MANAGING DIVERSITY AS A FOUNDATION OF RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE: A STUDY IN SIDOASRI VILLAGE, THE REGENCY OF MALANG

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ABSTRACT

Amongst other things, Indonesian history was rife with religious conflicts. Religious differences had thus far been factored in the causes of intolerance amongst believers of different religions. This study examined how religious tolerance that was established in Sidoasri village where Christians and Muslims were living together. This research used a qualitative descriptive method, where it would describe and explain data from the subject research on the form of religious tolerance in Sidoasri village. The results of this research show that religious tolerance is always built through the long process by way of mediating various past conflicts. Religious dogma has never been a cause of intolerance. Social, cultural, political, and economic factors are decisive in founding religious tolerance.

Keywords: diversity, managing diversity, religions tolerance

INTRODUCTION

One of the major problems that Indonesia faces as a nation is the looming threat of disintegration, of which religious conflicts are counted among its triggers. Remarkably, to this day religion is supposed to provide moral guidance and values. According to Suryana (2011), for their believers, religions color life have to harmonize the world because they compel the believers to perform acts of kindness for the sake of a blissful afterlife. The belief in a religious dogma impels believers to enact it in their daily thoughts, action, observance, and behavior. Despite one's initial belief in religion as a subjective reality, it subsequently turns into an objective one. This objectivity is manifest in how a shared belief in a religious dogma form a specific interaction pattern among the believers and other religions' believers. Each religion, whether it is Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, or others, essentially never teaches its believers to harm other religions'. Peaceful religions have at times been legitimized to disconcert, antagonize, and annihilate other religions' believers, nevertheless. In Indonesia, religious conflicts, such as those that took place in Ambon and Poso, were one of authentic evidence that religious dogma might be abused by its believers as their justification tool to antagonize and exterminate in the name of said religion. This truth is diametrically in contrast with the dogma's essence, which is replete with compassion and peace. Such religious conflicts in Ambon and Poso, between Muslims and Christians, can possibly occur among other religions' believers; Muslims and Buddhists, Christians and Hinduism, or Christians and Buddhists. This is understandable on account of plurality in Indonesian society. Ethnic and racial differences are potential factors in the worsening of religious conflict. Such direpossibility cannot be overcome unless tolerance is established among believers of different religions.

Conflicts have long been encompassed as parts of our communal issues (Fauzi *et al.*, 2009). Religion is either a sole factor of such conflicts or one of the multiple factors. Numerous tribes,

religions, and ethnics in Indonesia are highly potential causes of conflict. In Indonesia, tolerance, concord, and *tepo seliro* (from Javanese, meaning ability to understand one another) are amongst the values that are considered able to bridge differences. This is perceived and legitimized through our ideological foundation: *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (from Sanskrit, meaning *unity in diversity*). Socially diverse areas are assumed to be more potentially afflicted by conflicts, rather than socially homogenous ones.

Sidoasri village is located in the regency of Malang, and it is one of the Sidoasri village is located in the regency of Malang, and it is one of the aforementioned socially heterogeneous areas, specifically pertaining to religion. Two religions prosper in the village, Islam and Christianity. Living side by side, their concord is evident in several, for instances the visits to their neighbors' houses during celebrated religious holidays, with duly respect to one another's religion. In the village, religious missions are contained in routinely held religious activities according to their respective teachings (Yunita, 2012).

Concerning religion, Muslims predominate Indonesian population, especially in Java. The opposite happens in the eastern region of the country. In this manner, Islam is ascertained as the major religion in Indonesia. It is thought-provoking that Sidoasri villagers are different from other areas in Java, concerning the religious belief that they are largely Christians. Based on the latest collected data in 2014, the number of population is 5230 people, comprising 2691 males and 2549 females. Based on religion, there are 4651 Christians, 572 Muslims, and 7 hinduists. In percentage, there are 88,93% Christians, 10,94% Muslims, and 0,13% hinduists.

