

GENDER CONSTRUCTION IN DAKWAHTAINMENT: A Case Study of *Hati ke Hati Bersama Mamah Dedeh*

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Abstract:

This case study examines the phenomenon of dakwahtainment, a concept amalgamating Islamic propagation and entertainment. It focuses on the highly popular daily live programme entitled Hati ke Hati Bersama Mamah Dedeh (literally: Heart to Heart with Mother Dedeh). The programme involves a female penceramah (preacher) providing tawsiyyah or nasehat (spiritual advice) to the jamaah (congregation), while offering religious verdicts on various aspects of life confronting Indonesian women. One of the main pillars of the programme's success has been its tightly observed winning formula held dearly by the producer and the creative team, which stipulates 70% tuntunan (spiritual guidance) and 30% tontonan (entertainment viewing). Based on an exploratory, single case study design, research findings suggest that the Hati ke Hati Bersama Mamah Dedeh programme is constructed on a gendered understanding that is inconsistent and contradictory, which tend to simultaneously empower and disempower Muslim women viewers.

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[Tulisan ini merupakan studi kasus mengenai dakwahtainment yang mempertemukan dakwah pada satu sisi dan hiburan pada sisi lainnya. Diskusi akan difokuskan pada program televisi "Hati ke Hati Bersama Mamah Dedeh." Program ini melibatkan penceramah yang menyampaikan tawsiyyah dan nasehat yang merespon persoalan-persoalan yang kerap dihadapi perempuan Muslim di Indonesia. Salah satu kunci kesuksesan program ini adalah keberhasilan produser dan tim kreatif yang memadukan 70% tuntunan dan 30% tontonan. Tulisan ini menemukan bahwa program Hati ke Hati Bersama Mamah Dedeh dikonstruksi berdasarkan pengertian relasi gender yang rancu dan saling bertentangan. Karena itu, program ini dapat memberdayakan pemirsa perempuan dan sekaligus memperlemah mereka.]

Keywords: *dakwahtainment*, Mamah Dedeh, gender

A. Introduction

Thoughts on religion and gender have flourished over a century with significant developments and progress, notably on feminist thought.² The initial attempt in linking the two subjects had primarily focused on how religion often neglects and/or sidesteps the issue of gender. The logical corollary to this was the understanding that religions of the world had singularly marginalised the subject of gender, and henceforth been asserted to contribute to the hierarchical structuring of society, where the male members predominate over their female counterpart.

Through their systematised teachings and preaching, male religious scholars have more often than not contributed to the marginalisation of women in society. Preference and prominence have been given to the male understanding of religious practice, which concomitantly dictates much of the way religious people think about religion and gender. This has lent credence to the bias thoughts and practices that males are in a

² For a good discussion on Islamic feminist thought, see Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Women: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Fatima Mernissi, *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2004); and more recently, Haleh Afshar, "Muslim Women and Feminisms: Illustrations from the Iranian Experience," *Social Compass*, 54 (3) 2007, pp. 419-434. The most cogent definition of feminism can be found in Wadud, wherein she argues that it is "the radical notion that women are human beings."

better position than females to interpret the sacred laws and texts, and hence know what is in the best interest for the whole humanity, including women.

Such a perspective is indeed problematic because men in society do not share the habitual female life experiences such as menstruation, pregnancy and the miracle of giving birth. In recent times, the life experiences of the female gender have reached a level where there is a marked increase in the prevalence of sexual harassment, rape, domestic abuse, pre-marital pregnancy, teen abortion and incest, wherein the male head of the family becomes a sexual predator to the young and vulnerable female members. While the above social ills are real, there are more delicate and subtle, if not understated, problems of gender such as polygamy, homosexuality and same-sex union, where religion mostly holds an *a priori* view, deriving from the gendered interpretation of religious laws, supposedly directed at creating the ideal normative value system in society.

