



## BACK TO GUS DUR IN THE AGE OF INTOLERANCE: AN ANALYSIS OF ARGUMENTS IN *RIGHT ISLAM VS. WRONG ISLAM*

Harits Masduqi

Universitas Negeri Malang  
harits.masduqi.fs@um.ac.id

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**Abstract:** Current issues on politics have become so influential in Indonesia that people are divided and become more intolerant of each other. In the age of intolerance it is quite right to rediscover ideas and analyse arguments of the late Gus Dur or K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid which cement his legacy as an international Islamic figure and a champion of humanity. This paper discusses current theories on arguments and presents practical applications of argumentative devices which are used to analyse Gus Dur's arguments in his article, *Right Islam vs. Wrong Islam* which is published in The Wall Street Journal.

**Keywords:** age of intolerance, argument, argumentative devices, Gus Dur

### INTRODUCTION

Current issues on politics have become so influential in Indonesia that academics often wonder whether other studies are not ineffective in daily life. No knowledge of English linguistics, for example, will significantly help Indonesian people in solving various societal problems due to the 2019 general election in which people are divided and become more intolerant of each other. No theories of English literature will directly lighten the suffering of people who lost their families and treasures at the latest natural disasters in several Indonesian islands. It is, however, quite right that English lecturers and students should ask themselves one of the most basic phenomena of language use in public life, that is, what is argument?

The simplest definition of argument is something which is named or talked about (Richards and Schmidt, 2002). Wahab (2003) states that argument is a mode of persuasion by which someone persuades others to follow his or her own idea or thought. Viewing arguments this way, people may see that arguments are common features of daily life, for people are often involved in persuading others for things they believe or in giving reasons they want others to follow. In many cases, arguments also involve measuring and evaluating reasons. To vote a public figure in general election or whether to support or oppose pornography rules involve measuring and evaluating reasons. Logic plays an important role in these issues because it is the universal science of argument which differentiates good arguments from bad arguments. The fact that argumentative statements can be extended and analysed almost indefinitely is covered inclusively in a research discipline called argumentation analysis.

For decades, linguists have proposed various models of argumentation analysis. A significant development was the publication by the English philosopher, Stephen Toulmin (1958 cited in Renkema, 2004) of a model which could be used for the analysis of argumentation in everyday language. In Toulmin's approach, the main issue is not the logical form of an argument but the question of how an argument is structured. Another model was developed by Petty and Caciopo (1986 cited in Renkema, 2004). This model, the *Elaboration Likelihood Model*, was widely used in research for persuasion by communication. This study provides a general theory on attitude change which contains the following basic idea: The variation in persuasive power is influenced by the likelihood that receivers will be preoccupied with the elaboration of the information resented. In this case, elaboration means the thought given to the topic.

Fogelin and Sinnott-Armstrong (2014) recently proposed a model of argumentation analysis called *Argumentative Devices*. Argumentative devices are words, phrases or sentences that can be utilized to convey arguments or to give reasons for or against some claims given by other people. The argumentative devices can be used to analyse people's arguments by classifying their utterances or statements that were inclusive of the eight types of argumentative devices.



## ARGUMENTATIVE DEVICES

Fogelin and Sinnott-Armstrong (2014) state that analysing arguments in oral utterances or written texts is effectively done by analysing argumentative devices used by the speaker or the writer. The devices are divided into eight categories, i.e., *warranting connectives*, *assuring*, *guarding*, *discounting*, *argumentative performative*, *evaluative expressive*, *slanting*, and *rhetorical devices*.

### Warranting Connectives

Here is a partial list of connective terms that introduce an argumentative structure into language by marking out reasons for a conclusion, such as *accordingly*, *thus*, *since*, *for*, *hence*, *then*, *because*, *so*, and *therefore*. These are called these terms *warranting connectives*, because, in various ways, they each present one or more statements as the *warranting* or *backing* for some other statement. Here is an example: *Since all men are mortal, Socrates is mortal, for Socrates is a man.*

### Assuring

When will other people want to give assurance about some statements they have made? People offer *assuring* when they think that someone might challenge what they say. They sometimes cite authorities: *Recent studies have shown...* and *It has been established that...* Here they do not actually cite reasons; they indicated that reasons can be produced on demand. In a context of trust, this is often sufficient.