Islam holds a status as the major religion in Indonesia, and yet the village has seen the opposite take place. The relation of majority-minority determines religious concord. Believers of a major religion have to endeavor with some adjustments in interacting with their minority counterparts, and vice versa. Such adjustments are inevitable when one wishes to avert conflicts, especially the religious ones since religion itself is a sensitive issue. From this study is expected to get an overview of practices tolerance and limit of practices tolerance itself from religion. The picture is used as input for the or stakeholders related how to build practices tolerance better.

METHODS

This article is based on a qualitative social research, in order to understand and explain a numerically intangible phenomenon. The advantage of this type of method is its ability to provide an in-depth explanation of a phenomenon. In this case, the approach is descriptive qualitative, to portray and explain the data on religious tolerance in Sidoasri village.

Explanation and interpretations of a social phenomenon are provided by way of a descriptive research. The subsequent steps of this descriptive research explore the development of forms and types of tolerance amongst Muslims and Christians in Sidoasri. The boundaries of tolerance are observed based on each religion's teachings. From that point onwards, foundations of the religious tolerance in Sidoasri are told. It is to be expected that this research could provide a practical input for both the society and stakeholders in developing better practices of tolerance.

The kind of data that used in this research is primary and secondary data. The primary data is obtained to technique data collection of in-depth interviews with informants and observation in the Sidoasri village. A kind of the interviews conducted in this research is the interview that is not structured where researchers more free having knowledge, in studying the situation, and aware of information that required without procedure questions being neat and tight. An interview guide fixed

is prepared in early research as a guide what be missed in the field, but the guide is not rigid in nature, and it would get done within square and flexible in its implementation. Secondary data is obtained from the researchers, a historical report that is arranged in archive documentary data relating to the study, reference/books, or journal that pertaining to the matter the study, and internet with the data pertaining to the matter research. The secondary data is the supporting data research that strengthens the primary data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Each religion, whether it is a samawi (from Arabic, meaning sky) or an *ardi* (from Arabic, meaning "earth"), is built upon its specific teaching. Religious faith is built based on the concepts of life direction alongside its believer within almost every aspect of life. Theologically, "sky" religions intersect in how the teachings are brought to earth.

In the tradition of samawi religions, Judaism is believed as the first samawi religion to descend from the sky to earth. This was later followed by Christianity and Islam respectively. Practices within a diverse society which are based on inclusive belief in each religion are the potential causes of religious conflicts especially in traditionally similar religions in the matter of God-worship (Tantowi, 2013). Christianity and Islam become actual examples how religious practices instigate conflict in the Cross War.

Thus, whenever a religious conflict occurs, religion is not the lone cause of such conflict. This is the root of geographical variations in conflicts (Fauzi *et al.*, 2009). Historically, Islam and Christianity come to Indonesia through two dissimilar manners. Islam was brought along the trade routes of India, Persian, and Gujarat merchants. In Java, Islam entered from its shores. Consequently, at the outset, Islam was embraced as a religion in the northern shores before everywhere else on the island. Islam had a strong affinity with Hinduists Javanese kingdoms, since when the rulers in such kingdoms gradually embraced Islam, their subjects followed their lead. This acceptance of Islam occurred without obliteration of numerous long-held sacred ritual elements or tradition, and as a result, the religion as it is known in Java is thick with specific rituals, setting it apart from its the Middle East original (Ricklefs, 2013).

There are those among historians who believed that Islam or Christianity came to *Nusantara* far before the 13th or 18th century. Damayanto (2005) has argued that a Christian community was founded in the 7th century; the community being Nestorian Christians in the shores of Northern Sumatra. Conversely, there is no further historical evidence on the community survives that making the tracing of Christianity's development from the community out of the question. Islam came to Indonesia as late as the 11th century by trade routes, placing the control of trade from *Nusantara* to Malacca in the Muslim merchants' hands, until the Portuguese defeated them and claimed Malacca for their own (Aritonang, 2004). The encounter between Islam and Christianity were first occurred in *Nusantara* during the 16th century; the time when the Portuguese, the Spanish, and the Dutch interacted with Muslims. The latter were called "The Moor" by the former; a moniker commonly attached to black Muslims.