The above problem is almost universally found in all religions, countries and social contexts, not excluding Indonesia. This phenomenon has been further accentuated due to strong linkages and interconnections between religion and politics, which many social and cultural problems, issues and discourses are seen and analysed through religious lenses. Politicians and political parties too are partly to blame because they perceive gender justice as a hard sell, and that going against the prevailing habits of society may potentially cause them to lose electoral votes, which they desperately need to maintain power.

Thus, in dealing with gender, not only are religious leaders and preachers important as a community of practitioners but also to the institutions they represent. Traditional religious boarding schools, universities, faith-based organisations and public agencies have a pertinent and strategic role to play in ensuring that gender justice does prevail. In hopes to share the burden, academicians, public intellectuals and social activists need to establish intellectual rationalisations and scientific arguments to deconstruct some of the conventional wisdoms to pave the way for gender justice in Indonesia.

Yet, these actors alone cannot accomplish this daunting task unless strong engagement with the media is established. Since the 1998

reform, Indonesia experienced liberalisation in the fields of politics, economics, culture and the media. With the reformed laws on the media in 1999, the state no longer holds sway to censorship and revocation of licenses, giving freedom and liberty to the burgeoning and increasingly powerful industry. Consequently, the freedom the Indonesian media currently enjoy have brought many positive impacts, notably in terms of divulging corruption, maladministration and state inefficiencies. Debates on public policies that concern the citizenry are printed and broadcast daily, allowing ordinary people access to information and deliberations that they had not previously been privy to, including the various issues that pertain to gender.³

Problems, however, persist. The liberalisation of media ownership has generated reports and coverage that are politically biased, if not tendentious, and much too often ideologically inclined. As a result, the interest of the media owners always comes before the public. One notable development generated by media liberalisation is the increasing number of *dakwah* programmes and the mushrooming of religiously-oriented, mostly Islamic, movies, films and *sinetrons* (literally, electronic cinema), which is akin to soap operas in the West.⁴

Television programmes, especially Islamic ones, allow the vast audience to consume religious knowledge and perspectives framed by a multitude of religious preachers with their own gendered interpretations and performative styles of preaching. One type of programme is the traditional and conventional *ceramah* (preaching), whereby one *penceramah* talks before a congregation or on camera, transforming home viewers into his or her *jamaah*. While most of these *penceramahs* have been predominantly male, the market demands more and more female preachers, who have equal talents in performative religious skills with high entertainment value, hence the term *dakwahtainment*. The Indonesian audience -comprising mostly women homemakers sitting in the studio and in their homes- become addicted to such *dakwahtainment* programmes, and ultimately often get caught up in the web of industrial interests,

³ For further reading, see Kathryn Robinson, *Gender, Islam and Democracy in Indonesia* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

⁴ A cultural discussion on the “micro-practice” of Balinese women watching *sinetrons* can be found in Pam Nilan, “Gendered Dreams: Women Watching Sinetron (Soap Operas) on Indonesian TV,” *Indonesia and the Malay World*, 29 (84) 2001, pp. 85-98.

conveniently wrapped in religious fervour.

B. Case Study in Religion

Research on religion has been somewhat distant from case study research designs, which for the most part have been employed in the areas of organisations, management and business. Many of such case studies have largely focused on organisational effectiveness, leadership and marketing. Arguably, case studies have “a separate research method that has its own research design,” which in turn is “the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study’s initial research questions and, ultimately, to its conclusions.”⁵ In a nutshell, a case study can be defined as “an empirical inquiry to investigate contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.⁶ In terms of the methodological merits, case study research can therefore provide the investigator “access to a situation previously inaccessible to scientific observation.”⁷

In this respect, case studies emphasise the “how” and “why” of a scientific problem at hand. Qualitative case studies facilitate “exploration of a phenomenon within its context using a variety of data sources.”⁸ The main strength of case study research therefore lies in the exploration of contemporary phenomena, while providing a *mélange* of evidence and datasets.⁹ On this point, Ritchie and Lewis (2003) argue:

The integration of different perspectives on the context or interaction means that case study designs can build up very detailed in-depth understanding. They are used where no single perspective can provide a full account or explanation of the research issue, and where understanding

⁵ Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (Newbury Park, Sage Publications, 1984), p. 20.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Pamela Baxter and Susan Jack, “Qualitative Case Study Methodology: Study Design and Implementation for Novice Researchers,” *The Qualitative Report*, 13 (4) 2008, pp. 544-59.