### Guarding

*Guarding* represents a different strategy for protection premises from attack. Other people reduce our claim to something less strong. Thus, instead of saying *all*, people say *most*. Instead of saying something straight out, they use qualifying phrases like *'it is very likely that'*, *'it is arguable that...'* and so on. This is wonderfully noncommittal, for it really doesn't indicate how strong the argument is, yet it does get the statement into the argument.

### Discounting

The general pattern of *discounting* is to a possible criticism in order to reject it or counter it. A partial list of terms that function as discounting connection includes *although*, *however*, *but*, *nevertheless*, *nonetheless*, *yet*, *still*, and *though*. People sometimes use discounting to block certain conversational implications of what they have said, for example: *The situation is difficult, but not hopeless. A truce has been declared, but who knows for how long?*

### Argumentative Performatives

*Argumentative performatives* are used to make moves in arguments. These performatives are obviously concerned with arguments. They are not statements about arguments, since they are not even statements. If I say *"I doubt that"* I do not thereby doubt it. Whether I doubt something or not is a fact about me. Here the utterance is performative. Usually *"I agree to..."* is performative, whereas *"I agree that..."* is not. In a court of law, however, saying *"I agree that..."* is often performative. It is one way of stipulating facts that will not be contested.

### Evaluative Expressive

Although some words in our language are relatively neutral, others carry strong positive or negative connotations. That is, in using many words people are not only describing something, but also *evaluating* it or *expressing some attitudes toward* it. Generally speaking, *evaluative* terms, as they are called, apply to lines of conduct. They interconnect to form a rich system of terms that allows us to indicate whether (and to what degree) actions are justified or unjustified. For example, those who hold that South Africa's system of apartheid is morally wrong, hold that there is moral justification for its abolition.

### Rhetorical Devices

People often use *rhetorical devices* in conversations. For instance, the question "Do you want me call the police?" has the expected answer *no* and because this question conversationally implies the threat, "If you don't get out of here, I'll call the police." Sometimes people do not intend their words to be taken literally or expect

their listeners to interpret meaning just the *opposite* of what they say. This occurs, for example, with *irony* and *sarcasm*. Saying the words “Nice work” function as a way of saying, “You’ve really ruined it this time.”

### Slanting

*Slanting* involves the important use of evaluation and expressive language to place something in a good or bad light without adequate justification. Ethnic and racial slurs are obviously examples of slanted language. To say that someone is a Muslim is to comment on his/her ethnic origin. In this area, connotations are actually so prevalent that people have to look to scientific language to find more or less neutral language. For example, “white” is a positive term, whereas “whitey” is negative. “Caucasian” is more or less scientific and neutral. Here people must use the guarding expression “more or less” because all the language in this area is highly charged. These tensions in the language reflect deeper tensions in our society.

### METHODS

The study relied on the process of collecting argumentative statements in *Right Islam vs. Wrong Islam* which was written by the late Gus Dur or K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid. The article was subjectively chosen for three reasons. First, the article is internationally and nationally well-known. It was published in the Wall Street Journal on December 30, 2005 and currently republished by the Hudson Institute at <https://www.hudson.org/research/9835-right-islam-vs-wrong-islam>. Secondly, the writer of the popular article, Gus Dur is famous for his controversial arguments and movements. During his multifaceted life as a former president of Indonesia, an international Islamic scholar, and a top political leader, what he said and acted were often treated as a hot discussion topic which invited not only public figures but also ordinary people to comment and interpret it. Lastly, current political situations in Indonesia have created an age of intolerance in which people are divided and become more intolerant of each other. The nation is almost on the brink of disintegration due to different presidential votes, interpretation of religion, and hoaxes among Indonesian people. In the age of intolerance, therefore, it is quite right to rediscover ideas and analyse arguments of the late Gus Dur which cement his legacy as an international religious scholar, a defender of pluralism, and a champion of humanity who was keen on supporting communication and cooperation between the mainstream and the marginalized societies.

