

'MAKING GOD SMILING'

The Carnavalesque of Nahdlatul Ulama Funny Brigade

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Abstract: This article describes and analyzes how the virtual communities of Nahdlatul Ulama *Garis Lucu* (Funny Brigade) have created a new religious culture in Indonesia through their Instagram posts. There are four important elements of their Instagram posts, namely the content, humor as a means of communication, interactions, and digital media as a new public sphere. The content analyzed is only a few samples related to three topics, i.e., religious teachings, religious practices, and religious conversions. The analysis is qualitative in nature, from a philosophical-conceptual point of view, especially through the lens of Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque. Such a concept highlights the importance of humor in these Instagram posts. Humor brings trust, equality, and also incongruity. The interactions allow for dialogism, and the digital space provides ample freedom. This article concludes that the Nahdlatul Ulama Funny Brigade has created a new image of Islam in Indonesia through its virtual carnivalesque.

Keywords: Nahdlatul Ulama Funny Brigade, NU *Garis Lucu*, Instagram, humor.

Introduction

In the virtual world of Instagram and Twitter, @nugarislucu, or Nahdlatul Ulama *Garis Lucu* (Nahdlatul Ulama Funny Brigade, hereafter NUFB) has become an interesting socio-religious and cultural phenomenon, especially among young people. They are phenomenal not only because they have many followers, but also because their style is followed by young people from other religions. As the name implies, in the virtual world they show a relaxed and humorous style in dealing with socio-religious phenomena in Indonesia. What is happening is a relaxed style of religion. With such a style, NUFB presents a friendly

face of Islam. People can say that it also presents a smiling God, not a rigid God, which is indirectly experienced by people who experience violence under the pretext of religion. In this way, the NUFB can give a new color to religious life in Indonesia.

There have been various writings about the *Garis Lucu* (Funny Brigade) communities, especially about NUFB. There are writings from a linguistic point of view.¹ Other studies are written from a media communication point of view such the works of Andi Pamungkas,² James Bourk Hoesterey³ and Zul Amri Fathinul Inshafi.⁴ Many articles are also written from a socio-religious point of view, either from the perspective of interreligious dialogue, such as the work of Azis Pajri Syarifudin,⁵ or from the perspective of religious moderation, such as the work of Hasbulloh Alfian Fadhli,⁶ Sahrul Romadhon and Ardi Wina Saputra, Ery Erman,⁷ A. J. Ramadhan,⁸ dan Dawam Multazamy Rohmatulloh.⁹ However, there has been no in-depth study of the NUFB as a cultural phenomenon. Therefore, this article is intended to fill the gap of the research that has been done and to further dissect the NUFB phenomenon from a cultural point of view.

¹ Lubis Winaria, “Analisis Tindak Tutur Dalam Akun-Akun Twitter Garis Lucu Sebuah Tinjauan Pragmatik,” *Jurnal Babastra (Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia)* 4, no. 1 (2019): 100–106.

² Andi Pamungkas, “Satire Dalam Media Sosial: Studi Reception Analysis Pemakaian Followers Terhadap Pesan Satire NU Garis Lucu (@NUGarislucu) Di Twitter” (Institut Agama Islam Negeri Jember, 2020).

³ James Bourk Hoesterey, “Nahdlatul Ulama’s ‘Funny Brigade’: Piety, Satire, and Indonesian Online Divides,” *CyberOrient* 15, no. 1 (2021): 85–118.

⁴ Zul Amri Fathinul Inshafi, “Fenomena Komunikasi Media Sosial Analisis Wacana Akun Twitter Garis Lucu NU Dan Muhammadiyah Perspektif van Dijk Dan Lasswell” (Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, 2021).

⁵ Azis Pajri Syarifudin, “Konstruksi Nilai Peace Building Dalam Akun Twitter NU Garis Lucu,” *Esenia : Fakultas Ushuluddin Universitas Sunan Kalijaga* (2020): 1–46.

⁶ Hasbulloh Alfian Fadhli, “Membaca NU Garis Lucu (NUGL) Sebagai Upaya Pencegahan Faham Radikalisme Di Kalangan Remaja Indonesia,” *Dinamika: Jurnal Kajian Pendidikan dan Keislaman* 5, no. 2 (2020): 21–38.

⁷ Ery Erman, “Ruang Publik Keagamaan: Intoleransi Dan Narasi Humor NG Garis Lucu,” *Fikeri: Jurnal Kajian Agama, Sosial dan Budaya* 3 (2018): 1–6.

⁸ A. J. Ramadhan, “Deradikalisasi Agama Melalui Permainan Bahasa Satire-Humor Pada Akun Twitter NU Garis Lucu” (Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya, 2021).

⁹ Dawam Multazamy Rohmatulloh, “In Meme Dakwah: A Netnographic Study of Garis Lucu Social Media Accounts,” *SSRN Electronic Journal* (2022): 38–39.