⁹ See also Bill Gillham, *Case Study Research Methods* (London: Continuum, 2000). Gillham argues that case study essentially calls for a “multi-method approach,” where “data is accumulated by different methods” (p. 13).

needs to be holistic, comprehensive and contextualized.¹⁰

Thus, while it is true that case studies can be labour-intensive, they are useful in the process of understanding complex realities and multi-layered phenomena.

The case study under investigation here is the highly popular live TV programme on ANTV entitled “*Hati ke Hati bersama Mamah Dedeh*.”¹¹ The programme was initially shown in Indosiar, with the title of “Mamah dan Aa (Mother and Brother),”¹² which drew many viewers and helped boost the ratings of the TV channel. Due to popular demand, the programme ran for six years, resulting in Mamah Dedeh becoming a household name. In ANTV, the *Hati ke Hati Bersama Mamah Dedeh* programme has been running on a daily basis between 6:30 and 7:30 a.m. for just under a year. Meanwhile, re-runs in Indosiar precedes the programme in ANTV from 5:30 to 6:30 a.m., thus allowing home viewers to watch Mamah Dedeh and Aa for at least two hours every day from Monday to Friday.¹³ In addition, newly taped episodes usually run in the morning on weekends.

The programme can be categorised as a form of *dakwah*ainment because it amalgamates two crucial elements: *tuntunan* (70%) and *tontonan* (30%). *Tuntunan* is generally defined as religious or spiritual guidance. It is manifested in the form of *tamasyiyah* and *nasehat* or advice during the course of each episode. In most cases, it also involves resolving issues pertaining

¹⁰ Jane Ritchie and Jane Lewis, *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers* (London: Sage Publications, 2003), p. 52.

¹¹ “Mamah” is an endearing term used as a synonym for “Mother” in Bahasa Indonesia. It is particularly endearing in the Sundanese context and culture, denoting a person who is not only respected based on seniority, but also one who is wise, thoughtful and caring. The real name of Mamah is Dedeh Rosyadi Syaifudin, who originally comes from Ciamis, West Java. She comes from the Nahdlatul Ulama tradition, and in fact heads the women’s organisation in the Depok Chapter.

¹² *Aa* is an abbreviation of the word *Akang* (in Sundanese, Brother), which is similar to *Mas* in Javanese.

¹³ During the month of Ramadhan, Mamah Dedeh and Aa perform daily from around 3 to 4 a.m. or during the period of *sabur*, where Muslims usually have their breakfast in preparation for the day’s fasting. The format of the programme is markedly different from the usual with less structure and formality. Normally, a couple of female Muslim celebrities and fashionist as are invited to discuss Islamic laws and the everyday forms of religious life.

to *fiqh*. The aspect of *tontonan* or entertainment viewing usually involves light moments and jokes frequently prompted by Aa as the programme host. The jokes are usually performed in typical Sundanese style with the host often deploying a forged, yet amusing, accent.

The general rule of thumb is that in order to get the audience remain interested and enthusiastic throughout each live episode, both Mamah Dedeh and Aa have been hard pressed to maintain the *tuntunan-tontonan* principle. In fact, during these live episodes in the studio, both Mamah Dedeh and Aa each wear an earpiece for the producer and creative team to conveniently communicate with them to ensure compliance with the policy. Thus, each time Mamah Dedeh and Aa would veer outside of the perimeters of the programme, either the producer or on-site creative team members would guide and/or provide forewarnings on the policy of proportionality.