The data collected was then analysed into two stages. First, the writer did a close reading/analysis by underlining and labelling words, phrases and sentences that were inclusive of the eight types of *Argumentative Devices*. The devices were labelled: *evaluative expressive (E)*, *rhetorical device (R)*, *assuring (A)*, *discounting (D)*, *warranting connective (W)*, *guarding (G)*, *slanting (S)*, and *argumentative performative (AP)*. The writer discussed how arguments were conveyed through those argumentative devices. Second, the data was then computed to find out the frequency of occurrence of each argumentative device in order to identify the tendency of arguments used by Gus Dur in his article, *Right Islam vs. Wrong Islam*.

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In *Right Islam vs. Wrong Islam* Wahid uses argumentative devices to convey his arguments as follows:

#### Paragraph 1:

“News organizations report that <sup>A</sup> Osama bin Laden has obtained a religious edict from a misguided Saudi cleric, justifying the use of nuclear weapons against America and the infliction of mass casualties. It requires great emotional strength to confront the potential ramifications of this fact. Yet <sup>D</sup> can anyone doubt that <sup>A</sup> those who joyfully incinerate <sup>E</sup> the occupants of office buildings, commuter trains, hotels and nightclubs would leap at the chance to magnify their damage a thousand fold?”

By stating, “News organizations report that”, Wahid tried to assure readers that the wrongfully justification of the use of nuclear weapons had been well-known in public. As usual, he did not mention clearly the name of his source as if the news had been valid. This kind of argumentation is a tactical strategy of *assuring* in which Wahid conveyed his argument by citing an authority (news organizations). Then, Wahid polished up his

argument by rejecting the later statement about “the potential ramifications of this fact” with the following statement “Yet can anyone doubt that”.

In the case of *discounting*, the word “yet” is not only used to rebuff the previous statement, but also to support an opening question which contains one *assuring* remark and one *evaluative expressive*. At first, by saying “can anyone doubt that”, Wahid actually wanted to direct and ask readers to agree to his argument. By using a melancholy phrase of *evaluative expressive*, “joyfully incinerate”, Wahid dramatically portrayed that any form of terrorist’s attack in reality was always cruel and dangerous.

#### Paragraph 2 and 3:

“...modern civilization is built on economic and technological foundations that terrorists hope to collapse with nuclear attacks like so many fishing huts in the wake of a tsunami<sup>R</sup>...

Just two small, well-placed bombs devastated Bali’s tourist economy in 2002 and sent much of its population back to the rice fields and out to sea, to fill their empty bellies<sup>R</sup>...”

The two underlined phrases above are clear examples of *rhetorical device* in the form of *personification* and *irony*. At the first point, Wahid mentioned “like so many fishing huts in the wake of a tsunami” to personify a terrible, distressing effect of terrorist’ nuclear attacks to recent developments in the world. Furthermore, the phrase “to fill their empty bellies” was used to show Wahid’s ironical view toward Balinese people’s condition after the Bali Blast. The Balinese used to be prosperous for tourism industries before the 2002 terrorism attack, but now most of them have to return to do his ancestors’ jobs, farming and fishing, to survive in their hard life.

#### Paragraph 5:

“An extreme and perverse<sup>E</sup> ideology in the minds of fanatics<sup>E</sup> is what directly threatens us (specifically, Wahhabi/Salafi ideology – a minority fundamentalist religious cult fueled by petrodollars<sup>R</sup>). Yet<sup>D</sup> underlying, enabling and exacerbating this threat of religious extremism<sup>E</sup> is a global crisis of misunderstanding.”

Here, Wahid presented his value judgments toward the minority of Muslims who conducted terrorism in the earth. The *evaluative expressive* phrase “extreme and perverse” seems to emphasize how dangerous the fundamentalists’ ideology is. Then, perhaps instead of saying a more appropriate word, *followers*, Wahid chose the word “fanatics” to refer to people who are sympathized with the ideology. This statement becomes more argumentative when Wahid rhetorically claimed that the financial source of the violent movement came from rich oil businessmen of Middle East (“fueled by petrodollars”). The same *rhetorical device* also appears in different words in paragraph 13 (“a well-oiled “machine” established to translate ... Wahhabi/Salafi propaganda”) and in paragraph 16 (“the flow of petrodollars used to finance that extremism, from Leeds to Jakarta”)