The first part of this article describes a short general description on the relationship between religion and humor (subsections 1). Then, the second part (subsections 2 and 3) describes the development of Nahdlatul Ulama Funny Brigade) and its interaction on its Instagram accounts with religious based *Garis Lucu* accounts. The interaction between them is indirect, as uploads or posts are not immediately replied to by the other. However, the interviewees become each other's followers and interaction takes place. The focus is on how these Instagram accounts provide humorous commentary on sensitive issues in interfaith relations. The issues presented and discussed in this article are related to 1) doctrines, 2) religious practices, 3) religious conversions. These are sensitive issues in the Indonesian context. Data is presented from Instagram accounts, although interactions also occur via Twitter. Posts within Instagram accounts take precedence over Twitter because the content is mostly the same and Instagram accounts are easier to follow.

The third part (subsection 4) of this article is a qualitative conceptual analysis of the data, specifically to see how the NUFB became phenomenal. There are cultural dynamics in it. As an analytical tool, this research uses Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque,¹⁰ which includes humor as one of its core elements, to better understand such a phenomenon. After this analysis, the article ends with a conclusion (subsection 5).

Religion and Humor

In the philosophers' reflection, human being is a religious being (homo religiosus)¹¹ cum laughing being (homo ridens).¹² Since both attributes are in the same human being, religiosity and the tendency or desire to laugh are actually inseparable. Both are intrinsic to human beings. If so, why is there (or at least there was, and some still are) a bipolarity between religion and humor? The answer is simple. Both religion and humor are social constructs, developed in society, outside of individual human beings. For such a reason, the discussion on the

¹⁰ Simon Dentith, *Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reader*, *Bakhtinian Thought: Intro Read* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).

¹¹ S Sztajer, "The Concept of Homo Religiosus and Its Philosophical Interpretations," *Anglojęzykowy Supplement Przeglądu Religioznawczego* 1, no. 1 (2013): 17–27.

¹² Peter L. Berger, "Homo Ridens: Physiology and Psychology," in *Redeeming Laughter: The Comic Dimension of Human Experience* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2014).

relationship between religion and humor is a discussion in the realm of culture. Since then, both are relative. They cannot be easily defined. The image and the concept of divinity in religions varies, and this will also determine its relationship with humor. Meanwhile, humor is not only relative, but also has many types.¹³

The relationship between the two is mostly extrinsic. It is a relationship in which the one ‘uses’ the other. On the one hand, humor uses religious teachings as its material. This relationship occurs in society, including among the followers of a particular religion, but usually not among its leaders, though mostly are unofficial. On the other hand, religion uses humor as a means of communicating its teachings. They use humor to make their sermons more interesting. However, this relationship is extrinsic because it is functional, not essential.¹⁴

The essential relationship between religion and humor happens when the relationship has existed from the beginning, such as the fact that the scriptures or official teachings of the religion in question consider humor to be integral part of the teachings. At another level, humor is part of the official religious teachings delivered by religious leaders and in formal forums, even though it may not be explicitly stated in the text of the scriptures. At this level, humor becomes part of the interpretive dimension.

There many discussions on extrinsic relationship between religion and humor, being the subject of sociology,¹⁵ communication,¹⁶ culture,¹⁷ and anthropology.¹⁸ Meanwhile, the discussion of the

¹³ Bernard Schweizer, “Religion and Humour, the Big Picture,” in *Humour in the Beginning. Religion, Humour and Laughter in Formative Stages of Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Judaism*, ed. Roald Dijkstra and Paul van der Velde (Amsterdam: Benjamins Publishing Company, 2022), 11.

¹⁴ Paul S. Martin, Nicole Graham, and Christian F. Hempelmann, “Introduction to the Special Issue: Humour and Religion, ‘You Must Be Joking?!’,” *Humor* 37, no. 2 (2024): 169–179.

¹⁵ Oleksandr Golozubov, “Concepts of Laughter and Humor in the Sociology of Religion,” *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 140 (2014): 528–534.

¹⁶ Arianto, “Analysis of Da’i Communication Skills towards the Muslim Converted Karomba Community,” *Al Balaq* 5, no. 1 (2020): 35–66; Anita Cloete, “Revisiting the Social and Religious Value of Humour,” *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 5, no. 2 (2019): 81–94.