In many ways, the *Hati ke Hati Bersama Mamah Dedeh* programme is unique. First, most *dakwabtainment* programmes are pre-dominated by male religious preachers. Only recently have *dakwabtainment* programmes in Indonesian mainstream media employed female preachers. The studio audience comprises mostly women from various *Majelis Ta'lims* (Islamic religious study groups).¹⁴ Second, the usual setup of the programme is that Mamah Dedeh and Aa sit on a circular stage in the middle with the studio audience sitting in rows on stools around them. Mamah Dedeh and Aa would then occupy rotating chairs to enable them to direct their attention to any of the members of the audience. Third, the programme is modeled on the notion of *Curhat*, an abbreviated form of “*Curahan Hati*” (literally, “Outpouring of the Heart”). The notion of *Curhat* in Indonesian popular culture occupies a special place, especially among the youths. It signifies the desire and need for guidance and advice for all those engaging in it.

Curhat is one among many popular slang words together with the more contemporaneous one such as *galau* (more or less, ‘state of confusion’), which serves as a convenient term to show one’s need to go into contemplation or seek advice and guidance from a person perceived

¹⁴ Due to the popularity of Mamah Dedeh and the TV programme, the *Majelis Ta'lims* interested in participating in the live studio would normally have to endure a one-year waiting period.

to be wiser than themselves. In practice, the *curbat* model has enabled the programme to be highly interactive in nature due to the level of participation from both the *jamaah* in the studio as well as those calling in from home.

Each episode normally begins with an introduction by the host, who would introduce Mamah Dedeh and himself, the invited congregations and the topic of the day. In addition, the host is to play the role of managing the interaction during the question and answer session between the penceramah and the *jamaah*. Once the introduction is completed, Mamah Dedeh is asked to give what is frequently called as *tawsiyyah*, which normally lasts between five and seven minutes. Upon finishing the *tawsiyyah*, the host would then usually ask the *jamaah* in the studio for any question to be posed to Mamah Dedeh, which may not necessarily be related to the topic.¹⁵

Aside from its uniqueness, the programme's appeal is also generated from the strong personality of Mamah Dedeh, her sturdy outlook and firm opinions on a whole range of issues pertaining to women and Islam. One survey respondent said, "I am proud of the fact that there is such a woman as Mamah Dedeh, who is so passionate (*bersemangat*) in helping to strengthen the Indonesian nation, notably among women, in the field of Islam." When asked why the *jamaah* in the studio feel drawn to Mamah Dedeh, a respondent described her as "a woman who can answer queries about religion with clarity, no-nonsense and firm." Another respondent said, "She is a wise, motherly figure who knows exactly how to respond and comment on the problems put forth by people." In an exclusive interview, the host of the programme Aa Abdel succinctly puts it this way:

Mamah Dedeh's charm is that she conveys the message using "*babasa sehari-hari*" (everyday language). People who listen to her do not feel like being patronised. They would feel like they were being advised by their own mother. With other conventional preachers, they can be quite intimidating. Mamah Dedeh is alternatively very motherly.¹⁶

This research is thus a single case design with the programme being

¹⁵ A recent modification of the programme setup is by inviting a special guest to talk about her or his plight, while showing a short video of the life of the guest, wherein then Mamah Dedeh would offer *nasehat* to the special guest and then provide general commentaries about the topic at hand.

¹⁶ Interview held on 13 April 2012 in Jakarta.

its unit of analysis. The choice of *Hati ke Hati Bersama Mamah Dedeh* is not arbitrary. The growing popularity of the daily programme and the familiarity of the preacher among Indonesian Muslim families clearly point to its potential to becoming a “representative” case, which by definition will expectedly bring forth new revelations in the way gender is constructed in Islamic *dakwabtainment* programmes in Indonesia. The fact that the *penceramah* is a female, her ‘voice’ on gender issues, specifically on women affairs, would or *should* by default be more representative, if not more evocative, than if it were coming from male preachers.

In doing this case study research, various datasets were compiled, and served as a basis for analysis. They include textual analysis, in-depth interviews, direct observation, participant-observer, survey questionnaire, books, articles and Facebook. Textual analysis was based on recordings of live episodes for one whole month from March 1 to 31, 2012. The recorded episodes were then transcribed, and analysed using the usual “keywords in context” technique. Interviews were held with Mamah Dedeh, Aa and the producers of the programme. Research assistants were asked to participate and observe the live episodes inside the studio, and to record in writing the programme’s standard operating procedures from preparation to the end.