While Islam was brought by merchants, Christianity was brought by European missionaries (18th century) to Java. Colonialization in Java and several other areas in Indonesia affected the spread of Christianity. As it was introduced by European missionaries, Christianity was stereotyped as a colonialist's religion, unlike Islam was impeded from expanding. As an attempt to localize the gospel, the Bible was translated into Javanese. A European named Coolen founded the GKJW (In Javanese this stands for Greja Kristen Jawi Wetan, meaning "East Java Christian Church") (Lombart, 2005).

Many Christian communities estranged Coolen for committing bigamy and rejected Coolen's sacrament bestowing and barred him from accepting it. Outside of these polemics, it is interesting that Christianity adapted with the local culture.

The term of "Javanese Christian" does not merely refer to their geographical existence, but also refers to how Javanese local culture affects interpretation on the gospel, which came from a foreign (European) culture. The same applies to Javanese Islam. Malleable Javanese culture enables Christianity and Islam to adapt to it. These adaptations further shape the dynamics in religious practices of the two respective religions and distinguish them from their original equivalents.

Sidoasri village had established the vision and mission of their development according to its status as a new administrative local government designs it to complement its social, cultural, economy, and political conditions. Its vision is to be "a harmonious and prosperous Sidoasri Village as a front leader in agriculture and fisheries." Among 11 of its mission, the 2nd especially states that it aspires to "To realize and encourage efforts of harmony among believers of the same and different religions, despite differences in religion, belief, organization, and other causes, in the spirit of appreciation and respect." This directly indicates that plurality of religious practices is acknowledged by the villagers. The differences are not made into conflicts because the villagers do not wish to frustrate development in the seven-year-old village. Instead, they turn the differences into foundations of development by acknowledging them and encouraging appreciation and respect for one another.

Before coming to the point in this article of how religious tolerance turns into practice and necessity in attitude and thoughts within social reality of the Sidoasri villagers' daily lives, their religious practices will be highlighted first. According to informants, the view of believers on their own religion, on its belief system, and its truth is what forms their belief. This belief compels them to apply the aforementioned truth in their daily lives and understand the consequences of their failure in doing so. Exploring the belief system is important because a believer unswervingly believes in the absolute truth of their religion. All informants in this research unanimously state that they believed in the dogma of truth in their religions.

The belief in the truth of religion is not automatically followed by adherence to religious rituals. Christian and Muslim informants claim that in the matter of adherence to such rituals, there is no significant difference among them. Personal factor, i.e. laziness, is the main cause of their failure to fully abide by the rituals. The laziness is connected with "compulsory" or "noncompulsory" categories of such rituals. Both in Islam and in Christianity, some rituals are compulsory, e.g. going to church on Sundays for Christians (because in the Bible, Sunday is a special day to pray), or praying five times a day for Muslims. Compulsory rituals are to be adhered fully, while noncompulsory ones are not, because the believers considered these additional. As long as the compulsory rituals adhere, a believer has fulfilled their main obligation. Due to the lack of pressure to adhere to them, noncompulsory rituals are often abandoned. This happens despite the encouragement from religious preachers in the village.

When the believers do not fully adhere to their religion, they are beset by guilt. Sin is the main controlling factor stressed by religion elite, so as to make sure that their congregations always abide by religious teachings. The guilt is felt by Suarnoadi (a Christian, interviewed on July 19 from 15:00-17:00), and Dini (interviewed on July 20, 2014, 09:15-11:30). In different expressions, they both stated that they felt remorseful and guilty, which were signs of their belief in their religion because they had declared their belief from a long time ago. The fear of sinning and the feeling of remorse arose from the knowledge that good believers are supposed to abide by all God's orders instead of following their own selfish whims—according to what was preached in churches, mosques, or elsewhere in any religious activities.

Sin is a religious concept to control a believer in observing all of their religion's teachings. Both Islam and Christianity recognize the concept. Sin is to commit any action against God's will. The concept is connected with the concepts of heaven and hell, where they serve as reward and punishment for good and bad deeds, obeying or disobeying God's orders on humans in their believer capacities. The measure of belief is shown in whether a person feels that he/she have sinned, or whether they feel discomfort in not observing the religious teachings. Neither the discomfort nor the fear of having sinned is followed by the changes in both quality and quantity of adherence to one's religion in all instances, but the presence of the two signifies that each believer strongly believes in their religion.

