

RHETORIC AND BELIEF: AN ANALYSIS OF MUHAMMAD YAHYA WALONI'S DA'WAH (A YOUTUBE STUDY)

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the thoughts and rhetoric of Muhammad Yahya Waloni. He was born in Manado in 1970 into a Christian family. He pursued his education up to the doctoral level in theology before converting to Islam. He has had an active career as a preacher and has also served as a lecturer, rector, and politician. This research employs a qualitative approach with content analysis. The primary data is sourced from YouTube, while secondary data includes articles, websites, and books. The data is then analyzed using a deductive approach. The findings reveal that his thoughts primarily revolve around criticizing Christianity, recognizing only Islam as the true religion, and being highly sensitive to social and political issues. Regarding his preaching rhetoric, his style is consistently passionate, incorporating personal narratives, confrontational language, and frequent calls for open debates. This study is expected to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of religious and social dynamics in Indonesia, as well as provide new insights into the role of religious figures in spreading Islam in the digital era.

Keywords: Yahya Waloni; Christianity; Converted to Islam; Rhetoric; Thought.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pemikiran dan retorika Muhammad Yahya Waloni. Ia lahir di Manado pada tahun 1970 dalam keluarga Kristen. Ia menempuh pendidikan hingga jenjang doktoral di bidang teologi sebelum memeluk agama Islam. Ia memiliki rekam jejak aktif sebagai pendakwah serta pernah menjabat sebagai dosen, rektor, dan politisi. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode analisis isi. Data primer diperoleh dari YouTube, sedangkan data sekunder mencakup artikel, situs web, dan buku. Data tersebut kemudian dianalisis menggunakan pendekatan deduktif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pemikirannya terutama berkisar pada kritik terhadap agama Kristen, pandangan bahwa hanya Islam sebagai agama yang benar, serta sikap yang sangat sensitif terhadap isu-isu sosial dan politik. Terkait retorika dakwahnya, ia secara konsisten menampilkan gaya yang penuh semangat, dengan menyertakan narasi pribadi, penggunaan bahasa yang konfrontatif, serta seringnya ajakan untuk melakukan debat terbuka. Penelitian ini diharapkan dapat berkontribusi pada pemahaman yang lebih komprehensif mengenai dinamika keagamaan dan sosial di Indonesia, sekaligus memberikan wawasan baru mengenai peran tokoh agama dalam menyebarkan Islam di era digital.

Kata kunci: Yahya Waloni; Kekristenan; Mualaf; Retorika; Pemikiran.

Intruduction

Indonesia, as a country with rich religious diversity (Fahriana & Lufaei, 2020), provides fertile ground for various socio-religious phenomena, one of which is religious conversion. (Ridwan, 2017) The dynamics of this shift in belief not only reflect individual freedom in choosing one's faith but also involve a complex interplay of influencing factors. These factors may include social motivations, economic pressures, political constellations, and deeply held theological convictions. Therefore, in-depth research is required to identify and analyze the factors underlying the phenomenon of religious conversion in Indonesia.

In the context of the dissemination of Islam, religious figures play a central role. They not only serve as conveyors of the religious message but also as figures who influence public opinion and social behavior. (Ticoalu, 2021) One figure who has attracted considerable attention in recent years is Muhammad Yahya Waloni. With a unique background and a controversial *da'wah* style, Yahya Waloni has emerged as a distinct phenomenon within the landscape of Islamic *da'wah* in Indonesia. Therefore, exploring his background, motivations, and *da'wah* methods is essential for understanding the dynamics of the dissemination of Islam in the contemporary era.

The development of technology and social media, particularly YouTube, has brought significant changes to various aspects of life, including the practice of *da'wah*. Conventional *da'wah* methods that relied on face-to-face encounters have shifted with the emergence of contemporary *da'wah* approaches that utilize digital platforms. (Chudori et al., 2024) Yahya Waloni, as one of the contemporary preachers, also employs social media to convey his messages. Therefore, an analysis of the *da'wah* methods he uses, including the utilization of social media, is relevant for understanding how these messages are delivered, received, and influence society.

This study aims to examine the phenomenon of religious conversion in Indonesia by focusing on the role of religious figures in the dissemination of Islam, particularly in the case of Muhammad Yahya Waloni. The study discusses the biography of Muhammad Yahya Waloni, the factors that influence the effectiveness of his *da'wah*, and analyzes the contemporary *da'wah* methods he employs.