¹⁷ Susi Herti Afriani, “Berkelakar and Directives in Palembang Malay: The Islamic Humor Discourse in Indonesia,” *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 15, 2 (2021).

intrinsic relationship is just developing. It becomes the studies of psychologists,¹⁹ philosophers²⁰ and also theologians,²¹ although these branches of science face an epistemological obstacle, namely the absence of a definition of religion and, moreover, of humor. The temporal and spatial relativity is very high, so the development is not very significant.²²

The study of the intrinsic relationship between religion and humor has developed quite rapidly. It began in the 1960s.²³ The science of humor began to develop in such a way that it also looked at the symptoms of humor's relationship to other cultural products, including religion. Besides, religion is beginning to lose its greatness, both externally and internally. Externally, the power of religious influence on society is diminishing. Internally, the absoluteness of religious teachings and the authority of religious leaders over their congregations have also begun to melt away. In this situation, humor entered into religion, and scholars, including theologians, began to study the phenomenon of humor in religion and its scriptures, including its prophets. For example, there are studies on the laughter

¹⁸ Henk Driessen, "Anthropology of Humor," *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (Elsevier, 2015).

¹⁹ Vassilis Saroglou, "Religion and Sense of Humor: An a Priori Incompatibility? Theoretical Considerations from a Psychological Perspective," *Humor* 15, no. 2 (2002): 191–214; Istiningtyas Listya, "Humor Dalam Kajian Psikologi Islam," *Jurnal Ilmu Agama* 15 (2014).

²⁰ C Stephen Evans, "Kierkegaard's View of Humor: Must Christians Always Be Solemn?," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers* 4, no. 2 (1987): 176–186; Walter G Moss, "Wisdom, Humor, and Faith: A Historical View," *The Wisdom Page*.

²¹ Anita Houck, "Holiness and Humour," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 72, no. 4 (2016): 1–8; Ben Mansour, "Laughter in Islam," *Booksandideas.Net*; Shawn R. Tucker, "On Mormon Laughter," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (2012): 141–154.

²² Walter Van Herck, "Humour, Religion and Vulnerability," in *Humour and Religion: Challenges and Ambiguities*, ed. Hans Geybels and Walter van Herck (London and New York: Continuum, 2011), 191–203.

²³ Nicole Graham, "Unraveling the Seriousness Fallacy: A Case for (the Study of) Humor and Religion," *Humor* 0, no. 0 (2024): 181–198.

of Jesus.²⁴ There are also studies on the nuances of humor in the Bible,²⁵ or the teachings of theologians and saints on humor.²⁶

However, those studies have their bias, namely Western and Christian bias. The character of Western and Christian religion is different with that of local religions, especially Eastern one.²⁷ One of the very distinct characters of Eastern religions is that the divinity of the scriptures is not strongly claimed. The scriptures are still sacred and held in high esteem, but the overtones of its divinity are not as strong as in Western religion (in this case, Christianity). In Eastern religions, the Divine is presented in the many faces of deities who indirectly accommodate human desires, including laughter. The image of Buddha laughing is one example,²⁸ while the image of Jesus laughing is not yet a tradition.

There have not been many studies on the relationship between traditional religions and humor in Indonesia. For Kejawen, the Javanese traditional religion, humor is also not widely discussed. In the Javanese culture of politeness, people must be able to control their emotional expression. However, there is one tradition that can bridge the relationship between Kejawen and humor, and that is the presence of the character Semar in the world of *wayang*, or traditional puppetry.²⁹ Puppet show is known to be a means of transmitting Kejawen values to the community. In that puppet show, Semar, who is described as a god incarnate as a servant, is presented together with the *punokawan* (the clown), who are known for their jokes. There have been no in-

²⁴ Riyadh Tariq Kadhim Al-Ameedi and Rufaidah Kamal Abdulmajeed, "Persuasion in Jesus Christ's Humour: A Linguistic Analysis," *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics* 06, no. 02 (2016): 71–84.

²⁵ Charles David Isbell, "Humor in the Bible," in *Jews and Humor* (Purdue University Press, 2007), 1–12.

²⁶ Anne Louise Williams, "Satirizing the Sacred: St. Joseph and Humor in Northern European Art, ca. 1300-1530" (University of Virginia, 2015).

²⁷ Selva J Raj and Corinne Dempsey, "Ritual Levity in South Asian Traditions," in *Sacred Play: Ritual Levity and Humor in South Asian Religions*, ed. Selva J Raj and Corinne Dempsey (New York, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 2010).

²⁸ David V. Fiordalis, "Buddhas and Body Language: The Literary Trope of the Buddha's Smile," in *The Language of the Sūtras Essays in Honor of Luis Gómez Edited by Natalie Gummer*, ed. Natalie Gummer (Berkeley, CA: Mangalam Press, 2021).

²⁹ Catur Nugroho, "Asal-Usul Mitos Tokoh Semar; Eksistensi Dan Esensinya Bagi Masyarakat Jawa," *Lakon Jurnal Pengkajian & Penciptaan Wayang* 20, no. 1 (2023): 1–9.

depth studies of this emphasis, but it is clear that Kejawen does not prohibit humor strictly.

