INCORPORATING THE ISLAMIC AND JAVANESE CULTURAL PRACTICES TO PROMOTE SOCIAL COHESIVENESS AMONG THE ARDA ART COMMUNITY IN PEKALONGAN, INDONESIA

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the relationship between Islam and Javanese culture viewed from the way of life and social actions of Arda Art Community. Data collection method in this study includes observation and in-depth interviews to the leaders and members of the Arda Art Community. By using discourse and content analysis, this study links the findings obtained from the progressive discussion related to Islam and Javanese culture.This research concludes that the social interactions among Arda Art Community members are able to support their social cohesion. In addition, it is believed that the Javanese society is not syncretic as Cliford Geertz, Andrew Beatt, Niels Mulder, etc. said, and not acculturative as Robert W. Hefner, Mark Woodward, Marshall G. Hogdson, etc. assumed. There is similarity between Islam and Javanese culture, which is the recognizing of God (Tauhid), emphasizing the usefulness of life, the importance of politeness, and keeping the harmony among human being, animals, and Universe. Regarding the similarity, Javanese society accepted Islam rapidly without any conflicts as occurred in other areas, which assumed that Islamic and Javanese values originally are from the same sources.

Keywords: Islam, Javanese culture, social, construction theory, cohesion

1. Introduction

This study seeks to contribute the developing the discourse related to the relationship between Islam and Javanese culture, by highlighting two main related thoughts. The first thought enlightens dialectics between Islam and Javanese culture resulted in a syncretic Islam that was conceptualised by Cliford Geertz, Andrew Beatty, Lode Frank Brakel and Niels Mulder. Meanwhile, the second thought views the dialectics as acculturative and it obtained great interest

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of scholars including Robert W. Hefner, Wark Woodward, and Marshall G. Hogdson.

According to the first thought, Islam came to Java and mixed with Javanese culture which had adopted mysticism emerging from animist and dynamism beliefs, and it was reinforced by the inclusion of Hinduism and Buddhism from India [1-4]. Therefore, Geertz, the main figure of this belief, stated that Islam in Java, especially the performance of the very common people (*abangan*), no longer performs the original Islamic teachings, but only touches its surface. He added that *Abangan* Islam as the major group in the typology of *santri, priyayi* and *abangan*, is a group which closely related to animism believing in spirits, supernatural power, and those supernatural creatures that can influence someone's fate [1].

Unlike the first view, scholars of the second thought assumed that the relationship between Islam and Javanese culture is not syncretic, but acculturative [4, 5]. It appeared on the study conducted by Sulistyono Susilo inspired by Hefner, Hodgson, Ricklefs and others' writing. It said that Islam and Javanese culture have identical identities in terms of cultural genealogy, mysticism, teaching orientation, and construction of power in Javanese courts. The identities are mainly imbued by the similarity of the mystical spirit among Javanese society which has been existed for years, bringing the concept of *tassawuf* (esoteric) in Islam. Therefore, Susilo argued the typology of the relationship between Islam and Javanese culture is dialectical, not contradictory [6]. In addition, Zuly Qodir, citing Woodward, said that based on historical facts, Islam and local culture do not stand alone, but they complete each other. The fact can be seen from the Gede Kauman mosque architecture, which looks like a Joglo (a typical Javanese building) and *slametan* as the traditional activity to get The God's blessings (*ngalap berkah*) during the *Idul Fitri* celebration [7].

Marshall G. Hogdson, cited by Woodward, clearly said that Geertz's conclusion above are very biased and it is only based on his own theory on the modernist perspective when he said that Islam did not mix comprehensively into mystical Javanese culture. On the contrary, Hogdson believed that Islamic practices in Java are very perfect [8]. According to Zamahsyari Dhofier, cited by Mudhofir, the evidence of the perfection appears in the daily activities of Javanese society. For an instance, a *priyayi* or *abangan* always asks for help from *santri* (pure Islam/orthodox based on Geertz' assumption) to pray for or slaughter the chicken [9].

