

POLITICAL ARTICULATION OF GUS MUS' ASCETICISM IN STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF NU AS A MORAL FORCE IN NATIONAL POLITICS

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ABSTRACT. This study reveals the practice of articulation of ascetic politics carried out by Gus Mus amidst the strong democratic regime that dictated the process of contestation of power at the NU Congress in 2015 in Jombang. The practice of articulation of asceticism is political, because he always changes his identity. As a subject, Gus Mus often changes positions, such as a *kiai* and a cultural figure. This position is called the subject position. This study explores the creation of a new identity in contemporary politics using Laclau's articulation theory within a post-structuralist case study research design. Therefore, the main argument in this study is that through the political articulation of asceticism, Gus Mus' political reasoning transcends the Laswellian mainstream political reasoning. This study uses a qualitative method, with two methods in data collection, namely interview and documentation methods. The informants were selected using purposive sampling techniques, and data analysis used discourse analysis which was completely within the theoretical frame used by the researcher. This study does not only shift from a positivist paradigm to a post-positivism research, but from a focus on thoughts to a focus on the discourse articulated by Gus Mus from the perspective of actors from both the NU 2015 Congress committee and the NU elite in Jombang, and from here, the novelty in this study. In this study, the political practice of asceticism articulated by Gus Mus was found in: a). Discourse in the articulation of intellectualism, b). Modesty, c). Beyond practical politics, and d). Consistency in cultural politics. From here, "new political ethics" is relevant and vital as an alternative political thought for recent political actors.

Keywords: articulation; discourse; intellectual; and articulation of asceticism.

ARTIKULASI POLITIK KEZUHUDAN GUS MUS DALAM MEMPERKUAT PERAN NU SEBAGAI KEKUATAN MORAL DALAM POLITIK KEBANGSAAN

ABSTRAK. Penelitian ini mengungkapkan praktik artikulasi politik kezuhudan yang dilakukan Gus Mus di tengah kuatnya rezim demokrasi yang mendekati proses kontestasi kekuasaan pada Muktamar NU tahun 2015 di Jombang. Praktik artikulasi kezuhudan itu bersifat politis, karena ia selalu merubah identitas diri. Sebagai subjek, Gus Mus sering kali berubah-ubah posisi, seperti sebagai kiai dan tokoh budaya. Inilah yang kemudian di sebut sebagai *subject position*. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi penciptaan identitas baru dalam politik kontemporer dengan menggunakan teori artikulasi Laclau dalam desain penelitian studi kasus pascastrukturalis. Oleh karena itu, argumen utama dalam penelitian ini adalah melalui politik kezuhudan itulah, Gus Mus melakukan praktik artikulasi yang melampaui perpolitikan mainstream yang mendominasi nalar berpolitik orang kebanyakan. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif, dengan dua metode dalam koleksi data antara lain metode wawancara dan dokumentasi. Para narasumber dipilih menggunakan teknik purposive sampling, dan analisis data menggunakan analisis wacana yang sepenuhnya dalam frame teoritik yang peneliti gunakan. Kajian ini tidak saja bergeser dari paradigma positivis ke paradigma penelitian post-positivisme, tetapi dari fokus pemikiran ke fokus wacana yang diutarakan Gus Mus dari perspektif aktor baik dari panitia Muktamar NU 2015 maupun elite NU Jombang, dan dari sinilah kebaruan dalam kajian ini. Dalam riset ini, ditemukan praktik politik kezuhudan yang diartikulasikan oleh Gus Mus antara lain : a). Diskursus dalam artikulasi keintelektualan. b). Kerendahan hati. c). Melampaui politik praktis, dan d). Konsisten dalam politik kebudayaan. Dari sinilah, apa yang kemudian disebut sebagai "fatsun politik baru" menjadi relevan dan penting sebagai pemikiran politik alternatif untuk para aktor politik dewasa ini.

Kata kunci: artikulasi; diskursus; intelektual dan politik kezuhudan.