In the Islamic world, the relationship to humor is not as harsh as in the Catholicism, but it is not very fluid either. The problem lies in the interpretation of the Qur'an.³⁰ Since Islam does not recognize a strict hierarchy, the diversity of interpretations is great, and the socio-cultural context has a great influence. For example, Yasmin notes that the Sunni tradition is more accepting of humor, while the Shiite tradition rejects it.³¹ It is the Sunni tradition that has influenced Islam in Indonesia,³² so humor is quite accommodating, especially in the pesantren world. In other words, religion and humor are not contradictory, even compatible, not only extrinsically as a means of da'wah, but also as an important part of the teachings.³³

NUFB (Nahdlatul Ulama Funny Brigade) grew up in a Javanese context that is very receptive to humor, and in a Sunni Islamic context that is not allergic to humor either. From the perspective of the literary and philosophical theory developed by Mikhail Bakhtin, the Russian philosopher (1895-1975), there are carnivalesque elements in the practices of NUFB. In Bakhtin's analysis, a carnival, as a public festivity, has become carnivalesque when the cuteness and humor performed by the actors behind the exaggerated masks (grotesque), can deconstruct the existing social order and the hierarchy of power in society, including of religion. Humor brings trust, equality, and also incongruity.³⁴ Bakhtin's carnivalesque perspective is relevant to be used as an analytical framework. In this case, Bakhtin does not directly relate

³⁰ Mostafa Abedinifard, "Ridicule in the Qur'an: The Missing Link in Islamic Humour Studies," in *Muslims and Humour*, ed. Bernard Schweizer, Lina Molokotos-Liederman, and Yasmin Amin (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2022), 19–43.

³¹ Yasmin Amin, "A Laughing God, between Sunni Approval and Shi'ite Rejection," in *Humour in the Beginning: Religion, Humour and Laughter in Formative Stages of Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Judaism*, ed. Roald Dijkstra and Paul van der Velde (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2022), 156–182.

³² Abon Ronaldi, Arief Subhan, and Arif Zamhari, "Indonesian Islam: History, Characteristics and Global," *Islamika Inside: Jurnal Keislaman dan Humaniora* 9, no. 1 (2023): 100–120.

³³ Francesca M Corrao, "Some Observations on Humour in Islamic Culture," *The Arabist, Budapest Studies in Arabic* 37 (2016): 1–7.

³⁴ Ben Taylor, "Bakhtin, Carnival and Comic Theory" (University of Nottingham, 1995).

humor to religion, but places carnivalesque humor within a social event in society.

The Spirit and the Background of Nahdlatul Ulama Funny Brigade

NUFB was born among the young people of Nahdlatul Ulama. Nahdlatul Ulama or NU for short, the largest Islamic organization in Indonesia that initially started as traditionalist,³⁵ but tries to be more progressive in recent years,³⁶ including doctrines,³⁷ politics,³⁸ economy³⁹ and social issues.⁴⁰ NUFB was not born as a direct response to the situation in Indonesia. It was an unofficial group formed in response to the formation of NU *Garis Lurus* (Straight Brigade) in 2015. NU *Garis Lurus* claims to be the legitimate group. This group considers the others to have deviated from the core teachings of NU. NU *Garis Lurus* seeks to absolute their interpretation of the spirit of NU so that they see others as ‘crooked’, as reflected in their social media tagline, Straightening crooked thoughts. Rather than fight head-on, a group of NU youth formed the NU Funny Brigade in 2015.⁴¹

³⁵ Rumadi Rumadi, “Speaking the Unspeakable: The Status of ‘Non-Muslims’ in Indonesia Speaking the Unspeakable: The Status of “Non-Muslims in Indonesia,” *SAMARAH Jurnal Hukum Keluarga dan Hukum Islam* Vol. 6 No. (January 2, 2023): 734–756.

³⁶ Asmawi Asmawi, “Murūnah Ijtihād Jam‘iyyah Nahḍah Al-‘Ulama: Min Fiqh al-Ḥaḍārah Ilā Dīn al-‘Ishrīn,” *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 17, 1 (2023).

³⁷ Fany Hakim, “Re-Understanding Tolerance through Intrareligious Dialogue: The Discourse of Anti-Shi‘ism in Indonesia,” *Ulumuna* 25, no. 2 SE-Articles (December 31, 2021).

³⁸ Ahmad Huda, “The Rise of Cinematic Santri in Post-Authoritarian Indonesia: Figure, Field and the Competing Discourse,” *Studia Islamika* 30 (December 27, 2023): 261–290.

³⁹ Zainal Abidin et al., “Al-Wasathiyah Fī al-Iqtishād al-Islāmī: Ârâ’u ‘Ulamâ Jam’iyati ‘Nahdlatul Ulama’ Bi Jawa al-Syarqiyah Haula ‘al-Taraddud’ Bi Sya’ini Fatâwa al-Fawâid al-Mashrifiyah,” *AL-IHKAM: Jurnal Hukum & Pranata Sosial* 18 (June 30, 2023): 246–283.