Anthony Reid added an argument that Islam was pure when it came to Indonesia, especially Java. He claimed that it seems that the Islamic population of *Nusantara* have changed ethnically due to the shift of their way of life. This illustration shows the fundamental changes of the Indonesian people as the result of the Islamization [10]. Reid provided an example, by the time before Islam came to Indonesia there had been a tradition in Java and Bali that a wife had had to follow her husband when he had passed away. She had to burn herself in the fire burning the corpse of her husband to proof her loyalty to accompany her husband living afterlife [10, p. 164]. After Islam arrived in Indonesia, this

tradition changed. Furthermore, Reid noted that Indonesian, especially Javanese, must abandon their habit of eating pork as one of the consequences of the conversion process of Islam. This process was not easy, due to the fact that pigs were the main dish in ritual ceremonies before the arrival of Islam. Islam also obligated males to perform circumcision (*khitân*). These new obligations (performing circumcision and not eating pork) strongly became the main identities of Islam. In addition to these changes, Islam also had an enormous social change effect in this nation in terms of food, fashion, and hairstyles [10]. Based on these arguments, Reid disagreed to the arguments claiming that Islamization in this archipelago - especially in Java - only impacted it superficially, not fundamentally.

This study highlights two mainstream thoughts concerning the relationship of Islam and Javanese culture, through the social actions performed by Arda Art Community. The data were obtained through observation, action research and in-depth interviews with leaders and members of the community. In order to analyse the data, this study used discourse and content analysis and it used social construction theory as the instrument.

2. The relationship between Islam and Javanese culture in the historical path

In the Indonesian context, the relationship between Islam and local culture in Indonesia, especially in Java, experienced its own dynamics [11]. The beginning of the arrival of Islam in Java was marked by a harmonious relationship between Islam and Javanese culture. It was due to the intelligence of the early preachers who were Indian Gujarati merchants, and they were continued by Walisongo (as the figures of preacher widely known by Javanese). Walisongo succeeded in introducing Islamic values through a *Sufism* (esoteric) approach deemed more suitable than the *Syariah* (exoteric) to the mystical Javanese community. In addition, their intelligence appeared in their preaching strategy (*dakwah*), which used *wayang* (puppet), *gamelan* (traditional music), *tembang* (traditional song), etc., as the preferred medium of Javanese society. The intelligence of the early preachers, especially Walisongo, mostly considered successful because it was able to 'Islamize' this nation, especially Java, in a relatively short time (approximately about 40 years). In addition, it was conducted without conflict or war, as mostly occurred in the islamization process in other areas [12-15].

Ricklefs, cited by Hefner, noted that the conflict between Islam and the Javanese society emerged in the 19th century, along with the issue of Islamic revitalization [16]. The conflict was increasingly apparent in the early period of Indonesian independence, marked by the Madiun massacre [16]. Hefner assumed that the splitting of the puritanical (orthodox) and Javanese Islam was the effect of the political business, especially during the wars in the previous and after independence, the mass mobilization of the 1950 elections, and the failure

of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) in establishing a classless society [13, p. 534].

The conflict was diminished by New Order regime (rezim Orde Baru) led by Soeharto. It was due to the decisive, even repressive actions of the regime, particularly by separating Islam and politics. In 1998, the repressive regime fell down. According to Ahmad Muzaki, the regime change, economic and social crisis, and Arab's support not only encouraged the birth of conservative Islamic movement, but also radical Islam [17]. Like Muzaki, Bruinesen also said that the fall of the New Order was marked by a movement of Islam restoration to return the religion into its pure form (purification), or what Martin Van Bruinessen called as a conservative Islam in Indonesia [18]. The power of this conservative Islam empowered the conflict between Islam and Javanese culture. Similar to Hefner, who claimed that the conflict between Islam and Javanese culture was caused by the split of the politicians, Al Makin stated that the strength of the orthodox Islam - using the term of Al Makin's homogenizing Islam - in Java, was often triggered by political reasons. Politicians used religious issues as a tool to gain the sympathy of the conservative Muslims [19].