INTRODUCTION

As a political regime, democracy, as stated by Samuel P Huntington, is the end of human political history Huntington (1991), marked by many third-world countries changing from authoritarian systems to democracies through elections. The influence of democracy has created attitudes, behaviors, and ways of thinking of modern humans in politics or

democracy, namely materialistic-capitalistic reasoning or character. Specifically, political reasoning seeks to gain and maintain power at all political levels, either state or social organizations. The strong current of democratization has influenced not only the political level of state government but also many social, political, and religious organizations, including social and religious organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). Ironically, since the 32nd NU

Congress in Makassar, NU elites have interpreted and positioned the NU organization like a political party through the election of *Ra'is Aam* and General Chairman with a Schumpeterian system: one man, one vote. Throughout the NU Congress, there were at least 2 NU Congresses (2010 and 2015) when the atmosphere and political nuances were thicker with the emergence of supporting teams, billboards, banners, and other props around the NU Congress arena. Democratization, which should ideally be implemented in the party system, is carried out by NU elites to gain position and power.

In literature, the term 'democracy' in a modern sense, began to be used in the 19th century to describe a system of representative government in which representatives are elected through free and competitive elections (Birch, 2007, p. 110). As a regime, liberal democracy, with all its instruments and mechanics, has been the main foundation of political practice in Indonesia, at least as long as the New Order was in power (1966-1998). At its peak, democracy became the central political system in the Reform era or after the 1998 New Order and impacted Indonesian social, political, and cultural constellation. In the name of democracy, various statements and slogans emerge and become public knowledge. Through democracy, all political system rules, procedures, statements, and methods must be coherent with the democratic regime, including freedom of speech, assembly, and association. With democracy, the majority can significantly influence decision-making and policy-making (Roper, 2013, p. 01). Democracy assumes that every autonomous citizen has the right to participate in determining policy through a representation system. What is essential is that the principles of minimal or procedural democracy operate in every citizen's thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors. In that position, democracy is established as a regime of truth that eliminates other regimes, such as the authoritarian regime identical to the New Order (1966-1998).

After the New Order collapsed in 1998, Indonesian democracy showed significant changes. At that time, more than 200 new political parties emerged, and the level of participation in the 1999 elections was also very high, more than 80%. This phenomenon seems to repeat the conditions of political parties in the first election in the 1950s when Indonesia experienced parliamentary democracy for the first time after independence in 1945 (Ufen, 2006, p. 05). This reasonably high level of participation cannot be separated from democracy, which inherently offers positive values, such as freedom of assembly and association and the establishment of specific organizations or political parties. Moreover, pro-democracy voices after the 1998 reformation, up

to the first direct presidential election in 2004, have given optimism for the political life of the Indonesian people in the future.

As the fourth democratic country, Indonesia's political atmosphere after the New Order was dynamic, marked by various maneuvers by political elites to participate and gain or maintain power. This phenomenon marks the practice of Indonesian politics as Laswellian and democracy as Schumpeterian. In other words, a liberal democratic regime assumes that everyone is autonomous and can participate in gaining and maintaining power by any means and is strengthened when many officials and political actors use all their power and efforts to seize political positions, including *kiai* in the Nahdlatul Ulama *jamiyah*.

The congress is a political stage for Nahdliyin citizens every 5 years that has been going on for a long time. However, the 33rd congress in 2015 became a very interesting political event because Gus Mus rejected the position of *ra'is aam* that he had received from Ahwa. This political fact has become the attention of Nahdliyin citizens and the public at a time when the liberal democratic regime has become a regime of mainstream truth, namely a position that is hunted by most people. In August 2015, the public was enlivened by the 33rd NU Congress in Jombang, East Java, a city historically close to the founders of NU. During the congress, *Muktamirin* (the attendees) arrived in large and small groups since morning. The atmosphere of the congress was even more lively when, in the afternoon, at around 3 pm, President Joko Widodo and some cabinet ministers arrived. Many politicians from certain parties, especially PKB, were present to show the close relationship between NU and PKB. This is undoubtedly clear from the closeness of PBNU chairman Said Aqil Siraj and PKB chairman Muhaimin Iskandar since 2010. The congress is an arena for contestation of the highest power within NU. At that time, several candidates for *Ra'is Aam* were proposed, including *Kiai Hasyim Muzadi* and the incumbent *Kiai Mustofa Bisri* or Gus Mus. Before the *Ra'is Aam* election, PBNU had agreed on a system for selecting *Ra'is Aam*, namely *Ahwa* or *Ahlul Halli Wal Aqdi*. This system elected nine senior *kiai* or *khos* within NU through proposals from all NU administrators in Indonesia.