As observed, several studies have examined Muhammad Yahya Waloni in terms of rhetoric, language style, and related cases, such as: "*Perbandingan Retorika Dakwah Da'i Mualaf: Ustaz Felix Siauw dan Ustaz Yahya Waloni Di Youtube*".(PRATAMA, 2023) This study compares the *da'wah* rhetoric of two convert preachers, namely Felix Siauw and Yahya Waloni, on YouTube. The findings indicate that both employ effective methods in facilitating audience understanding; however, the difference lies in the intensity of their preaching tone, with Felix Siauw's sermons being calmer and lower in tone, while Muhammad Yahya Waloni's preaching tone is relatively higher. The distinction between this study and the author's research lies in the sources of social media analyzed. While previous research focuses solely on YouTube, this study utilizes a more varied range of social media platforms, such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, as well as news reports from mass media. In addition to rhetorical analysis, this study also examines Muhammad Yahya Waloni's beliefs and attitudes both before and after his conversion to Islam.

Another study entitled "*Pendekatan Konseling Behavioral pada Kasus Dugaan Ujaran Kebencian dan Penodaan Agama Yahya Waloni*".(Oktaviawati, 2024) aims to discuss behavioral counseling that focuses on cases of alleged hate speech and religious blasphemy attributed to Yahya Waloni, which have triggered public debate. The distinction between this study and the author's research lies in the analysis

of Muhammad Yahya Waloni's rhetoric and beliefs in his *da'wah* activities.

Another study entitled "*Kontruksi Media*

Kompas dan DetikNews: Analisis

Wacana Kritis Berita Kasus Penistaan Agama Muhammad Kece dan Yahya Waloni". (Syahrudin & Ilham, 2023) examines the media construction employed by *Kompas* and *DetikNews* in reporting the religious blasphemy cases involving Muhammad Yahya Waloni and Muhammad Kece. The distinction between this study and the author's research lies in the focus of analysis: the former addresses the religious blasphemy cases involving Muhammad Yahya Waloni, whereas the present study focuses on the rhetoric and beliefs manifested in Yahya Waloni's *da'wah*.

This study is expected to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of socio-religious dynamics in Indonesia and to provide new insights into the role of religious figures in the dissemination of Islam in the digital era. Furthermore, it is anticipated that this research will serve as a platform for fostering constructive dialogue and discussion on various Islamic issues in the digital age.

Research Method

This study employs a qualitative approach. According to Denzin and Lincoln, qualitative research is a form of inquiry that utilizes natural settings with the intention of interpreting phenomena as they occur and is conducted by involving various available methods. (Setiawan, 2018, p. 7) This study applies content analysis. According to Krippendorff, content analysis is a research technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specific characteristics. (Ed.D & M.Pd, 2021, p. 5) This research utilizes both primary and secondary data as part of its data management strategy. Primary data refer to data obtained directly from the research subject by relying on direct data collection instruments as sources of the required

information. (Utama et al., 2023, p. 128) The primary data used in this study consist of analyses of Muhammad Yahya Waloni's *da'wah* derived from various YouTube channels.

Secondary data, meanwhile, refer to data that are published or used by organizations that do not directly manage them, as well as data collected through indirect means. (Ed.D & M.Pd, 2021, p. 98) The secondary data used in this study consist of journal articles, websites, social media content, and books relevant to this research.

This study adopts a socio-cognitive approach, namely an approach aimed at understanding social phenomena. The analytical technique employed in this research is descriptive analysis, which is a type of data analysis intended to present the conditions or characteristics of the sample data. (Djaali, 2021, p. 112) Furthermore, the data concerning Muhammad Yahya Waloni are synthesized using a deductive approach, that is, analyzing the data obtained in general terms and then drawing specific conclusions, moving from theoretical concepts to empirical facts.