Political factors seemed to be an important factor in triggering tensions between Islam and Javanese culture. The series of political events at the moment of the Regional Head Election in Jakarta changed the assumption into an argumentation. The researcher argued there are forces that deliberately use religious sentiment to gain the voters, or to guide masses not to choose a certain pair of candidate which is considered to be *kafir* (infidel). The impact of the use of religious sentiment for political business is vast. Although the election process of Jakarta has been over, the impact still exists today, which is the splitting opinion in previewing the relationship between Islam and politics.

Sandu Frunza alarmed that incorporating religion into the political domain is dangerous. Frunza, cited by Iulian Boldea said that religion as a private area must be separated from politics in the public domain. He added that the state of public constitution should not be disturbed by religious doctrine [3].

3. A glimpse of Arda Art Community

Arda Art Community was established in 2007, and currently exists in Pekalongan. This community was founded and led by Agung Rahmat Santoso, who is popular as Santoso or Anto. The members of this community are 125 people spread in Pekalongan, Batang, Solo Jakarta, Jogjakarta, Semarang [*An Interview with Agung Rahmat Santoso (Ato). The Founder and Leader of Arda Art Community*].

The naming of *Arda Art Community* itself was inspired by the word 'Arda' which was taken from the Arabic word that means lightning, or the Earth. Meanwhile, in Javanese, 'Arda' can be interpreted as angry. Therefore, when Javanese and Arabic are combined, the philosophical meaning becomes vanishing anger on the Earth by God's lightning. The 'Art Community' is English phrase which means community of art. Thus, the establishment of this

art community is expected to defend the truth, and eliminate evil through the spirit of divinity (*tauhid*).

Beside the experience gained from the art world, Anto's life background as the graduate of Brawijaya also shaped his view and values that must be kept. It provided the Javanese philosophical value, in which he called as *Kaweruh Jawi* that firmly embedded in his way of life, and enabled him to hold the value in his art community.

4. Values used by Arda Art

Anto, the leader of Arda Art Community, said that the principle teaching of social interaction in this community called by *Suluk nogo Songo* [Dokumen *Suluk Nogo Songo* yang dimiliki Santoso, pimpinan *Arda Art Community*]. He said that the teaching was inspired by *Kitab Serat Kawedar Sunan Kalijaga*, and it was developed based on his religious understanding and view of life. The essence of his teachings is about the harmony of life among ourselves, the environment and others. Anto emphasizes that life is an arena to spread the benefits to others as much as possible [*An Interview with Agung Rahmat Santoso (Ato)*].

Through the values stated in *Suluk Nogo Songo* above, Anto does not only teach his students about theatrical skills, but also philosophical views of life taken from the unity between Islamic values and Javanese culture. The teachings are emphasized in philosophical aspects, rather than *Shari'ah* (Islamic law). He believes that the teachings are based on *Shari'ah*, such as *Sholat* (prayer), ablution, fasting and so forth. Without the teachings, the view of life on the role of human beings on the Earth will not be able to form a person with noble characters. Therefore, the early Islamic preachers, especially *Walisongo*, did not approach the Javanese society through *Shari'ah* method (legal formal approach). On the contrary, they chose strategy providing a philosophical view of life which Anto thinks is more appropriate. The strategy was widely accepted by Javanese society who already had traditionally philosophical view of life what Santoso called as *kesejatian* (wisdom). Further Santoso said: "By only doing Ngesti (like meditation), Javanese people are able to achieve Moksa (the highest spiritual level that gives rise to serenity, peace and happiness). So, for what Javanese people perform prayers, fasting, pilgrims and hajj as the guidance of Islamic Shari'ah, if what is conveyed only the shari'ah demand (exoteric), and ignore the meanings behind the implementation of the shari'ah itself?" [*An Interview with Agung Rahmat Santoso (Ato)*]

5. Social interaction of Arda Art Community - based on social construction theory

Some members of the community said that Anto does not convey the values contained in the *suluk nogo songo* explicitly. They even said they do not

know about the existence of it. However, it does not mean that Anto do not deliver the values to members of the community.