At last, having utilized the *discounting* term “yet”, Wahid again showed his emotional perspective that the fundamentalists’ ideology was the same with “religious extremism”. The *evaluative expressive* phrase referring to the fundamentalism above emerges in most paragraphs of the article, such as “extremist views” (par. 6 & 8), “dangerous ideology” (par. 7), “Islamist extremism” (par. 8), “virulent ideology” (par. 9), “extremist ideology” (par. 10 & 19), “narrow ideological grasp” (par. 11), “radical views” (par. 12), “religious extremism” (par. 13, 15, & 17), “extremist ideas” (par. 18), and “fanatical ideology” (par. 19). In this case, although Wahid’s value judgment is presented in different words, but obviously they have the same meaning and reference.

#### Paragraph 6:

“...The essence of Islam is encapsulated in the words of the Quran, “For you, your religion; for me, my religion”<sup>A</sup>. That is the essence of tolerance. Religious fanatics<sup>E</sup> – either purposely or out of ignorance<sup>E</sup> – pervert Islam into a dogma of intolerance, hatred and bloodshed<sup>S</sup>. They justify their brutality<sup>E</sup> with slogans such as “Islam is above everything else...”

In the paragraph above, Wahid quoted a verse in the Holy Qur’an as *assuring* device. This popular verse was mentioned as a basis to clarify that tolerance was included the real teaching of Islam. This statement is

necessary to counter and prevent Western people's stereotyping that often discredits Islam in general. No wonder Wahid emphasized it again in paragraphs 15 and 16 ("a peaceful and tolerant Islam"). In addition, the statements "Religious fanatics" and "either purposely or out of ignorance" are inclusive of negative *evaluative expressive* which actually refer to followers of the Islamic fundamentalism.

Regarding the sub-clause "pervert Islam into a dogma of intolerance, hatred and bloodshed" followed with the word "brutality", Wahid personally judged the teaching of the fundamentalist' ideology is very bad. Certainly, it is contradictive with the faith of the fundamentalist' followers who believe their religious rites, including the one so-called *jihad*, are virtuous and worth sacrificing. Such a personal view that may invite contradictions or debates is a common application of *slanting*.

#### Paragraph 9 and 10:

"...Islamic fundamentalism has become a well-financed, multifaceted global movement that operates like a juggernaut<sup>R</sup> in much of the developing world, and even among immigrant Muslim communities in the West...

The Sunni (as opposed to Shiite) fundamentalists' goals generally include: ... establishing a utopian society<sup>E</sup> based on these Salafi principles, ... transforming Islam from a personal faith into an authoritarian<sup>E</sup> political system; ...

The expression, "like a juggernaut" is another example of *personification*. At this point, Wahid figured out the speed of Islamic fundamentalism movement is almost unstoppable. The word "juggernaut" itself literally means a very large articulated lorry, whereas figuratively means a large, powerful and destructive force or institution. In the case of Indonesia as a developing world, Wahid's opinion seems to be true. Nobody will deny that such a fundamental movement has grown very significantly in Indonesia since 1980's with the appearance of KISDI, FPI, MMI, and so forth.

In the next paragraph, having undoubtedly mentioned The Sunni as the fundamentalist, Wahid justified its objectives by using two negative *evaluative expressive* phrases. Stating "a utopian society" is like judging that the goal is far from reality since the establishment of a society in which everything is perfect is impossible to achieve. Subsequently, the phrase "an authoritarian political system" is also another form of negative value judgment. Here, Wahid claimed that the fundamentalist' political system is undemocratic in nature. This one-sided statement probably comes from his personal concern on some offensive, destructive cases done by the fundamentalist' movements (i.e., FPI) in Indonesia.

#### Paragraph 11 and 12:

"Fundamentalist strategy is often simple as well as brilliant.<sup>E</sup> Extremists<sup>E</sup> are quick to drape themselves in the mantle of Islam<sup>R</sup> and declare their opponents kafir, or infidels,<sup>E</sup> and thus<sup>W</sup> smooth the way for slaughtering<sup>E</sup> non-fundamentalist Muslims. Their theology rests upon a simplistic, literal and highly selective<sup>E</sup> reading of the Quran and Sunnah ... to entrap<sup>E</sup> the world-wide Muslim community...