Subsequent to that, two surveys were conducted: one with the *jamaah* in the studio and the other with the audience at home, who are familiar with the programme. Among the *jamaah* in the studio, more than 50 respondents completed the questionnaire. Meanwhile the home audience reached around 30 respondents. The research team also studied two books on Mamah Dedeh, and numerous media articles put up on the web for additional information about her profile, family background, commitment to *dakwah* and her own views on the programme.

An examination was also done on the various social media technology utilised by ANTV to promote the programme, and derive questions and inspiration for topics from her “Fans,” “Friends” and “Followers.” In the official Fans page in Facebook, entitled “*Hati ke Hati Bersama Mamah Dedeh*,”¹⁷ which to date has over 24,725 “Likes” from

¹⁷ There are two types of Facebook accounts established by ANTV: one is a Fans page, and the other is the conventional Facebook page. The Fans page addressed is: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Hati-ke-Hati-bersama-Mamah-Dedeh/194192997316231>. The data on the “Likes” was gathered on September 14,

around Indonesia, and contains exchanges with her Fans. As explained by the programme's producer during an in-depth interview, the official Fans page was not created by Mamah Dedeh, but rather a creation of ANTV to obtain inputs from the public for the programme's topics.¹⁸ Many of the questions being posed in the Fans page are then relayed, and confirmed by Mamah Dedeh and subsequently filtered by ANTV's creative team, which would then ultimately decide on the topic for each episode in consultation with the programme's producer.

In addition to the above, two Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) were convened for this research: one in Yogyakarta and the other in Jakarta. In both FGDs, reference groups were setup to provide inputs and sharing of perspectives on the programme. Like the live recordings, the discussions were later transcribed to ensure accuracy of statements and opinions from the participants, and to enable double checking of facts.

As in all case studies, propositions are necessary to set the perimeter and scope of a given research. Baxter and Jack argue that "the more a [case] study contains specific propositions, the more it will stay within feasible limits."¹⁹ The proposition being offered here is that gender construction in *dakwabtainment* contains inconsistent and often contradictory patterns that simultaneously empower and disempower women. Through what is called "analytical generalisation," this case study will show how the inconsistency and patterns of contradiction have affected the construction of gender propagated through this programme.

C. Gender Construction in *Hati ke Hati Bersama Mamah Dedeh*

In case studies, the role of analytical generalisation holds an important position in terms of lending credibility and reliability of the research at hand. Analytical generalisation denotes that "the investigator is striving to generalise a particular set of results to some broader theory."²⁰

2012. Meanwhile, the address of the other official Facebook with the same name is at: <http://www.facebook.com/hatikehati.antv?sk=info>. The number of "Friends" in this Facebook account stands at 2384 (as of September 14, 2012). In addition to the two Facebook accounts, ANTV also maintains a Twitter account at: <http://twitter.com/HatiKeHatiANTV>, which currently has 7184 "Followers" (as of September 14, 2012).

¹⁸ Interview held on April 13, 2012 in the ANTV studio in Jakarta.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research*, p. 37.

By employing analytical generalisation, one can conclude this case study research by developing a framework to understand how gender is constructed in *dakwah*ainment programmes on TV.

While *Hati ke Hati Bersama Mamah Dedeh* can be considered a typical Islamic *dakwah*ainment, the programme is clearly geared toward and created for women. Around ninety percent of the *jamaah* in the studio comprises women, while there are ordinarily two rows of seats slated for around 15 male members of the *jamaah*. Based on an interview with the programme's producer, *Hati ke Hati Bersama Mamah Dedeh* is a programme dedicated to "*ibu-ibu*" (literally, "mothers") with the aim to help provide "solution to all sorts of family problems," including issues relating to "*hubungan suami-isteri*" (husband-wife relationship).²¹