Fathur, as a member and founder of the community, explained that the main idea of Anto's advice is brotherhood, harmony, usefulness of your life for yourself, relatives and others. Gathering with others is not a useless activity, which Fathur calls as *muspro* [*An Interview with Fathur a Member of Arda Art Community*]. Nevertheless, he added that all members are allowed to express their opinions about an authenticity, or the real concept of the usefulness. Similarly, Rudin, as one of the members also said that the value of brotherhood and usefulness is a value that is upheld by the members. He argued that the secret of growing the sense of brotherhood among the members is the strong motto to avoid earning a living through theatre. Rudin said: "The principle instilled in this community is 'Do not Live at the Theatre'. It comes not only because of the motto, but also because of the sharing as their habit. In fact, the members have multi backgrounds, especially in living the profession." [*An Interview with Rudin a Member of Arda Art Community*]

Faza, as the members of the community stated there are various professional backgrounds of the members. He serves as a printing officer, Rudin as an employee at *Keraton* Hospital, and Fathur works in a financial institution of PNM (*Permodalan Nasional Madani*). Other members are working as pineapple sellers, batik craftsmen, immigration employees, etc. [*An Interview with Faza a Member of Arda Art Community*].

Principles of brotherhood and usefulness in Arda Art Community are represented through their careness for community members who need any assistance. As the example, when there is a member who needs money for starting a small business, all worthy members help him by collecting their money. Another chance, when a member will get married but he does not have money, or needs other technical support, all members help him according to their abilities. Rudin stated that there have been many community members getting married through the help of the community, such as Febri, Panji Kurniawan, Dewi and others [*An Interview with Rudin a Member of Arda Art Community*].

Rudin added, beside the principle of not earning a living in the community - thus affecting the elimination of personal interests of the each member - the secret of the growing sense of brotherhood in this community is the attitude of accepting each member's weaknesses. He continued, the principle of acceptance is constantly campaigned, so the members do not only like their brothers or sisters because of their advantages, but also weaknesses [*An Interview with Rudin a Member of Arda Art Community*].

Rudin loves this community despite of the fact that it provides him many benefits. Personally, he mainly feels there is a fusion of the community members to grow all of his potentials. The hard training in theatre art, for example, when the members must act as scavengers, they must appreciate the role and act totally as scavengers while putting off their real attributes. Rudin calls an attitude to live the role as 'observation'. Another example is training the members to gain

confidence to manage some social activities. Nowadays, Rudin's position is the chairman of the arts board of Pekalongan City in theatre affairs, because of Ato's recommendations. Those trainings have fostered his confidence and leadership skill. Rudin believes that his profession is the reward of his activities in this community, because this community allows him to spread his network. He said: "First, I was hired by a friend in the community as a financial consultant. When I worked in Keraton Hospital, the hospital hired me as a part timer worker. So, my current job cannot be separated from my association in this community." [*An Interview with Rudin a Member of Arda Art Community*]

Although the journey of this community does not entirely depend on the figure of the leader (as Fathur states), but Rudin says that one of the secrets of social cohesion among members of the community is the figure of Bang Anto (thus Rudin calls for Santoso as the leader of community), who is able to be close with all members because of his personal approach. He adds, Anto's actions to deepen each personality and problems that the members have, make them comfortable. All members want to tell him all problems they face, even their serious problems that they may not tell to their parents, for example, when there is a problem in the office (especially when there is an issue about the misplacing of medical devices in the place where he works), Rudin will tell it to Anto. Besides getting a solution from Anto, Rudin also gets spiritual strength to deal with the problem, whenever he tells his problem to Anto [*An Interview with Rudin a Member of Arda Art Community*].