The armed *ghazis* (Islamic warriors) raiding from New York to Jakarta, Istanbul, Baghdad, London and Madrid are only the tip of the iceberg<sup>R</sup>, forerunners of a vast and growing population ..."

Different from the previous paragraphs, at this time Wahid showed his admiration to the fundamentalists' strategy and theology by revealing positive expressions "simple as well as brilliant" and "simplistic, literal and highly selective". This is a tactical device to balance his argumentation with regard to two different sides of opinion. However, labeling "Extremists" and "kafir, or infidels" supported with a gerund "slaughtering" and an infinitive "to entrap" is, indeed, a negative use of *evaluative expressive*.

In addition to the explanation above, Wahid utilized the word, "thus" as a *warranting connective* to mark a conclusion for the previous remark "to drape themselves in the mantle of Islam". The later remark is inclusive of *rhetorical device* because it is a *metaphor* to illustrate how invisible the fundamentalism enters the world of

Islam. Similarly, the metaphorical expression of “the tip of the iceberg” is used to figure out how large and extensive combat followers of the fundamentalism are.

#### Paragraph 16, 17, and 19:

“...traditional and Sufi leadership and masses, who are not yet radicalized<sup>E</sup> (strong numeric advantage: 85% to 90% of the world's 1.3 billion Muslims)<sup>A</sup> ...

Though potentially decisive, most<sup>G</sup> of these advantages remain latent or diffuse, and require mobilization to be effective in confronting fundamentalist ideology...

Muslims themselves can and must propagate an understanding of the “right”<sup>R</sup> Islam, and thereby<sup>W</sup> discredit extremist ideology ... and offer a compelling<sup>E</sup> alternate vision of Islam, one that banishes the fanatical ideology of hatred to the darkness<sup>E</sup> from which it emerged.”

The word “radicalized” is an *evaluative expressive* term that can be changed with a more appropriate word, *influenced*. Wahid’s real argument, however, lies on the following data, “strong numeric advantage: 85% to 90% of the world's 1.3 billion Muslims”. This is an example of *assuring* by citing a statistical source that Wahid believes to be accurate. Such an argumentation is usual and widely used by experts in most articles, especially those which are related to quantitative data. Meanwhile, the following paragraph contains a *guarding* term “most”. It is a different strategy for protecting premises from other people’s opposite ideas. In this case, Wahid reduced his claim to something less strong. Thus, instead of saying *all of these advantages*, Wahid said “most of these advantages”.

In the last paragraph, putting the word “right” in quotation marks is a common device for conveying a rhetorical idea. The rightness of Islam at this point is, of course, based on Wahid’s own interpretation that may never be shared with the fundamentalists. At the same time, the word “right” also clarifies that there is a wrongful ideology in Islam (Islamic extremism) that should not be held. Following the use of “thereby” as a concluding remark, Wahid used another *evaluative expressive* device “compelling” to show that there is a better insight of Islam replacing “the fanatical ideology of hatred to the darkness” (the wrongful Islamic fundamentalism).

In summary, it can be said that Abdurrahman Wahid or Gus Dur used all eight *argumentative devices* variously to convey his arguments. Here, *evaluative expressive* expressions are the most frequent *argumentative device* (16 times) used by Wahid. This is because Wahid tended to show his value judgments bluntly, either positive or negative, to comment or react to current issues being discussed. Such an emotional tendency potentially comes from Wahid’s own point of view that is based on things which are ideal for him, not on objective analyses made by other people (Barton, 2002).

#### CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid or Gus Dur is an international public figure who has deep knowledge and wide perspectives on current national and international issues. In this study, it is proven that Gus Dur is able to clarify and give sound arguments regarding Islam and its relation to terrorism, culture, politics, technology, and democracy. Due to its limitations, the study is open for development for further studies. The area by which the findings of the present study can be enriched or modified is by analysing Gus Dur’s articles that are issued in newspapers or magazines and his commentaries on television. By analysing the two kinds of data, written and oral statements, the question on how Abdurrahman Wahid conveys his arguments on religion, politics, human rights, and other important topics can be observed more clearly and objectively. Thus, research in this area is not only useful for teachers and students of English Department, but also for Indonesian people in general.

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