Based on the text of the corpus and defining the multitude of topical categories of the sampled month of March 2012, at least 12 (almost fifty percent) of the *tamasyahs* directly dealt with family and husband-wife relationships, such as *Sebatang Kara* (Unmarried People Living Alone), *Meyakinkan Orang Tua* (Convincing Parents), *Tulang Punggung Keluarga* (Breadwinner of the Family), *Restu Orang Tua* (Parent Endorsement), *Mengatasi Kebosanan dalam Rumah Tangga* (Overcoming Boredom in Marriage), *Nafkah Labir Batin* (Economic and Spiritual Family Provision), *Pekerjaan Halal* (Permissible Career), *Kesetiaan Suami Istri* (Fidelity among Husbands and Wives), *Menjaga Kepercayaan Suami Istri* (Keeping Trust between Husbands and Wives), *Mengatasi Pasangan yang Mudah Tersinggung* (How to Deal with a Sensitive Spouse), *Mandul* (Infertility), and *Teman tapi Mesra* (Romantic Friends).²² Other topics in the sampled month mostly pertained to either social (human-to-human) or spiritual (human-to-God) relationships.

In terms of gender construction on the part of Mamah Dedeh, a binary logic is employed to see how the *Hati ke Hati Bersama Mamah Dedeh* programme can create contradictory effects on women's perspective about religion and issues pertaining to their family affairs. The binary analysis follows the logic of empowerment and disempowerment. The former concerns all things said, preached and advised by Mamah Dedeh,

²¹ Interview held on April 13, 2012.

²² Categorisation was determined not only by the topic but also decided on the basis of the actual content being presented by Mamah Dedeh during the *tamasyah* at the beginning of each episode.

which instill strength, optimism and confidence among the female *jamaah*. The latter relates to the statements, teachings and guidance that could potentially generate over compliance, passivity and pessimism among the women of Islam in Indonesia, who happen to regularly watch the programme.

On one occasion, a destitute woman whose baby had been sold by another without her consent for IDR 20 million sought advice from the programme. The seller, who was asked to take care of the baby, was already taken custody, yet the child was not yet allowed to be united with the mother. Deploying her no-nonsense motherly advice, Mamah Dedeh responded by saying:

Now that everything has unfolded, there is no reason for regret. You need to look at the future now. Such a case was caused by the trust that was violated by another. This is indeed a lesson for all of us. As difficult as life may be for you, and your children, we have to take good care of our children, because Allah will ensure our sustenance as long as we put effort into it. At the moment, you are separated with your child, but someday we all hope that the law will catch up and the police would be able to resolve this problem, so you can be reunited with your child. My advice is to not be too trusting to others because there are many who harbor bad intentions.²³

Another instance pertained to a woman, whose husband never sleeps at home. According to her, the husband merely provides money and sex. “I am tired. I want to resist, but my condition does not allow me to provide for my children. I often cry when I pray because of this. How much longer do I have to bear this?”²⁴ Mamah Dedeh responded characteristically by saying:

I am sure that when you married your husband, you were well aware that he had a family, has children and a wife. This is the risk you have to take for being a second wife ... That is why I have told all of you a thousand times that as a woman do not depend on your husband [for your welfare]. Do some business. Look at history. Look at Siti Khadijah, Siti Hajar, Siti Aisyah, Rabi’ah al-Adawiyyah, Ummu Salamah, As-Syifa and others. They were all women who could “*berdiri di atas kaki sendiri*” (stand up

²³ March 2 Episode entitled “*Amanah Menjadi Khianat* (Foregoing Trust).”