⁴⁰ Musda Asmara, “Komparasi Fatwa Ulama Indonesia Dalam Menyikapi Pandemi Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19),” *Al-Manabij: Jurnal Kajian Hukum Islam* 16 (May 30, 2022): 29–44.

⁴¹ Hoesterey, “Nahdlatul Ulama’s ‘Funny Brigade’: Piety, Satire, and Indonesian Online Divides.”

As of August 31, 2023, the NUFB's Instagram account had more than 909,000 followers and Twitter had more than 956,700 followers. Their posts are not only funny, but also inspiring. This is in keeping with their motto: "Speak the truth, even if it's funny. This phrase is a clever adaptation of the words of the Prophet Muhammad SAW: "Speak the truth, even if it's bitter."⁴² In the slogan, the word "although" exists and is aligned with the word "despite" in the Prophet's words, which is not very important in meaning. However, it is worth noting first the truth and second the humor as a way of expression.

In this spirit, serious religious issues have been addressed in a relaxed and funny way. There are at least three forms of pleasantly relaxed responses to some sensitive issues, such as laughing at oneself (especially at the religious practices of *Nahdliyyin*, a term for NU members), commenting humorously on religious practices outside NU (both fellow Muslims and non-Muslims), and commenting humorously on the news (from offline and online newspapers), television, or posts from Instagram accounts.

The positive response of many groups to the NUFB inspired several other youth groups to create social media accounts with the label *Garis Lucu*. From Islamic circles, there are also those from Muhammadiyah, the second largest Islamic organization in Indonesia, using the name Muhammadiyah *Garis Lucu* (Muhammadiyah Funny Brigade, hereafter referred to as MFB). MFB's Instagram account is followed by more than 48,400 followers. Although it was created in 2018, there are already 254 posts. There are also several *Garis Lucu* accounts from Islamic circles, such as Islam *Garis Lucu*, Cadar *Garis Lucu*, Sufi *Garis Lucu*, and even Wahhabi *Lucu*, although they have relatively few followers so far.

Muslims are not the only ones attracted to the NUFB method. Young people from other religions have also created similar accounts. From the Catholic community came the *Katolik Garis Lucu* (Catholic Funny Brigade, hereafter referred to as CFB). From the Protestant community came the Protestant *Garis Lucu*, the HKBP *Garis Lucu*, the GBI *Garis Lucu*, and several others. Then came the Buddhism *Garis Lucu*, the Hinduism *Garis Lucu*, and the Confucianism *Garis Lucu*. However, the development indicates that the humorous way of

⁴² Mevy Eka Nurhalizah, "NU Garis Lucu: Kesalehan Dan Sindiran Melalui Media," *Nursyam Centre*.

addressing a problem in a light-hearted manner is becoming more and more accepted as an effective means of communication. In this case, in a post dated October 26, 2021, CFB dared to mention that NUFB is a gift from God for minorities. This post was "liked" by 2870 followers and commented on 74 times. In fact, from a follower perspective, NUFB is still in the lead, followed by CFB. However, from a post perspective, CFB has already caught up to NUFB with its 3539 posts.

Smiling with God

One of the most sensitive issues in interfaith relations is religious doctrine. This is a paramount concern when there is a sharp difference in certain topics of their teachings vis-à-vis others. An example of such a sensitive issue is the issue of the Trinity in Christianity and the Trimurti in Hinduism versus the concept of monotheism in Islam. On another level, there are different views on the prohibition of drinking alcohol and eating pork in Islamic teachings and the teachings on these matters in other religions. These differences are prone to misunderstanding. However, the communication of these Funny Brigade communities offers enlightenment.

Figure 1. Who is Your God?



An example of the above can be seen in one of the posts about the Trinity on the day of the commemoration of the Holy Trinity in the Catholic tradition. CFB posted "Man Rabbuka (in Arabic, meaning 'Who is your God')? God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit". NUFB responded humorously with "Angel: Didn't you read the answer key?" (And in the background of this post is the cover of a book entitled "Answer Key to the Grave Question"). This June 6, 2020 post was liked by 23,090 accounts and had 392 interactions in the comments.⁴³

Figure 2. The Closest to God.



As mentioned earlier, these posts discussed sensitive issues regarding the understanding of God, especially regarding the understanding of God and the Trinity, which is sensitive for both Islam and Catholicism/Christianity. This dialogue became easy and fluid because NUFB succeeded in relativizing the difference and its sensitivity by shifting attention from God to the "answer key." This deviation surprisingly provokes a smile because the "answer key" reminds Indonesian people of their school days with the tests and the

⁴³ Nugarislucu, "#nugarislucu _ Instagram," *Nugarislucu*. accessed on June 2, 2023.

"answer keys" of the tests. Such interaction became an icebreaker and made room for brotherhood.

