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Islam Nusantara: An integration opportunity between Christianity and culture in Indonesia

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The integration or inculturation of religion and culture has been massively and controversially discussed despite being successfully presented by Islam Nusantara. Therefore, this study attempts to delve into the possibilities of integrating Christianity into the culture of Indonesia by seeking the Islam Nusantara experience. The study employed a qualitative method, using literature, articles, books and related references, and attempted to reconstruct the Islamic dimension concerning inculturation. Subsequently, the opportunity for Christianity will be displayed and formulated to establish a hospitable religion. This will offer a chance to improve and develop its identity regarding integration into the local culture by respecting without destroying, contextualising without syncretising and negotiating without compromising.

Contribution: This article contributes to the ongoing debates on culture and Christianity in Indonesia. Islam Nusantara offers an opportunity and example of how religion and culture should collaborate. The expectation is that the collaboration will display a solid formation to other contexts in Asia or Africa that could arrange a fruitful conversation between culture and Christianity.

Keywords: Islam Nusantara; Christian; inculturation; religion; culture.

Introduction

Indonesia is not a Christian nation, and its citizens consider Christians associated with colonisation and the Western world. The religion has not been satisfactorily disseminated, causing Christians to become a minority and subject to suspicion in their ecclesiastic activities. Conversely, Islam is a universal religion that dominates many dimensions and life systems in Indonesia, including politics, economics, education and social concerns. Mahmudi (2018) argued that Islam is a humanistic–universal religion proposed by the Prophet Mohammed. It applies throughout the ages, is receptive to scientific progression and reformation, encourages the achievement of inventions (Supriatna 2019) and is not against modernism, which essentially agrees with Islamic teachings. These facts have led to the global superiority of the religion (Suaidi 2014). Although the growth of Islamic tradition in Indonesia involves several factors, the primary reason is the treatment of and respect for local tradition, as Islam has successfully integrated with Indonesian culture. According to Wekke (2013), inculturation in Bugis society presents harmony and interaction with Islam, as the study showed that the local culture received religious expression as a portrayal of synergy. Islam translates its values into the ethical and belief system of the Buginese, leading to the building of a new tradition in this environment. Sumpena (2012:117–118) argued that local culture and Islam share mutual support for their development. Islam respects and rejuvenates the culture, and this collaboration generates various unique features. Islam thus proves that its values apply to all social dimensions, are suitable to the universe, can collaborate with cultural issues and colour local features. Inculturation results in the diversity of Islam and its rituals in Indonesia. Meanwhile, Islamic teachings do not consider diversity as an objective truth but as an inevitable condition that should not be regarded as a substantial issue. Diversity sets the stage for interaction and collaboration (Muzaki & Tafsir 2019:74), leading to the success of the inculturation of local traditions into Islam in Indonesia. Subsequently, this inculturation or collaboration presents a new Islamic look with Indonesian cultural features, known as Islam Nusantara (Luthfi 2016). This is a potential formulation that could offer new perspectives to other religions and enhance their hospitality to local culture (Hasan 2000:140). Therefore, sharing Islam Nusantara as an alternative contribution is necessary to establish a peaceful and harmonious civilisation, especially in Indonesia (Astuti 2017:39).

Generally, Christian teachings fail to accommodate cultural issues in Indonesia. Lola (2019) argued that Christians should not succumb to any cultural worldview but protect the faith, as the

teachings are a remedy for global fluctuation. Christianity aggressively reduces the local culture in Tobelo, Indonesia and considers its practices against their religious worldview. It fights to eliminate cultural dimensions amongst the people, thereby causing the Tobelonian Christians to become ambivalent about choosing to respect the ancestral tradition or maintain their faith (Duan 2019). Similar conflicts also occur in Minahasa, Sumba and Batak. According to Mawuntu (2017:59), zendings (European missionaries, or specifically speaking, Dutch and Deutchland missionaries) and local Christians eliminated Minahasan cultural documents to reflect their religious faith and ignore local traditions. In Sumba, the local church punishes congregation members that engage in traditional cultural practices, thereby creating enmity and controversy with the indigenous community. Meanwhile, the church attempts to contextualise certain Bataknese traditions but is strictly against most of the local culture (Min 2001:111, 137). Christian teachings with Western features are the cause of the enmity between religion and culture. Nego and Mondulu (2017) stated that Christianity in Indonesia demonstrates spiritual experiences as the core of the religion, leading to anthropocentrism and terminating social togetherness with culture. Gener (2018:49) also asked a thought-provoking question: 'are Christian beliefs [doctrines] really above cultural influences, issues, questions and concerns?' This study intends to clarify that Christian theology developed and grew under Western tradition, which does not respect Asia. Hence, the battle in Indonesia should not be considered a discussion between Christian theology and local culture but a controversy between Western and Asian or Indonesian cultures. Although Western theology is concerned with soteriology, pneumatology, the Trinity and other related doctrines, it rarely articulates pertinent Asian issues such as poverty, civilisation, injustice and demonic possession.