All of the informants agree that truth existed in their respective religions. The implication of such notion is that no truth exists outside them. The view that other religions' teachings are mistaken, it is not directly asserted to other religious groups. This is mainly done by the Muslim minorities because assertions that the Christians are wrong would threaten their existence. Adherence to a religion's teachings is deemed important by the informants, however, that there is an interesting statement from the informants when they are asked what they would do if members of other religious groups do not adhere to that religion's teachings.

The informants unanimously agree that they have to remind the non-observant other believers to observe that other religion. However, the reminder has to be polite and kind, perhaps in jokes. This is especially true among kinsmen and women. When the informants are not kin with the non-observant other believers, they chose to remain silent due to *sungkan* (From Javanese, meaning reluctance to disturb) and let God as the highest power passes His judgment on other people. Apparently, social control for observance is only applicable to kinfolks. For outsiders, the control is weaker because belief is considered a personal matter beyond judgment from strangers.

Identification of main difference in religious dogma influences the religious attitude of Muslims to Christians and vice versa. Each believer maintained not to insult other believers. As they embrace different religions, there is almost no joint ritual because their rituals are different. Nonetheless, a ritual is attended jointly by Christians and Muslims; that is the making of s*esajen* (from Javanese, meaning offering) for *tolak balak* (From Bahasa Indonesia, meaning averting harm). This is usually performed at the beach in undetermined times, usually after a disaster occurs. Aside from the *tolak balak* ritual, Christians and Muslims share a similar way of celebrating the circle of life. Rejoicing on a religious holiday, i.e. Christmas or Eid-al-Fithr, each believer visits their family graveyard. A believer of a different religion still visits their family's graveyard on religious holidays. The death of a family member is commemorated in 3 to 1000 days counts. This is not a religious teaching, but a part of Javanese tradition.

In matters of religious attitudes, informants agree that there is neither a supporting nor obstructing attitude from a religious group to another. Each tries their best to observe their own religion's rituals. Problems occur only due to misunderstandings of other religion's teaching.

As two different religious groups, there are almost no similarities in neither theological nor religious attitude based on the two religions' respective teachings, except for that of respect towards one another. However, many collective activities are under the village administration's supervision such as bridge construction, *karang taruna* (youth organization), sport, Independence Day (August 17) festivities, or the village founding commemoration that involved Christians, Muslims, and Hinduism. The Muslims perform the *tanjidor* (a localized form of Middle East music) on the village commemoration day.

Only the activities that are supervised by the village administration that enable the believers from the existing three religion without alluding to the different teachings in their respective religions. Religious activities are carried out by believers in their own ways, e.g. building a mosque or a church. This reality shows that tolerance is contextual that Sidoasri villagers are able to tell apart public and

private spheres. This contextualized differentiation pattern, of whether they must act together or not, strengthens relations among believers of different religions. In other words, the Christian villagers would neither force the Muslims to join christian activities nor forbid the Muslims from observing theirs and vice versa. Even though a "saving the lost sheep" mission is done by the Christians a couple of years prior, thus far this activity has an insignificant impact on relations among inter-religion believers in Sidoasri. The Muslims are predisposed to passivity in response to this mission, and consequently, any ensuing resistance does not damage the tolerant structure of relations.

The internal condition in the relations of inter-religion believers in Sidoasri does not seem to be seriously disturbed, due to impassiveness of the Muslims in the wake of the Christians' mission. The Muslims recognize that they are minorities and they understand that the Christians' mission is born out of kindness, chiefly in the form of economic support. Thus, based on this understanding, the Muslims politely pass it over and does not overreact even though there is an encouragement from Christians for them to convert to Christianity.