Based on the observation, the sense of brotherhood is growing among members of the community. It can be seen from the voluntary actions to renovate Santoso's house which he calls it as a *Sangar* (Like Studio, as a place to learn together). In addition, when a community member has a special occasion, all members come together to assist him [Observation in 2015–2017 on social interaction of Arda Art Community].

Berger said that all social realities are formed from the process of social construction, in the form of a dialectical process between objectification, externalization and internalization [20]. Therefore, the social interaction conducted by Arda Art Community above is formed by the three dialectical processes above. The process of externalization showed by habits, words, etc., will produce the same subjective understanding among community members towards social reality, that it will produce institutionalization (objectification). Furthermore, the repetitive institutionalization will create an objective understanding of subjective understanding (internalization).

Bungin, who interpreted Berger and Luchmann, said that community institutions were created, maintained or changed through human actions and interactions. Although social institutions and society are objectively visible in reality, they are built in subjective definitions through the process of interaction. The new objectivity can occur through repeated affirmations by other persons who have the same subjective definition. In short, Berger and Luckmann said there was a dialectic between individuals creating society and society creating individuals [21].

Related to the relationship between religion and culture, Berger's social construction theory assumed that religion which produces values that will be held and upheld by its adherents is the result of human construction. This means that there is a dialectical process between society and religion. Religion is an objective entity because it is outside of the human himself, so it has the process of objectivation. For an instance, when a religion is in the text or it becomes a value, norm, rule etc. The text or norm then passes the process of internalization into the individual, because society has interpreted the religion as their guidance. Religion also undergoes the process of externalization because it becomes a reference of norms and values to guide and control the society [22]. Thus, the process of objectivation of the religious values conducted by Anto is combined with the values of Javanese culture that he has held so far. The relation between religion and Javanese culture is Anto's base, which was then applied to the community in social interaction.

Thus, the growing sense of brotherhood and helpful among the members of the community is a social construction that is formed because of the process of social interaction carried out continuously in the community. The values of *suluk nogo songo* implemented by Anto as the community leader to its members become the basis in carrying out the social construction process, so as to foster a sense of belonging, cohesiveness and brotherhood, and help each other among community members.

Based on the theory of social cohesion by Johnson, social cohesion in a community occurs when group members like each other and want each other's present, and it is shown by the community members of Arda Art Community [23]. Berger's social construction theory assumed that religion which produces values that will be held and upheld by its adherents is the result of human construction. This means that there is a dialectical process between society and religion. Religion is an objective entity because it is outside of the human himself, so it has the process of objectivation. For an instance, when a religion is in the text or it becomes a value, norm, rule etc. The text or norm then passes the process of internalization into the individual, because society has interpreted the religion as their guidance. Religion also undergoes the process of externalization because it becomes a reference of norms and values to guide and control the society [24]. The interaction shows the high level of acceptance and love among members. It is represented by their cohesiveness to help each other in terms of business and career or when one member is going to marry and hold a celebration, as well as caring to overcome various problems faced by them.

6. Analysis of the similarities of Islamic values and Javanese culture

Related to the relationship among human beings and their environment including plants and animals, even the whole Universe, Anto said that Javanese culture has instructed human beings to have a good harmony with this Universe. He argued that Javanese values on this perspective is convincing if the Islamic values and the Javanese culture came from the same source. The emphasis on

harmony between humans and nature becomes a high concern in Islam. This is presented in Q.S. Al-Baqarah: 31, which explains about human creation into the earth as the *khalifah* (leader/representative of Allah), whose the main duty is nurturing the Earth [*An Interview with Agung Rahmat Santoso (Ato). The Founder and Leader of Arda Art Community*].