In NU circles themselves, after Gus Dur passed away in 2009, Gus Mus's character is not much different from Gus Dur's. In addition to being a study partner in Egypt, Gus Mus today has become a central figure in the Nahdliyin environment through his various thoughts, fatwas and ideas which are not only eccentric and controversial, but are often able to mediate conflicts among NU members. This is where Gus Mus's intellectualism comes from, daring to

voice the truth in the public space amidst the currents that have been so dominant so far.

Through the practice of articulating asceticism, the practice of asceticism in the contestation of power in the political arena of NU members can be a reference for today's political actors that the practice of politics does not have to be about fighting for office, but fighting to reject it. This thinking is certainly beyond Lasswellian politics which has dictated, determined and directed the public's way of thinking so far. That the chaos of politics today is an implication of liberal democracy which assumes a struggle for power. Therefore, Gus Mus's ascetic political behavior can be a reference for political practice for anyone who wants to build a better future politics.

At that time, there was chaos and dispute between pro-AHWA and anti-AHWA groups for consensus in the *Ra'is Aam* election. Amid the chaos and conflict, the temporary *Ra'is Aam*, Gus Mus, was present to resolve the dispute between the *Muktamarin*. After being suppressed by Gus Mus, the AHWA system was successfully implemented. The AHWA members, such as Kiai Ma'ruf Amin, Kiai Maemon Zubair, Kiai Mas Subadar, and others, agreed to choose Kiai Mustofa Bisri or Gus Mus to remain the supreme leader or *Ra'is Aam* of NU for the 2015-2020 period. Nine *Kiai*, as the members of AHWA, chose KH Mustofa Bisri or Gus Mus as *Ra'is Aam* of PBNU for the 2015-2020 period at the Plenary Session III of the 33rd NU Congress in Jombang. However, Gus Mus, who had resigned from the candidacy before the election, was still not present in front of the Congress when he was supposed to give a speech. In fact, Gus Mus was repeatedly persuaded by the committee but remained refusing the position of *Ra'is Aam* even though AHWA mandated it.

As a political phenomenon, Gus Mus' work is interesting to study. Most explanations of mainstream politics see that people generally seek positions in certain institutions/organizations. This way of thinking is strongly influenced by the political theory developed by Harold Lasswell, who believes everyone always has personal interests and tries to get them in various ways. For Lasswell, politics is about who gets what, when, and how. However, Gus Mus is breaking out of that Lasswellian device. Gus Mus' attitudes are possibly political ethics or different powers from political theorization dominated by Harold Lasswell's perspective all this time.

At that time, Saifullah Yusuf, representing nine *kiai* of AHWA, admitted that before being elected as *Ra'is Aam*, Gus Mus had submitted a letter of resignation. However, according to Saifullah Yusuf, Gus Mus' resignation letter did not affect Gus Mus'

election as *Ra'is Aam* because the attitude shown by Gus Mus is a form of the morality that Nahdlatul Ulama has always upheld. This is where Gus Mus displayed the unusual political phenomenon amid the liberal democracy which is everyone's main goal to get a position and maintain power. In other words, the public is being taught a new lesson in political and power contestation other than only losing and winning. Therefore, this study aims to reveal and elaborate the political message from Mustofa Bisri's intellectual articulation amid the wave of procedural, mechanistic, and Lasswellian democracy.