²⁴ March 16 Episode entitled “*Mengatasi Kebosanan dalam Rumah Tangga* (Overcoming Boredom in Marriage).”

for themselves) and did not burden their husbands, but supported them. That is how it should be!²⁵

On the issue of women's emancipation and the extent of how Islam allows it, Mamah Dedeh's response seemed somewhat counter intuitive. She unexpectedly responded using a reverse logic based on her understanding of the Qur'an, which very much clarified her stance:

In Islam, there is no such thing as emancipation because from the very beginning Allah has revealed in the chapter on *al-Baqarah*, verse 228.²⁶ Women have the same rights as men. Only under conditions of righteousness that men occupy one degree higher above women. But this means that the rights and obligations of men and women are similar. They share the same responsibility in taking care of the house, caring for the children and engaging in community work. It is only in family matters that the husband becomes the head of the family.²⁷

Inasmuch as Mamah Dedeh or the programme may have empowered many Indonesian women, her preaching, guidance and advice at times can also prove to be hypercritical and judgmental, hence potentially disempowering the women, who had earlier expected to gain support and get good advice. Some examples are provided here below as a typical pattern.

A member of the *jamaah* in the studio informs Mamah Dedeh that her husband does not allow the wife to frequently attend *pengajian* (Quranic study group) in the *kampung* (village). The response from Mamah Dedeh was rather unexpected to the person posing the question. She replied by saying:

That is why the [religious] knowledge that you gain should be applied. You frequently attend *pengajian* but your way of talking to your husband is judes (loquacious), you get mad at your children, you become a miser

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ The verse states: "Divorced women shall wait concerning themselves for three monthly periods. Nor is it lawful for them to hide what Allah Hath created in their wombs, if they have faith in Allah and the Last Day. And their husbands have the better right to take them back in that period, if they wish for reconciliation. And women shall have rights similar to the rights against them, according to what is equitable; but men have a degree (of advantage) over them. And Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise." (The Holy Qur'an, Translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, 1987).

²⁷ March 18 Episode entitled "*Perbedaan Pendapat* (Differences of Opinion)."

to your own parents in laws. If you were to use the religious knowledge you gained, I am quite certain that your husband would tell you to attend the *pengajians* as frequently as you like ... It may also be that you have been putting on too much makeup, and hope to get attention from others. A husband would not like a wife like this. He would no doubt become jealous. So, I advise you to lessen such things.²⁸

Another form of disempowerment is her frequent deployment of what some may perceive to be brutal logic. This practice is usually coupled with the method 'blaming the victim.' On one occasion, a woman stood to ask a question to Mamah Dedeh about how Islam would perceive a husband who loaned money to pay for his dowry, and does not provide for the wife during *'iddah* (the period following the dissolution of a marriage). Mamah Dedeh swiftly responded by saying:

I am convinced that you have made the wrong decision on your choice of a husband. From the very outset, he was already taking a loan to pay his dowry for marriage. And now he does not want to give you *nafkah* (provision) in the period of *'iddah*. This is a risk for those who have wrongly chosen a husband.²⁹

The above response is more or less consistent with her general view on polygamy. When asked this question during an exclusive interview, Mamah Dedeh said:

Like it or not, in Islam, polygamy is permitted. As a Muslim, we cannot of course evade the laws stipulated by Allah for us. However, there is a prerequisite. 'If you are afraid of committing unfairness, then one is enough.' The question is whether or not this prerequisite has been fulfilled.³⁰

Of course, the above reasoning is a conventional argument, which attaches polygamy and fairness, and is often used to perpetuate the practice without elaborating the latter notion. As one workshop participant questioned: "from whose perspective should the fairness in

²⁸ March 3 Episode entitled "*Memaksakan Kebendak* (Forcing One's Will upon Others)."

²⁹ March 6 Episode entitled "*Tabiat Baik dan Buruk* (Good and Bad Habits)."

³⁰ Interview held on April 13, 2012 in Jakarta.

polygamy be drawn from? Fairness for whom, the husband or the wife?’³¹ Furthermore, the participant asserted that the fairness argument is often detached from all the sacrifices made by the wife during the early days of marriage when the husband would normally have not reached the level of income at the time of his intention to marry another.³²

D. Conclusion

From the theoretical and methodological viewpoint, case studies are helpful in analysing complex and complicated religious phenomena that are sometimes blurred by our contextual understanding. Case study designs are particularly useful for contemporary, real-life event phenomena, where historical rendition may not at all be essential, necessary or even relevant. This research has proven that using exploratory, single case study design, an investigator can gain access to understanding the way religion and gender are constructed in popular *dakwah*ainment programmes on TV.