A research conducted by J.A. Niels Mulder supports Anto's review on Javanese values that emphasizes harmony and concluded that the way of life of Javanese society (Weltanschaung) is based on the belief of the unity of the essential existence (the Universe). Furthermore, Mulder said, that view of the unity is firmly held by the Javanese people, thus surpassing the religion itself. Through this view, man is regarded as an integral part of nature. Therefore, this view puts people in a cosmological context, thus making life as a part of religious experience. The existence of human is regarded as an integrated part with the supernatural dimension, meaning the present and future life would not be separated [25]. The Javanese society assumes that all existing essence obeys the laws of nature. Therefore, it is a moral obligation for human beings to live harmoniously by maintaining the values and norms stated in the law of nature and they struggle to maintain the harmony [25].

Like Mulder, Javanese cultural researchers also add that the moral values or rules of Javanese society emphasize the realization of stability, peace, harmony, modesty, refinement, patience, acceptance, and restraint of lust. The harmony of life as the character of the Javanese society is based on the view that the individual's life is subordinated by society, and the life is subordinated by nature [2, 26, 27].

At a glance, the Javanese view telling about the unity of the Universe is similar to naturalism. This view was firstly expressed by the Greek philosopher named Permenides. He noted that everything comes from the same elements. Everything that make human beings look different is an illusion. This view was followed by naturalist philosophers such as Spinoza, Feurbach, and religious Naturalists [28]. Interestingly, that Javanese view of unity is different with naturalism's although they are looking the same. The Naturalist view does not recognize the existence of God even in different languages. For example Spinoza says that nature and God are the same, as the material and spiritual dimensions are the same (derived from the same element), whereas Feurbach says that God comes from nature as man-made expression [28]. However, the Javanese people recognize the greatness of God although they embrace the unity of the Universe. This can be seen from phrases such as 'Gusti Ingkang Murbeng Dumadi', which means God Almighty and the determinant of the fate of all beings.

The basic principle of Javanese values is almost similar with the Islamic basic values which stand on the principle of tauhid (acknowledging the existence and greatness of God). In the aspect of harmony, Islam also emphasizes the importance of harmony with self, mankind, environment and nature. It appears in Allah's commands in the Qur'an to behave well (Al-Baqarah: 195) to self (Al-Isra: 7-10), mankind (Al-Baqarah: 83) and environment (Al-A'raf: 56-58).

Moreover a hadith mentioned that Muhammad was sent to perfect and complete moral [Hadis Riwayat Al-Bayhaqi dalam *al-sunan al-kubra* (no. 20782), al-Bazar in his Musnad (no. 8949)].

By seeing the similarity of fundamental values between Islam and Javanese culture, as well as the unification of the two values in shaping a social interaction as demonstrated by the Arda Art Community, it proves that Javanese society is not exclusive as Cliford Geertz, Andrew Beatt, Niels Mulder, etc., and also not acculturative as Robert W. Hefner, Mark Woodward, Marshall G. Hogdson, etc. say. The fact shows that both Islam and Javanese culture have common values. Allegedly, it is the similarity of values that makes it easy for Javanese society to accept the Islamic teachings, so that Islam is embraced by Javanese people in a relatively short time, and almost without conflict, even war as happened in other regions [29, 30].

7. Conclusion

The social interaction of the Arda Art Community, which is based on a combination of Islamic values and Javanese culture, can foster the social cohesion of its members. Thus, this research concludes that the Javanese society's diversity as shown by the Arda Art Community is not syncretic as the theory by Cliford Geertz, Andrew Beatt, Niels Mulder, etc. and it is not acculturative as the theory by Robert W. Hefner, Mark Woodward, Marshall G. Hogdson, etc. Both Islam and Javanese culture has a similarity in the term of views on God (*Tauhid*), emphasizing the usefulness of life, as well as the importance of manners and maintaining harmony among humans, plants, animals and the Universe. In addition, by considering some meeting points between the two traditions, it is strongly assumed that the Islamic and Javanese values may have come from the same sources. As a matter of fact, the acceptance of Islam in Java ran quite smoothly and almost without conflicts, unlike in those outside Java.

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