From the previous explanation, it could expound how tolerance is formed as well as the reasons behind it. How Sidoasri villagers view religion and their religious groups' dynamics as well as others' have helped in shaping such tolerance. The study finds that there is neither a significantly distinct view nor behavior in matters of belief system, religious observance, religious rituals, and religious groups. The sole difference is the form of rituals between Islam and Christianity based on their respective teachings. There is no difference between Islam and Christianity in matters of belief in dogma, origins of religion, and attempts to preserve the teachings for future generations as well to socially control members of their respective religious groups.

The types of occupation for the majority of Sidoasri villagers become a cross-border category for villagers whose identities are set apart by religion. The similarity of occupation unite the identities of the two religious groups (Islam and Christianity) in the village. Shared environmental condition instigates the villagers to work in the same occupational types, hence allowing them to realize that they share a social sphere as well; one that cannot easily be divided by theological differences in religions. This social reality becomes the first reality that promoted efforts to understand one another among Christians and Muslims.

In the beginning, the majority of the villagers who are Christians found it difficult to accept religious differences. Nevertheless, over time the two religious groups try to live in harmony after much negotiations from either group. The problem arises from the Christians' misunderstanding of Islamic teachings, but all believers wish to adhere to their respective religions undisturbed. The problem is leaned more towards disagreements in observance of religious rituals among Christians and Muslims. Theological debates on religion's ideology are inevitable. Furthermore, there are intersections in the theology of Christianity and Islam which could escalate religious conflicts. Still, what sets a latent and a manifest conflict apart is theologically-based religious behavior. It cannot be detached from the social and cultural environment where theology grows and develops.

Latent conflict from theological differences once occurred in the village as well. Disputes regarding the religious truth of other religions, Christianity against Islam and vice versa, has chanced in the village. However, the dispute has never become a public discourse. It remains an individual or a small group's discourse without many impacts on their daily lives. In this regard, sungkan (reluctance) is a determinant factor. Sungkan helps to submerge theological dispute and prevent a manifest conflict.

Conversion efforts in a triumphalistic (the conquer or redemption of believers of other religions) spirit is once carried out by the Christians. Since conversion is deemed a religious obligation, believers are obliged to convert others to their religion by both the gospel and Islamic teaching. In the gospel, conversion is the sharing of compassion and the saving of lost sheep. In Islam,

it is called *Dakwah* (from Arabic, meaning invitation). Attempts to convert others to a new religion can possibly instigate conflict in a religiously diverse society.

In Sidoasri, the Muslim minorities have experienced it. Economic support to Muslim families as a form of compassion according to the gospel that followed by efforts to convert them to Christianity causes conflicts among Muslims. It is not yet evident whether the conversion effort is done to observe the gospel or to homogenize religion due to the villagers' discomfort in living among neighbors of the different religion, or both. The Muslims grow more closely knitted than before and try to strengthen their belief and intensified religious rituals.

The problems that arise from religious intersections does not lead into protracted conflicts in Sidoasri. The socio-cultural condition of the villagers is one that avoids conflict, owing to sungkan and shared identity. In addition, the role of the village administration is significant in maintaining a peaceful life in the village. Under Pak Wik's administration, the Muslims are involved in various village festivities. The differences are acknowledged by modifications in such festivities, which is opened by a priest's prayer, and closed by an ustadz (From Arabic, meaning religious teacher).

The village leadership is a determinant factor. How a village leader sees the difference is a determinant. How Pak Wik views and treats religious differences is connected with his personal life. His wife is a Muslim, while he himself is a Christian. Interactions with a Muslim enable Pak Wik to understand her religious adherence without neither impelling her to convert to Christianity nor making a faith conversion to Islam for himself.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of religious behavior and practices of tolerance in Sidoasri, we need to reconsider how socio-cultural environment is attached to theology. Both Christianity and Islam in Sidoasri have undergone a certain kind of hybridity which facilitates a sungkan-based dialogue. Eventually, theological belief is sustained personally and is made into a personal matter that does not need to be excessively communicated.