So far, research on Mustofa Bisri or more familiarly known as Gus Mus has explained more of his thoughts. First, in research conducted by Soetrisno (2012), he concluded that Gus Mus's attitude in giving fatwa was not tied to a particular school of thought. Second, Laila's research (2017) concluded that the preaching carried out by Gus Mus was carried out using post-traditional methods, namely using modern and contemporary media. Third, Rasmianto & Abidin's (2017) research concluded that Gus Mus's Islamic educational thoughts were categorized as post-traditionalist thoughts. In other words, it is not always fixated on one school of thought. Fourth, research conducted by Samsuriyanto (2018), shows that Gus Mus as a preacher always uses different preaching methods from other preachers. He uses poetry, poetry and essays which are very close to moderate preaching in the virtual world. Fifth, in research conducted by Wahid (2020), he concluded that Gus Mus' poetry has more of a prophetic dimension and has distinctive discourse power and meaning.

From the five research review results on Gus Mus above, it can be concluded that researchers do not only have a positivist paradigm, but also focus on Gus Mus's thoughts. On the other hand, this study does not only shift from a positivist paradigm to a post-positivism research, but from a focus on thoughts to a focus on the discourse articulated by Gus Mus from the perspective of actors from both the NU 2015 Congress committee and the NU elite in Jombang. From here, the novelty in this study is to fill the research space that has not been done so far.

This research aims to reveal the practice of articulating asceticism carried out by Gus Mus at the 2015 NU Congress. This articulation was political in nature, because on the one hand, he transformed himself into a *kiai* when mediating the conflict that occurred at the NU Congress, but on the other hand he changed himself as *santri* when he refused the position of *ra'is aam* NU. Therefore, the main element in Laclaulian articulation is the subject position that is always changing.

Therefore, this article has two questions; what is the form of political articulation ala Gus Mus in the midst of the procedural democracy of the 2015 NU Congress? And why did the political articulation above be carried out by Gus Mus?

METHOD

In this research, we use qualitative methods that are not only to reveal or understand or interpret something behind a phenomenon, but also to gain insight into something that is little known (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Strauss & Corbin, 2003). This research uses a case study design at the 33rd NU Congress in 2015, and two methods in data collection, including interview and documentation methods. The case study strategy chosen by researchers aims to reveal unique, distinctive and specific phenomena, and can describe many cases. Because, in principle, the idea of case studies is that research focuses on an individual case and not on a broad spectrum (Denscombe, 2007). The interview technique with purposive sampling was carried out through informants to obtain data following research needs.

In this study, researchers conducted in-depth interviews with several informants, such as Muslimin and Rijal as the committee of the 2015 Congress. While Kholis and Wafi are two young NU figures, as well as part of the local committee in Jombang. We selected informants through purposive sampling technique, namely determining informants who are competent in providing the information we need in this study. With the main criteria being people who were directly involved in the 2015 Congress event. Researchers obtained supporting documents such as an official letter of Gus Mus' rejection of the position of NU's racist aam which added to the construction of his articulation discourse of asceticism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Discourse and Articulation

This study used the concept of articulation developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) from the post-structuralist tradition. The articulation here is entirely different from the general understanding, which limits it to specific ways or forms of pronunciation. Articulation is also not a way of speaking as is understood in public relations (PR). The articulation intended here is not a representation. In simple terms, articulation is giving meaning to an object by combining signs to have meaning. Meanwhile, representation is an effort to describe certain things, objects, essence, or content as accurately as possible. Laclau and Mouffe give a specific understanding of what articulation means:

we will call articulation any practice establishing a relationship among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice. The structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice, we will call discourse (Laclau & Mouffe 1985 (2001); 105). As a political practice, articulation operates through five channels or mechanisms. Firstly, this articulation is closely related to what Laclau expressed with discourse. According to him, discourse is more than just talk or talk with practice, as this is generally understood (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). The discourse here also does not refer to readings, issues, or gossip. The discourse in question includes all actions that form the meaning or identity of a thing. What is meant by "a thing" here is very broad. It can be humans, animals, events, things, objects, subjects, phenomena, and so on.