Results and Discussion

An Overview of Muhammad Yahya Waloni

Muhammad Yahya Waloni was born under the name Yahya Yopie Waloni on 30 November 1970 in Manado. He comes from a devout Christian Minahasan family. ("Muhammad Yahya Waloni," 2024) He is the youngest of seven siblings. His father was a retired military officer who had served as a member of the Regional House of Representatives at the regency level in North Sulawesi. He has stated that in his youth he was once delinquent and bears remnants of tattoos on his body. He holds a doctoral degree from the Institut Theologia Oikumene Imanuel Manado, dated 10 January 2004. Yahya Waloni claims to be a former pastor and to have served as a lecturer as well as Rector of STT Eben-Haezer. He and his wife recited the Islamic declaration of faith (*shahādah*) on 11

October 2006 at 12:00 WITA under the guidance of Komarudin Sofa, Secretary of the Nahdlatul Ulama Branch Leadership in Tolitoli, Central Sulawesi. (Zainuddin, 2008, p. 21) This indicates that Muhammad Yahya Waloni and his family were individuals of notable social standing and influence within the community.

Prior to embracing Islam, he served as a registered pastor under the Administrative Board of the GKI Synod in the Land of Papua, Region VI Sorong–Kaimana, and had held the position of Chairperson or Rector of the Calvinist Ebenhaezer Theological Seminary (STT) in Sorong from 1997 to 2004. (*Profil Ustaz Yahya Waloni, Eks Pendeta Yang Masuk Islam*, n.d.) On 11 October 2006, Yahya and his family officially embraced Islam. Subsequently, the name Yahya Yopie Waloni was changed to Muhammad Yahya; his wife, Lusiana, became Mutmainnah; and their children also adopted new names: Silviana became Nur Hidayah, Sarah became Siti Sarah, while Zakaria retained his original name. (*Ustadz Yahya Waloni Pindah Agama, Ganti Nama Anak Silviana Jadi Nur Hidayah*, n.d.) After converting to Islam, Yahya Waloni became known as a preacher who frequently addressed topics of Christianization and missionary activities, employing a confrontational and outspoken preaching style. He also served as a lecturer at the University of Balikpapan until 2006 and as a member of the Regional House of Representatives (DPRD) in one of the newly established regencies in North Sulawesi. (*Profil Ustaz Yahya Waloni, Eks Pendeta yang Masuk Islam*, n.d.) his life trajectory of Muhammad Yahya Waloni after embracing Islam underwent drastic changes. Nevertheless, his influence remained significant, as he continued to occupy prominent roles as a religious figure, academic, and public official.

In September 2021, Yahya Waloni issued a public apology to the Indonesian people, particularly to the Christian community, regarding the content of his sermons that touched upon issues of ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup relations (SARA). He acknowledged his

mistakes and expressed remorse for actions that had exceeded the boundaries of propriety and social ethics. (*Yahya Waloni Minta Maaf Atas Isi Ceramahnya Singgung SARA - ANTARA News*, n.d.) In January 2022, the South Jakarta District Court sentenced Yahya Waloni to five months' imprisonment and imposed a fine of IDR 50 million for hate speech related to SARA in his sermons. This sentence was lighter than the prosecutor's demand of seven months' imprisonment. The judges considered Yahya's remorse and his apology to the Christian community as mitigating factors in determining the sentence. (*Ustaz Yahya Waloni Divonis Lima Bulan dan Denda Rp 50 Juta*, 2022) After serving his sentence, Yahya Waloni was released from the Criminal Investigation Detention Center of the Indonesian National Police on 31 January 2022. (*Yahya Waloni Bebas Dari Rutan Bareskrim*, n.d.) Prior to this case, in 2018, Yahya Waloni had been reported by Abdul Kadir Karding, former Secretary-General of the National Awakening Party (PKB), for alleged hate speech in sermons deemed provocative toward certain public figures. (Media, 2021) This case serves as an important lesson on the necessity of guarding one's speech in *da'wah* activities. Therefore, a preacher is strongly obliged to exercise patience in navigating the challenging path of *da'wah*.

The Thought of Muhammad Yahya Waloni

After examining 50 videos of Muhammad Yahya Waloni, the analysis indicates that his thought revolves around several key aspects, particularly his criticism of Christianity. As a former pastor, Yahya Waloni constructs many of his sermons by drawing comparisons between Islam and Christianity. (*CERAMAH USTADZ YAHYA WALONI || Spesial Di Bulan Suci Ramadhan - YouTube*, n.d.; *Saya Bukan Mualaf...!! | Ceramah Terbaru Bersama Ustadz M Yahya Waloni Asal Manado - YouTube*, n.d.) He frequently critiques Christian doctrines using arguments as he understands them, while simultaneously attempting to demonstrate the superiority of Islam.