This is just one example of the many posts that showcase the witty interactions among the Funny Brigade communities. Sure, these witty reactions provoke laughter or at least a smile, but more importantly, these reactions convey mutual understanding and broaden each other's points of view. A similar example can be seen in posts about who is closest to God. The Hindu Funny Brigade uploaded an article on April 30, 2019, titled "The religion closest to God: 1. Christianity. It calls God 'Father', 2. Hinduism. It calls God 'Om. How about you? @NUgarislucu @MuhammadiyahGL." to which MFB (Muhammadiyah Funny Brigade) replied, "Islam is the closest because it calls God by his name. This post has been liked by 1571 accounts and commented on 83 times.⁴⁵

Figure 3. Calls by His Name.



⁴⁵ Muhammadiyahgl, "Ya Allah" . accessed on June 2, 2023.

These dialogues are captivating because sensitive jokes are taken lightly. Although the actual focus is not diverted, everyone has accepted the posts. The basis for this acceptance is the trust that has been built among the communities, which makes posting, commenting, and reposting uniquely interesting. Moreover, trust exists not only among the administrators, but also among the followers. This is shown by the number of comments (83) and likes (1571). This interaction is not only praised and laughed at, but also responded to by the account @mhd70821, who quoted Gus Dur and commented: "Muslims are people who are farthest from their God, so people just call with loudspeakers - Gusdur-".

Figure 4. The Farthest from God.



Playful interactions also occur when multiple groups are involved, as was the case in the post above about who is closest to God. Another example is a post about the sound of the call to prayer, which is also a sensitive topic. On September 8, 2019, CFB posted a Twitter text about the call to prayer at dawn: "@NUgarislucu was a bit

surprised to be woken up in the morning to be reminded to go to church... All right, I'm ready for the early morning mass..... It's nice to be near the mosque..." On September 13, 2019, MFB responded by saying "How do you know that the one who woke you up was @NUgarislucu, what was the morning call to prayer like?" MFB (in this case it is MuhammadiyahinGL) immediately responded by saying, "The call to prayer has a Javanese style." This response reminds people of the controversy over the Javanese style of reciting the Quran, as happened at the State Palace in 2015. In fact, this provoked a reaction from the NUFB, who responded by saying, "Ah, right. So what is the melody of the second verse?"⁴⁶



Another way to neutralize sensitive topics with humor is to offer a different or even unorthodox point of view. Posts about conversion from one religion to another are such examples. It is worth noting that regardless of the constitutional guarantee, religious conversion in

⁴⁶ Nugarislucu, "September 2019 _ Instagram," *Nugarislucu*. accessed on June 2, 2023.

Indonesia, especially from Islam to Christianity/Catholicism or vice versa, is a sensitive issue. One of the well known religious conversion events is that of Deddy Corbuzier, a celebrity who used to be a Catholic and then converted to Islam. In response to this event on June 21, 2019, CFB uploaded two posts. The first read, "Who said Deddy@corbuzier left the church? He actually realized he rarely went to church and decided to convert to @NUgarislucu so he could join *banser* (NU paramilitary) and officially become the caretaker of the church every week...".⁴⁷ This post was liked by 2621 followers and replied to 217 times.

Figure 6. Deddy Corbuzier 1.



Then the second one said: "Today we hand over @corbuzier to @NUgarislucu, please circumcise and be guided". The NUFB responded by saying, "Ready. We will continue to uphold the good teachings from you..."⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Katolik_Garis_Lucu, "Instagram Photo by Komunitas Katolik Garis Lucu • Jun 21, 2019 at 5_14 PM," *Katolik_Garis_Lucu*. accessed on June 3, 2023.

⁴⁸ Katolik_Garis_Lucu, "Sertijab _ Instagram," *Katolik_Garis_Lucu*.

This was "surprising" because CFB offered a new perspective on religious conversions to which NUFB also responded positively. This new perspective is achieved by "lowering the religious ego" by seeing religious conversions as something humane. In addition, CFB provoked humor by turning to a rather surprising topic, circumcision. As is well known, Corbuzier was a Chinese who had probably never been circumcised.

Figure 7. Deddy Corbuzier 2.



The posts and reposts have created a refreshing tone and mutual understanding. There is a familiarity where each community is friendly and accepts each other. Based on this event, a video clip circulating on Tiktok from the @Haffiyun_id account about a ustadz who discouraged Muslims from being friends with non-Muslims sparked a reaction.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Martina Rosa Dwi Lestari, "Beredar Video Ceramah Habib Jangan Berteman Dengan Non Muslim, Niluh Djelantik Ngamuk!" <https://netralnews.com/beredar-video-ceramah-habib-jangan-berteman-dengan-non-muslim-niluh-djlenatik-ngamuk/-ZUFMBu43TmJ6U1AybVAwdVNsMVI2Zz09>.