Secondly, this discourse is not us, humans, who create it, but is formed by a series of practices of articulation of elements and moments as the main building blocks of discourse. Elements are the minor units of discourse whose meaning is equivalent to a sign or signifier. Meanwhile, moments are signs that have been connected to other signs. For example, the word "horse" (element) has no meaning if it is not connected to other signs. When the word "horse" relates to other elements or signs, for example, "racing," the word "horse" is articulated in such a way as to become something different. It will be completely different if the word "horse" is also linked to the signifier "satay" and becomes "horse satay." This practice of connecting one sign with another and producing new meaning is a form of articulation. Without the practice of articulation, signs cannot produce meaning. Even in the example of the word "horse," this articulation precisely determines the meaning and identity of the word "horse," not the other way around.

Thirdly, linking the word "horse" with the other word "racing" or with "satay" does not happen haphazardly but through a particular mechanism. The names for these mechanisms are syntagmatic relations and paradigmatic relations. In linguistic studies, these two concepts are often referred to as a combination of syntagmatic and a substitution for paradigmatic. The act of arranging different signs or words and different signs so they have meaning is a syntagmatic relationship (Tohari, Nugraha, Hapsari, Muryana, & Saadah, 2022). Meanwhile, the meaning of this arrangement, which always distinguishes itself from other arrangements, is a form of paradigmatic practice.

Fourthly, the operation of this articulation then forms the identity of the subject and object. In the same sense, the subject's identity depends on the articulation regarding it. For example, women's

identities are very diverse, and even their identities depend on the articulation regarding them. When it concerns, for example, the articulation of Islam, women will act, think, and behave according to that articulation (Tohari, Nugraha, Hapsari, Muryana, & Saadah, 2022). When it concerns the articulation of family, the identity will change, meaning that women as objects or subjects depend on the articulation regarding them.

Fifthly, to successfully determine the identity of an object, subject, or any phenomenon, this articulation does not go smoothly. It must fight with other articulations until, at one point, it can become the most significant influence in forming the object's identity. The flood phenomenon, for example, has many articulations surrounding it, such as "poor city sanitation," "high rainfall," "climate change," "governor's failure," "low environmental awareness," "God's testing," and so on. If, for example, one of the many articulations that ultimately succeeds in dominating is the articulation of "governor's failure," perhaps the following action is to ask for accountability or hold a demonstration to demote.

Gus Mus' Intellectual Articulation

Gus Mus is a multi-dimensional figure with many articulations, making him appear in changing faces. He always appears in all-white costumes when the Islamic boarding school and Kiai interpellated him. On other occasions, he appeared wearing a hat while reciting poetry when cultural and literary articulations interpellated him. When family discourse is articulated, he appears wearing an ordinary t-shirt while playing with his grandchildren. In the context of the 33rd NU Congress, he was more articulated as a *kiai* because the congress was the arena for NU *kiai*. Additionally, the temporary official (PJS) of *Ra'im Aam*, who had previously served by Kiai Sahal Mahfud, articulated Gus Mus. These two latest articulations operated him so that he delivered a very touching, memorable speech and ended the feud between pro-AHWA and anti-AHWA articulations trying to control the meaning of the NU Congress.

Apart from cultural figures and *kiai*, the other articulation that strongly shapes Gus Mus is traditional Muslim intellectuals. So far, (Gramsci, 1971) describes an intellectual as anyone, but not all people or human beings are said to function as intellectuals in society. In a certain sense, anyone can be called an intellectual if he can carry out social functions such as offering new ideas and concepts (Held, 1983, p. 573) or offering alternative truths by conveying the truth to those in power (Said, 1996, p. 97). He has two main social functions: a stabilizer in

the social system and an essential function to continue democratic life to discuss political issues (Howard, 2010; Karpova & others, 2016; Ozick, 1995). In other words, to differentiate between intellectuals and non-intellectuals, it is enough to refer to the dimensions of the social function that a person carries out (Gottlieb, 1989, p. 115).

Furthermore, to obtain additional answers to the previous ontological questions, this study turns to the political activities of those called by Karl Max 'universal thinkers' and 'intellectuals' (Bates, 2007, p. 21; Fraser, 1971) which fight in political revolutions. Gramscian intellectual theorization is divided into 'organic' and 'traditional' intellectuals. The first appears in the dimension of the struggle of certain social classes, and the last is a group that emerges from the aristocrats, such as ulama, teachers, poets, and others. Gus Mus belongs to the traditional Gramscian-style intellectual group.