(Ceramah agama, 2025a; Ustadz Yahya Wahloni Marah....!! - YouTube, n.d.) In one of his sermons, he stated that Christianity is not a revealed (samāwī) religion but rather a philosophical religion. (BAHAGIA TV, 2025c; Mamank Dakwah official, 2025a; Rhoma Irama Official, 2024) According to him, the scriptures recognized by Christians, namely the Old Testament and the New Testament, do not hold the status of sacred texts equivalent to the Qur'an. (AN PROTV™, 2024b, 2025a; Viral...!! Debat Lintas Agama Pendeta Mell Atock Di Permalukan Ustadz Yahya Waloni 2024 - YouTube, n.d.-a) Islam, in his view, is the only religion approved by Allah SWT; therefore, whoever seeks a religion other than Islam will not have it accepted, and in the Hereafter will be among those who suffer loss.

Muhammad Yahya Waloni strongly emphasizes Islam as the only true religion. He frequently reiterates the narrative that Islam is the straight path and cannot be equated with other religions. This line of thought is evident in his sermons, in which he repeatedly asserts that only by embracing Islam can a person attain salvation in both this world and the Hereafter. (BAHAGIA TV, 2025d; HIJRAHKITA, 2025; Kabar Kini, 2015a; Ustadz Yahya Wahloni Terbaru - YouTube, n.d.; USTADZ YAHYA WALONI || Ceramah Debat Islam vs Kristen Terbaru - YouTube, n.d.-a; Yahya Waloni Terbaru - YouTube, n.d.) Yahya Waloni does not focus solely on religious da'wah but also frequently comments on political and social issues. He supports policies that, in his view, favor the Muslim community and does not hesitate to criticize figures considered to be inconsistent with Islamic values. (Aboe Bakar Channel, 2025; AN PROTV™, 2025b; Islam Sumirat, 2025a; LANGKAH USTADZ, 2025; Mamank Dakwah official, 2025b; PANAS!! USTAD YAHYA WALONI INGIN MEMBUKTIKAN KEBENARAN ISLAM || ISLAMRAHMATANLIL'ALAMIN - YouTube, n.d.-a; The Pamk official, 2025a) Therefore, the concern of a Muslim in responding to social issues with adequate knowledge is greatly needed by the Muslim community.

Yahya Waloni also demonstrates militancy in his da'wah and in his stance toward non-Muslims. He adopts a very harsh attitude toward non-Muslims, particularly those whom he perceives as attacking Islam. In various sermons, he employs coarse terminology to refer to non-Muslims, reflecting a highly confrontational worldview. He also calls for the unity of the Muslim community in confronting external challenges and frequently asserts that Islam is currently in a state of threat. (BAHAGIA TV, 2025a, 2025e; Ceramah agama, 2025b, 2025d; PENIKMAT ILMU, 2025; SAYA BUKAN KERAS...!! KADANG YOUTUBE YOUTUBE INI JADI SETAN CERAMAH TEGAS USTADZ YAHYA WALONI - YouTube, n.d.-a) In Islam, the doctrine of *al-walā' wa al-barā'* (loyalty and dissociation from disbelief) is a principle worthy of emulation; however, courtesy and gentleness serve to perfect the da'wah of one who is fervent in upholding the truth.

The Da'wah Rhetoric of Muhammad Yahya Waloni

After examining 50 videos of Muhammad Yahya Waloni, the analysis indicates that his da'wah rhetoric possesses distinctive characteristics that differentiate him from many other preachers. One of the primary elements of his rhetoric is his fiery oratorical style. Yahya Waloni frequently employs a forceful and highly spirited preaching style. He does not merely speak but emphasizes key points with a raised voice and dramatic gestures. This style is intended to capture the audience's attention and to instill a sense of urgency in the messages he conveys. (Derry Sulaiman And Sahabat, 2023; IRMA AN-NUR TV, 2021; Kabar Kini, 2015b; TERBARU!! KAJIAN USTAD YAHYA WALONI LUCU PENUH MAKNA || SIMAK VIDIONYA SAMPAI SELESAI - YouTube, n.d.) A fiery style was also employed by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) when commanding troops and during Friday sermons. Nevertheless, the Prophet's rhetoric was predominantly characterized by *rifq* (gentleness).