On August 14, 2022, CFB uploaded a video asking NUFB with the post “We are still friends, Gus?@NUgarislucu”.⁵⁰ NUFB quickly responded by saying, “As long as you still dispose of garbage in its place, regardless of your religion, we are still friends”.⁵¹ Turning the question of the nature of faith into what distinguishes it from "littering" created a hilarious surprise, because the issue of littering is a hot topic in Indonesia, and because many disagree with the uploading of the video.

Figure 8. Non-Muslim are Not Friends.



The Carnavalesque of Nahdlatul Ulama Funny Brigade’s Way

The above topics are some examples of NUFB contributions in interaction with other Funny Brigades. It is very difficult to translate humor because its language exists semantically and is tied to a narrow

⁵⁰ Katolik_Garis_Lucu, “Kita Masih Temenan Kan Gus _ @nugarislucu _ Instagram,” *Katolik_Garis_Lucu*. accessed on June 3, 2023.

⁵¹ Nugarislucu, “@katolik_garis_lucu _ Kita Masih Temenan Kan Gus,” *Nugarislucu*. accessed on June 3, 2023.

socio-cultural context, both in time and space.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the above contributions affirm a relaxed attitude in dealing with sensitive religious teachings, which is evident in three ways. First, there is a shift from focusing on differences in doctrine or religious practice to things that are more secondary but surprising in nature. These are then commented upon. Second, the content of the comments is often out of the box and invites a smile. Third, the informal language they use, including informal greetings, builds trust so that jokes can be accepted and responded to casually.

Figure 9. We are Still Friends.



Of course, humor plays an important role in building understanding and trust in this virtual encounter, but it is only one tool. Other factors that are no less important are 1) the content of the post itself (in the uploaded text), 2) the interactions that occur, and of

⁵⁴ Rizky Lutviana and Siti Mafulah, "Preserving Humorous Effects in a Target Language: Challenges in Translating Culturally Loaded Expressions," *Jurnal Pendidikan Humaniora* 5, no. 4 (2017): 159–164.

course 3) the context of the digital space that allows these interactions to occur in a new way.

A fundamental fact in this regard is the possibility of encounters in a virtual or digital world. Such encounters are not only related quantitatively to the number of people involved, but also qualitatively to the production of the text. The digital world has become a new kind of public⁵⁸ or transitional space⁵⁹ that provides space for expression and freedom so that participants can freely express their opinions. In Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque, participants can be themselves behind the mask, and the interaction that occurs is an interaction of equality that knows no hierarchy and in a sense mocks hierarchy.⁶⁰

This theory seems to be true in the interactions among the followers of NUFB and also among the followers of the Funny Brigade communities. The comments posted seemed spontaneous and genuine because they were behind their respective account names, which could not directly reveal the identity of the person who commented. They also express themselves freely, as there is no hierarchy in the interaction. The administrator is also a participant in the dialog, although he or she has the authority to remove redundant posts. Then, from the content, it is clear how they offer interpretations that are different from the official interpretations of the teachings of their religions, which they consider rigid. In this case, they are fighting against religious adherents who are too serious and textual.

Another important unifying factor is the humor in the posts and comments. Bakhtin reflects that humor is an important element in the carnivalesque.⁶⁵ In this carnivalesque context, he sees humor as liberating people, both liberating people from fear of hegemony or pressure from outside power, and humor as relativizing the difference

⁵⁸ Finn Bostad, "Dialogue in Electronic Public Space: The Semiotics of Time, Space and the Internet," in *Bakhtinian Perspectives on Language and Culture*, ed. Finn Bostad et al. (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 167–184.

⁵⁹ Mia Lövhelm, "Young People and the Use of the Internet as Transitional Space," *Online - Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 1, no. 1 (2005): 1–22.

⁶⁰ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984); Timothy William Fallis, "Pro-Christian Humor and the Online Carnival" (University of Pennsylvania, 2014).

⁶⁵ Taylor, "Bakhtin, Carnival and Comic Theory."

between those in power and those being controlled, even the difference between actors and audience.⁶⁶

If we look at the comments on a post from a certain Funny Brigade's Instagram account, we can see that equality and freedom are at stake. Although humor is seen as a tool, the administrators of the Funny Brigades Instagram account try to make their posts funny. This humor has become a kind of ideology that unites and invites trust, equality, and brotherhood. Humor makes people feel less hurt when their religious teachings or practices are alluded to. Moreover, humor offers novelty,⁶⁷ even a new image of God.⁶⁸