From the intellectual practices in the case of the rejection of *Ra'is Aam's* position at the NU Congress, Gus Mus occupies a position as a subject which in Laclau's term is called 'dislocation,' a concept equivalent to 'social antagonisms' Torfing, p. (1999, p. 31) which allows the formation of a new political identity because it tries to reject other political identities that try to control the meaning of the NU Congress (Mendoza, 2014, p. 68). The main characteristic of this dislocation is the adoption of a different position from the mainstream articulation position. In the case of the NU Congress, the mainstream subject position was played by both the pro-AHWA and contra-AHWA groups. From that position, Gus Mus' articulatory practices made it possible to create new politics, at least among the *Nahdliyin*, to revitalize NU as Indonesia's most prominent social organization, which was starting to be co-opted by the interests of powers. In Laclau's framework, this social antagonism is understood as 'constituting the limits of society, the latter's impossibility of fully constituting itself' (Laclau, 1990). It is not internal but external and social.

In Laclau's theorization, social antagonism is the limit of every objectivity, which cannot be domesticated, symbolized, or integrated internally in discourse, explaining why Gus Mus' attitude is shocking and controversial because this articulation is not known in the mainstream articulation structure which has been the dominant discursive framework at every NU Congress, for example not being allowed to reject the decision or "*dawuh*" (mandate) of the senior *kiai* as the member of *Ahul Halli Wal 'Aqdi*. For further details, Laclau & Mouffe said *the structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice* (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; 105). According to the previous definition, every object has identities

based on its articulation process. It is through Gus Mus' articulatory practice that the identity or meaning of the 33rd NU Congress in 2015 differs from the identities of other NU Congresses. Different regional social practices are entities whose meaning is determined by the politics of articulation surrounding them (Howarth, 2015, p. 04).

Therefore, Gus Mus' dislocation towards the 33rd NU Congress has a productive side because he does not only pose a threat to the mainstream articulation of the NU Congress, usually obeying the AHWA's mandate or accepting the positions but also becomes the basis on which other identities or articulations at the next NU Congress can emerge or be formed, for example refusing to become *Ra'is Aam*, which should not be done because it is considered "opposing the mandate of *kiai*." At this point, Laclau says that, *on the one hand, they threaten identities, on the other, they are the foundation on which new identities are constituted* (Laclau, 1990, p. 39).

In the social role of the NU Congress, Gus Mus articulated ideas and values in a universal space because he tried not to be bound by the identity and specialization of the meaning of the congress, which was previously very dominant, for example, accepting the AHWA mandate (Leo & Hitchcock, 2016; Melzer, 1992). Gus Mus' role in fighting for values and ideals at the NU Congress took place according to various articulations, namely the pro-AHWA and contra-AHWA articulations. Gus Mus at the NU Congress was operated by the Islamic boarding school students' values, ideas, or articulations, making him appear outside the dominant general reasoning in interpreting the NU Congress in the *kiai*'s articulation (Melzer, 1992, p. 04), precisely what Michel Foucault (1972) once expressed when he stated that intellectuals struggle to create truth, where truth is understood as something that is produced, maintained, validated, and regulated through a series of discursive mechanisms (Goswami, 2014, p. 08). Truth is the result of discursive practices Foucault (1972) and political practices of articulation (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001).

Like what Foucault expressed forty years ago, *truth is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements* (Foucault, 1980, p. 133). From here, truth is constructed by a discursive system or order of knowledge, creating a regime of truth by delegitimizing or eliminating another knowledge. More strictly speaking, truth emerges not from the internal side but is formed by something from the outside. In the case of the 2015 NU Congress, Gus Mus' articulation was correct because he rejected other articulations that attempted

to hegemonize the congress, both pro-AHWA and contra-AHWA groups. The fight between the two caused congress to lose its authority. After all, it turned into a feud over the power of *Ra'is Aam* as the highest leader in Nahdlatul Ulama. This articulation was rejected because it contradicted another articulation which said that in NU, pursuing power was a taboo act because it would make NU no different from an ordinary political party, even though this was considered valid when placed in the articulation of liberal procedural and political democracy of Lasswellian style.