In Sidoasri, belief is private, while religious practices, in particular, the collective ones are public. Visiting the neighboring houses on Eid-al-Fithr or Christmas days shows that in the village, certain rituals on Eid-al-Fithr do not exclusively belong to Muslims, and the same thing can be said about Christmas, and the forgiveness and compassion are public. Such social reality indicates that religious tolerance in Sidoasri is sufficiently strong, following a long social process.

The manifestation of *sungkan*, in its meaning of wishing for no conflicts and for belief differences to be reserved personally and among fellow believers only, comes forth from Javanese humanism. In Sidoasri, this humanism is supported by local values, in an institutionalization of social values. Inter-religion beliefs in Sidoasri are sheltered by compassion above faith. There is a certain boundary between compassion and belief; that enables the inter-religion believers to put an emphasis in the similarities in religious identity and practices, rather than their differences. Both the gospel and Islamic teachings embody respect to fellow human beings, which is humanism in itself and thus dissolves the boundaries of religious identity alongside its socio-cultural background.

Shared neighborhood in a village, shared occupation, and intensity of day-to-day interaction make the religious difference a secondary rather than a primary matter. In other words, belief and religious practices still matter for the Sidoasri villagers, but harmony in the sense of maintaining peace among one another matters more. The *sungkan* of the villagers originates from humanism as well as their social sphere.

From this social sphere, tolerance strengthens in its own way; respect from having the same goal to fulfill one's needs in a shared sphere that inevitably sets conflict-triggering religious identities

aside. In other words, tolerance cannot stem from a religion's internal teachings only but also needs a social sphere where it can be communicated.

Christianity and Islamic-based everyday practices and pattern had undergone a dialogue, because, as hitherto argued, the gospel and Islamic teaching do not differ to a great extent. From this reality, the first prerequisite of tolerance is religion's theocentric teaching. While Christianity recognizes compassion, Islam does so with *tasamuh* (from Arabic, meaning tolerant). In Sidoasri, these teachings are bolstered as the second prerequisite of tolerance at the anthropocentric level: through a social condition that springs from a long historical process.

Religious tolerance in Sidoasri between Christians and Muslims does henceforth reside in both theocentric and anthropocentric dimensions. The first prerequisite cannot be met unless the second supports it; tolerance from religious teaching cannot function at a maximum level lest a harmonizing social condition supports its practices. In Sidoasri, sustaining social condition for tolerance is its cultural and geosocial conditions with remote access from the outside world. This generates a communal identity and interest which dissolves religious identity and interests.

The aforementioned socio-culturally dependent condition of tolerance has its own forms of resistance, as is natural in such cases. Internally, the villagers put up a minimum resistance on tolerance, nonetheless the thread is external. The development of information technology might enflame the villagers with national issues pertaining to religious conflicts. When their massiveness is not regulated and well-discerned, national issues on religious conflict could provoke a negation of established local tolerance values in Sidoasri.

In order to sustain tolerance, the Sidoasri villagers need a securing alternative for the fostered social structure. Theological or theocentric dimension of both the gospel and Islamic teaching concerning tolerance must be continuously reproduced in the wake of the current social condition, which erodes access boundaries and distance from national and international information and issues. Religious conflict and fundamentalism have seen a recent escalation these days. There is an upsetting current indication that religious fundamentalism's main target has shifted from another religion's fundamentalism to moderatism or openness to different views. This shift necessitates a serious attention to prevent religious conflicts from taking place at local rural level.

CONCLUSIONS

Tolerance is not equivalent to inattention to a certain group or individual out of mere respect and the wish to avoid disturbance, but a recognition of differences as a social reality and adaptation to them. The Sidoasri villagers build their tolerance through a long process that enabled the believers of different religions to live harmoniously today.

Theological differences are inexorable among religions. Nevertheless, social, cultural, economy, and political conditions determine whether those differences potentially triggers conflict or not. It is true that religion is not always a singular variant in religious conflicts. When other variants for a religious conflict are absent, it will never take place.

Religion is a believer's and their group's understanding, as manifested by their religious behavior. Dogma is unchangeable, and the belief in it is not easily modified. In spite of that, the behavior can be changed and modified according to the environment. This transforms the face of religion into a humanist one.

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