One of the main strategies employed in his *da'wah* is the use of his personal experience as a former pastor. He frequently recounts his journey in discovering Islam as well as the challenges he faced after converting. These narratives function as a powerful rhetorical tool in constructing his authority as a preacher. (AN PROTV™, 2025c; Ceramah agama, 2025c; *SAYA BUKAN KERAS...!! KADANG YOUTUBE YOUTUBE INI JADI SETAN CERAMAH TEGAS USTADZ YAHYA WALONI* - YouTube, n.d.-b; *TAUSIAH NENYENTUH HATI USTADZ YAHYA WALONI "KEMBALILAH KEPADA YANG BENAR" !!#yahyawaloni* - YouTube, n.d.; The Pamk official, 2025b) In contrast to other preachers who tend to adopt persuasive and peaceful approaches, Yahya Waloni frequently employs confrontational and provocative language. He does not hesitate to label his debate opponents with sharp and at times derogatory terms. This approach often generates controversy, yet it also contributes to the virality of his sermons on social media. (Aboe Bakar Channel, 2024; AN PROTV™, 2024a, 2024c; Penghuni Jannah, 2022; *Viral...!! Debat Lintas Agama Pendeta Mell Atock Di Permalukan Ustadz Yahya Waloni 2024* - YouTube, n.d.-b) *Da'wah* strategies that utilize stories and personal experiences are among the most effective means of conveying messages and objectives; indeed, Allah SWT has made approximately one-third of the Qur'an consist of narratives. As for referring to debate opponents with harsh language, this should be minimized as much as possible, for the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) consistently warned against wrongful actions without explicitly naming the perpetrators. Accordingly, the best form of advice, according to al-Shāfi'ī, is counsel delivered privately.

Yahya Waloni also frequently constructs his arguments by juxtaposing opposing binaries, such as Islam versus Christianity, Muslims versus unbelievers, or 'ulamā' versus pastors. (Islam Sumirat, 2025b; *PANAS!! USTAD YAHYA WALONI INGIN MEMBUKTIKAN KEBENARAN ISLAM || ISLAMRAHMATANLIL'ALAMIN* - YouTube, n.d.-b; *USTADZ YAHYA WALONI || Ceramah*

Debat Islam vs Kristen Terbaru - YouTube, n.d.-b) These contrasts are employed to clarify the points he seeks to convey while simultaneously reinforcing Islam's position as a superior religion. He often challenges other figures to engage in open debates, particularly those from non-Muslim backgrounds. He claims to possess expertise in understanding Christian theology and considers himself more qualified to confront debates concerning religious differences. (Aziz lanitv, 2025; BAHAGIA TV, 2025b, 2025f; Mamank Dakwah official, 2025c) The rhetoric and thought of Yahya Waloni elicit diverse responses within society. On the one hand, he has a substantial following that appreciates his firm and uncompromising *da'wah* style. On the other hand, many parties criticize his *da'wah* methods for being overly provocative and potentially exacerbating interreligious relations in Indonesia.

Conclusion

Muhammad Yahya Waloni was born in Manado in 1970 into a devout Christian family. He pursued his education up to the doctoral level in theology and later embraced Islam together with his family. He has since pursued a career as an active preacher, calling people to embrace Islam and articulating what he considers to be the fallacies of Christianity. He has also served as a lecturer, a rector, and a member of the Regional House of Representatives (DPRD). His thought centers on critiquing Christianity and recognizing Islam as the only true religion. He is highly attentive to social and political issues. With regard to his *da'wah* rhetoric, his style is consistently fiery, employing personal narratives, confrontational language, and frequent calls for open debate. The rhetoric and thought of Yahya Waloni have generated diverse reactions within society. On the one hand, he has a large following that appreciates his firm and uncompromising *da'wah* style. On the other hand, many observers criticize his methods for being overly provocative and for potentially aggravating interreligious relations in Indonesia. It is hoped that this

study will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of socio-religious dynamics in Indonesia and provide new insights into the role of religious figures in the dissemination of Islam in the digital era.

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