As truth, Gus Mus' steps are considered very legitimate and have the privilege of guiding the human cognition and actions of congress participants because of rejecting two other truths or articulations (pro-Ahwa and anti-Ahwa) considered to have lost their ulama dignity. (Reyna & Schiller, 1998, p. 337). Thus, when Gus Mus said "inappropriate," it was not only referring to himself, but it also pointed to two contesting articulations. To the surprise of many people, he was delegitimizing these two articulations with this statement.

The Articulation of Asceticism: Modesty

In political reasoning, most political actors often use specific methods to achieve and maintain power or specific positions. According to Schumpeterian reasoning, their efforts are not justified procedurally and lead to unconstitutional actions that often sacrifice the people's interests. In the context of Gus Mus, articulating a political subject appears to be the opposite. He positioned himself as an ordinary person who did not try to maintain the position of *Ra'is Aam* of NU. As informants said, "When there was much competition for *Tanfidiyah* chairmanship, and then Gus Mus was chosen by the pro-Ahwa group, he gave a speech in front of me. I remember his speech very well when Gus Mus said, "I am nobody, and I do not wish to be *Ra'is Aam*." He was modest. Only then did the pro-Ahwa group choose Ma'ruf.." (Informant Muslimin, 10 March, 2024).

From this statement, it can be interpreted that the subject's position, positioning himself as an ordinary NU citizen, marks Gus Mus as a modest person, reinforced by another statement from the informants: "It has become part of the tradition and also the personality of the older *kiai* that this position is not taken, it is not asked for, even ethically, when asked, they often refuse because it is a matter of great responsibility in the afterlife." This tradition exists in the NU organizational mechanism, especially in the election of *Ra'is Aam*, which is not only limited to the national congress but also regional and branch-level congresses. Because there are many NU ulama who do not appear on the surface but support NU

ultimately, when Gus Mus realized this, he felt that he was not worthy of accepting this position (Informant Rijal, 15 March, 2024). *Ra'is Aam* is the highest position of the NU *jam'iyah*, where all strategic decisions come from the authority of *Ra'is Aam*. In other words, Gus Mus' articulation of his rejection can be interpreted as a sign that he is positioning himself as a *santri*, no longer a person who is worthy of occupying the highest position. One of the informants said that he saw the articulation or message conveyed by Gus Mus that first, the leader is a servant of the community. Second, a moral warning that the transition process within NU, a socio-religious organization, is not the same as political organizations in general because this organization is a moral organization. The political processes within it must uphold the meaning of morality, the meaning of ethics, also because here it is stated that procedural democracy means that everything is following the agreed rules." (Informant Kholis, 20 March, 2024). From this, what Gus Mus articulates is better understood as a form of "*tazkiyaun nafs*" or cleansing the soul in the Sufism reasoning. A clean soul in a political context is translated into an unwillingness to seize very material positions or power. In other words, Laclau's concept of articulation above shows how Gus Mus positions himself as an ordinary citizen, not a great ulama or *Ra'is Aam* who has a high position in the NU *Jam'iyah*.

Beyond Practical Politics

As previously explained, articulating Gus Mus as an ordinary citizen can be understood as his agility in politics, where he is modest enough to be unwilling that it does not mean that he is not involved in politics, but the articulation he engages in and believes in mainstream political reasoning is very political. One of the informants said that Gus Mus is a cultural figure and avoids politics, while at that time, the election at NU was entirely political. Gus Mus was not happy in that area. He always moves in the cultural area. Like now, try to see him and ask him if he wants to take sides in the presidential election, and he may answer that he is always firmly in the cultural area." (Informant Muslimin, 10 March, 2024). From this, Gus Mus' articulation indicates that he is at the level of no power or position. Indeed, in the asceticism reasoning, a person with no inner attachment to material things can be categorized into the "Sufistic" group, namely people whose life practice is not worldly or materialistic. This phenomenon is coherent with Laclau's articulation of trying to create a new subject, namely the Sufistic Gus Mus. In this sense, Gus Mus wants to provide a new political example or political ethics for the articulation practices of *Nahdliyin*, especially the NU

elite, so they are not trapped in the Laswellian style of mainstream politics, which is very capitalistic and materialistic. It is more evident that what Gus Mus is involved in and does deliver a political message that is not political for most people. The politics of rejecting the position of *Ra'is Aam* in the sense of asceticism or mysticism is very political and has high value (high politics).