The *Hati ke Hati Bersama Mamah Dedeh* programme provides a good case for exploring the various facets of how *dakwah*ainment successfully operates within the context of Indonesia after *reformasi*, where the liberalisation of the media has generated a whole range of religiously-oriented programmes that are geared toward not only spiritual enlightenment but also public entertainment through a certain performative style of preaching. Moreover, the 70% *tuntunan* and 30% *tontonan* principle embraced by the producer and the creative team has unmistakably enabled the programme to touch the hearts and minds of Muslim women from around Indonesia, thus contributing to the programme’s achievement.

In *Hati ke Hati Bersama Mamah Dedeh*, religious messages are propagated by the *penceramah* to the *jamaah* by way of *tawsiyyah* and *nasehat* with deliberate, yet measured, insertions of typical Sundanese witticism. The employment of the *curhat* model in *Hati ke Hati Bersama Mamah Dedeh* also serves as a convenient and effective platform to connect the

³¹ Workshop on “Religion, Gender and Media in Indonesia” held in the Graduate School of Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) on July 17, 2012.

³² For more on the issue of polygamy and the ensuing public discourse, see Nina Nurmila, *Women, Islam and Everyday Life: Renegotiating Polygamy in Indonesia* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

penceramah and her *jamaah*, both in the studio and at home. But technology also plays an important role. The use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter has given Mamah Dedeh, as the *penceramah*, access to her flock of Fans, Friends and Followers alike, while simultaneously providing inputs and feedback mechanisms for the programme's topics, questions and issues to be raised.

Analysing both the text and context of the *Hati ke Hati Bersama Mamah Dedeh* programme, one can confirm beyond reasonable doubt the proposition being offered earlier. From the above analytical generalisation derived from various datasets, it is evidently clear that *dakwah*ainment programmes on TV have a certain way of constructing gender and confronting problematic issues directly affecting the complicated lives of Indonesian Muslim women.

Putting her motherly appeal and charm to good use, Mamah Dedeh's seemingly patronising attitude toward her *jamaah* has in effect lent credence and authority to her message, giving her ostensible ability to resolve all problems and issues brought forth by the members of the *Majelis Ta'lims* in the studio or the home viewers. However, in many instances, the advice and solutions offered by Mamah Dedeh are inconsistent and even contradictory, from the gender perspective. When it comes to hardships in life and financial independence, Mamah Dedeh can be inspiring and empowering to the women *jamaah*. The empowerment originates from her persistence and diligence in advising women to stand up, and be able to financially support themselves. For women who experienced violence, domestic abuse or problems with their husband-wife relationships, Mamah Dedeh has been consistent in her approach by telling them to overcome their sadness, be forward looking and optimistic in forging ahead with life, despite the difficulties and challenges.

While the *Hati ke Hati Bersama Mamah Dedeh* programme is inspiring and empowering for the "ibu-ibu," Mamah Dedeh's *tamasyiyah* and *nasehat* can at times be disempowering for a segment of the women *jamaah*. The disempowerment comes from quick judgment and often hypercritical stance on some of the questions being posed by the *jamaah*, most notably those coming from members of the *Majelis Ta'lims* in the studio. From the communication perspective, such an approach can be

problematic because while the people posing the questions may be hard pressed to resolve their problems, Mamah Dedeh's rapid fire response can be seen as undermining, if not and underestimating, the extent of the problem confronted by those who earnestly seek real solutions to their real problems.

Another aspect of disempowerment concerns the way Mamah Dedeh often treats queries by essentially 'blaming the victim'. This can no doubt be highly counter-productive, given her prejudicial responses, notably when it comes to issues of cheating husbands and polygamy. It is common Mamah Dedeh to put fault at the women for not 'servicing' their husbands well enough or not putting makeup before their spouses. Indeed, such construction of gender is not only disparaging but also reprehensible.

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