Another factor to consider is the content of the text behind the humor. Given that the name of the NUFB and the accounts of the Funny Brigades are closely associated with religious institutions, the content of the text in their posts directly or indirectly contains religious values. Because it takes place in a digital space that allows for interaction, their posts are necessarily associated with their religions. The textual interaction that occurs in this digital space is referred to as digital intertextuality, which is complex and leads to new meanings. Their writings, both in administrator posts and in comments, become "open" texts⁶⁹ that autonomously provide the possibility for broad semantic meanings to emerge in an interaction in the model of Bakhtinian dialogism. It is a continuous discourse on a text in order to acquire, or rather to give and offer each other, a certain kind of meaning.⁷⁰ This is evident in the mutual interactions between accounts and those involving followers with their comments, including interactions among followers in the sense of *dialogic heteroglossia*.⁷¹

Dialogue in digital intertextuality wrapped in humor offers a new perspective on how to deal with a problem, especially sensitive ones. With humor, there is a mutually enriching and refining process that is

⁶⁶ Fallis, "Pro-Christian Humor and the Online Carnival."

⁶⁷ Saroglou, "Religion and Sense of Humor: An a Priori Incompatibility? Theoretical Considerations from a Psychological Perspective."

⁶⁸ Houck, "Holiness and Humour."

⁶⁹ Chinthu Viswanath, "Digital Carnivals: Performance as Identity and as Performance," *Boslit Journal of Language and Literature* 01, no. 01 (2021): 44–51.

⁷⁰ Andrew Robinson, "In Theory Bakhtin: Dialogism, Polyphony and Heteroglossia | Ceasefire Magazine," *Ceasefire*, 2011.

⁷¹ Gustavo Said and Michael Stricklin, "Dialogism: A Philosophical Contribution to Understanding Concourse and Consciring," *Operang Subjectivity: The International Journal of Q Methodology* 37, no. 3 (2014): 21–37.

not painful and does not become counterproductive. This new, out-of-the-box point of view is basically, to use Derrida's term, a deconstruction of the old or standard point of view.⁷² In the dialogical perspective mentioned above, deconstruction takes place in a continuous process. What is deconstructed is the generally accepted point of view and the perspective of each individual.

In this regard, the NUFB Instagram posts can be viewed as texts of populist theology, characterized by dialogic communication among the faithful, rather than monologic communication from the religious authority.⁷³ This perspective also implies an indirect dimension of theological deconstruction within the posts, due to both their content and the use of humor, which opens up a new realm of theology within religion. In a novel approach, humor can be interpreted as a "signal of transcendence" according to Berger. Donnelly argues that humor in theology plays three crucial roles: creating balance, providing perspective, and stimulating creativity.⁷⁴

Based on the aforementioned review, it appears that there is a strong correlation between digital text, humor, and theological deconstruction occurring amongst the followers of NUFB, although not in a formal capacity.⁷⁵ Humor plays a vital role within this context, although its relevance in the sphere of religious life and theology has only recently been acknowledged. Historically, in many regions humor was considered taboo,⁷⁶ but it was not applicable in Indonesia.

Conclusion

Based on the aforementioned perspectives, it is apparent that the NUFB and its affiliated groups operate as a digital carnival. The forum promotes equality and camaraderie among participants, providing the opportunity to learn and enlighten one another. While humor is a

⁷² Ceren Yegen and Memet Abukan, "Derrida and Language: Deconstruction," *International Journal of Linguistics* 6, no. 2 (2014): 37.

⁷³ Beatriz Gutiérrez Mueller, "Religious Word as a Variant of 'Authoritative Word' in Bakhtin," *Bakhtiniana* 12, no. 1 (2017): 91–112.

⁷⁴ Paul Woods, *Bringing Bakhtin into Theological Reflection Paul Woods* (Temple Tracts, 2020).

⁷⁵ Lucy Spoliar, "Learning from Laughter: Implicit Religion, Satire, and Power in Two British TV Situation Comedies," *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 43, no. 1 (2022): 68–79.

⁷⁶ Vassilis Saroglou, "Being Religious Implies Being Different in Humour: Evidence from Self- and Peer-Ratings," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 7, no. 3 (2004): 255–267.

significant component, it serves as a tool rather than a sole objective. As such, the humorous materials shared in this digital space occasionally touch on theological concepts, specifically relating to religious perspectives. Bakhtinian dialogue takes place, allowing for the deconstruction of certain religious perspectives. The texts presented in NUFB digital space promote values of tolerance, equality, brotherhood, humility, and optimism. These values are significantly distinct from the politically developing values in Indonesia, which include intolerance, difference, conflict, arrogance, and pessimism. In this context, the conclusion is that NUFB, along with other virtual communities within Funny Brigades, have effectively presented a joyful depiction of God in Indonesia through their humorous language within their digital interactions. Within the Indonesian digital space, individuals are encouraged to believe in “the One and Smiling God” in addition to “the One and Only God”. For Indonesia's future, it is essential to consistently provide this type of religiosity through an expansive digital space that incorporates humor. This combination adds a fresh perspective to religious practices. The digital realm offers ample opportunity for this endeavor. []

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