Consistent with cultural politics

Gus Mus tries to carry out the politics of Sufism to counter the dominance of the Laswellian style of mainstream political reasoning. From here, the public is amazed at Gus Mus' articulation practices' uniqueness. One informant explained that "Gus Mus, in his view, is always moving and mobilizing around culture. He did not reject political theory but he wanted to be consistent in culture, and he also once said that he was the one who founded the PKB political party for the struggle of NU cadres in the politics, and after establishing the PKB political party, he left. If you do not believe it, you may try going to his place and he will explain where he is (the cultural area). Thus, it is natural that he refused the position because he wanted to be consistent in the cultural area." (Informant Wafiyul Ahdi, 17 March, 2024). The description shows that Gus Mus pursued and articulated culture as a political instrument. His attitude and behavior so far have always positioned him differently, especially towards *Kiai*, ulama, and other religious figures. At one time, Gus Mus was not a *kiai* as most people saw. Instead, he appeared to criticize the attitudes and behavior of the *kiai*, who had been busy with religious routines, including the use of religion in the practical political stage.

From this, Gus Mus tried to regulate himself or in Laclau's language as a subject position to position himself as a member of the *nahdliyin* (*santri*), not an NU elite or a senior ulama like *Kiai Sahal*. He felt he did not have the level to be in the position of *Ra'is Aam* of NU. He is aware that his responsibilities as *Ra'is Aam* cannot be underestimated. In other words, not all *Kiai* or ulama have a good reputation regarding knowledge, influence, and acceptability that can match *Kiai Sahal*. However, the public can understand that Gus Mus used cultural instruments to do politics, even though it seems apolitical. Through culture, Gus Mus tries to provide a new political nuance amid the dominance of Laswellian and Schumpeterian politics, which are very capitalistic and liberal. From the dominance of liberal-capitalistic politics, the political reasoning of most people, including *Nahdliyin*, is trapped in the dimension of who gets what, when, and how, which has become a kind of *qa'idah* in the world's mainstream politics. Therefore, from Gus Mus' articulation, the public is

given an important message: politics is not just about seeking and maintaining power. However, politics is morality, where leaders must be role models for others. Being a leader is not limited to who occupies certain positions, but more than that. Everyone philosophically is a political creature whose ultimate goal is to organize human life through the various social positions and roles they have occupied and articulated over time. From here, the relevance of Gus Mus' asceticism is articulated in his practice of rejecting NU's highest position.

CONCLUSION

From the results of this study, it can be concluded that what Gus Mus was involved in and articulated in rejecting the position of *Ra'is Aam* at the 2015 NU Congress is a new form of politics that goes beyond current political practices. It is a form of Sufism in politics. Even though this is different from what Gus Mus did, it is possible that what Gus Mus was involved in was more about the issue of "self-awareness," not "self-image," because the public knows that since the NU Congress in 1999, until 2010, Gus Mus always refused to be nominated either as chairman of the NU *tanfidziyah* or *Syuriah/Ra'is Aam*. From the data, it is clear that Sufism in politics has a powerful nuance. It is just that most people do not comprehend what Gus Mus has been struggling with and articulating all this time. This unique, eccentric, and controversial behavior can be traced back to having long roots, namely when NU *kiai* and ulama always try to reject the position of *Ra'is Aam*. From here, the public knows that position must not be fought over. On the contrary, the *kiai* are fighting over not holding the position, and this can be said to be a form of "political ethics" in the NU *kiai* style in maintaining national moral integrity.

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