This contradiction and disregard of culture presents the church as a separate reality to the public, contrasting with the success of Islam in incorporating its values with Indonesian traditions to create the Islam Nusantara framework. Collaboration and integration between Christianity and culture are essential to promote harmony and synergy in society, enable religious teachings to accommodate local issues and offer alternative contributions for various complexities. However, Christian scholars generally ignore the tension as most of their academic works focus on biblical and systematic theology studies and show no interest in cultural issues. There have been several works by authors such as Bukit (2019), who regarded culture as an object to think, feel and act upon and suggested its consideration as an integral part of the society by Christians. Riniwati (2014) also proposed that Christianity must exist amidst society and attempted to implement a hospitable approach by inviting followers of the religion to recognise diversity and cultural existence. These studies, unfortunately, did not formulate a solid and firm concept for integrating Christianity into the culture. Hence, Islam's success with the framework offers an opportunity to explore and discover the Islam Nusantara concept that is expected to be fruitful in improving and developing such integration between Indonesian culture and Christianity. An interreligious approach offers a promising contribution to this issue, which leads to the examination of salient points from Islam Nusantara that could be beneficial for integrating Christianity into the cultural dimensions in Indonesia.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative analysis method. Islamic and Christian traditions and their encounters with local culture received massive attention. By doing so, intercultural and interreligious studies were the primary approach in this article. Analysis and description were handled by exploring references, literature and books that could contribute to constructing ideas and knowledge to reduce tensions. The first part of this study focused on the Islam Nusantara concept and reconstructed the idea and knowledge to examine the integration between Islam and culture. Then, the possibilities and opportunities were transformed and applied to the Christian context through the core values employed by Islam in exhibiting hospitality to culture. The next stage involved helping Christianity integrate and collaborate with the existing culture and suggested ways of viewing the local traditions practiced amongst the indigenous people. Finally, this study formulated and offered a Christian Nusantara pattern that integrates the local culture in Indonesia.

Discussion

Islam Nusantara: An inculturation project

Politics encourage the fragmentation of Islamic groups, and expression and reflection are inappropriate to the teachings of this religion. Islam's polarisation leads to fundamentalist and liberal movements, which are generally radical, triggering disrepute and inhumane violence and leading to the presumption that Islam is a religion of terrorists (Tike 2015). Mustofa (2012a) argued that Islamic radicals are responsible for the negative stereotype amongst Indonesians because they practice bombing and terrorism in the name of martyrdom. This movement interprets holy texts in the Quran atomistically and partially monolithically, prospectively leading to a narrow knowledge of religion, as holy verses are distorted for the justification of their radical and violent actions. More importantly, fundamentalist Islam does not respect Indonesian culture and diversity. Rokhmad (2012) claimed that fundamentalist Islam is alive and exists in Indonesia. Conversely, liberal Islam offers an independent and wild approach in interpreting the holy book without considering its core values (Mubarok & Rustam 2018:155). It supports freedom of thought, places rationality superiorly and has been greatly influenced by the thoughts of Western intellectuals and Islamologists. Liberal Islam became more developed when Indonesian Muslims studied in European and American universities (Mustofa 2012b), enabling them to accommodate culture by applying their rationality. However, the danger here is that this approach could potentially degrade the originality and core teachings of the religion.

Therefore, moderate Islam is the preferred solution to accommodate tension and controversy between fundamentalist and liberal Islam with the expectation that the result will be beneficial for Indonesia. A discourse on this approach, known as Islam Nusantara, emerged in Indonesia as a form of resistance to the two contradictory Islamic understandings (Mubarok & Rustam 2018:156). The term is presented to signify Islamic moderation in Indonesia, which expresses peace, hospitality, harmony and courteousness. It represents an Islam that respects local tradition and culture but still firmly holds on to sharia teachings. Islam Nusantara embodies Islam *rahmatan lil alamin* [mercy to all creation], which carries peace and happiness to human beings and the cosmological system. It does not eliminate local culture or prohibit the support of other religions, but the practices adhere to sharia and provide tolerance and independence. Consequently, these features distinguish this concept from other global Islamic traditions (Efendi 2010:109). Muzakki (2019) argues that the 'development of Nusantara Islam which is a model of Islam that is not only centered on Arabia and realise Islam that preach rahmatan lil 'alamin'. Islam Nusantara does not attack local culture in Indonesia, but rather creates a space for integration, thereby displaying hospitality toward local traditions. Waryono et al. (2021) prove that Islamic philosophy and local culture in Sumatra displays a valuable encounter between religion and local tradition, a form of Islamic inculturation, Islam Nusantara. As a form of moderate Islam, the concept exhibits the principles of tolerance, respect and preservation of local wisdom and avoids restricting its adherents. The moderate in Islam, however, is portrayed perfectly in Islam Nusantara (Khoiri 2019). Hence, the indigenous people accept Islam as the new worldview that engages with local culture, and this combination is termed Islam Nusantara.

The concept consists of five core principles, where the first is contextual, which adapts and modifies according to the age. Secondly, Islam Nusantara acknowledges and tolerates all Islamic branches without discrimination. Thirdly, it respects culture, as the concept is a process of inculturation between culture and Islamic teachings and does not terminate local traditions but integrates them into religion. Fourthly, Islam Nusantara is progressive in that it considers modernisation and progression as opportunities for conducting contributive dialogue. Lastly, it is liberal, as the teachings can answer human problems and do not discriminate between members of society because all humans are equal as God's creatures. Islam Nusantara allows its adherents to seek laws and lifestyles, obey or disobey, provided the preferences carry consequences (Mubarok & Rustam 2018:156–157). These five principles portray a persuasive approach toward culture, modernisation and especially social issues. Religion must consider culture as an opportunity to engage in prospective dialogues, while modernisation is a reality that requires religion to be receptive to all cosmological dimensions and layers. Islam Nusantara contextualises cultures and modernisation as an integral part of its value. Therefore, Islam is a leading religion that performs satisfactory inculturation, which is the merit of religion and culture in Indonesia.

Meanwhile, Astuti (2017:31) argued that Islam Nusantara does not replace Islamic doctrines but attempts to anchor Islam to diverse existing cultures amongst the people. It promotes culture as an integral part of its teaching but does not modify the purity of Islamic doctrines or deviate from the role of religion, thereby offering a hospitable appearance and friendly beliefs. Paloutzian (1996:201) stated the intrinsic elements of religion are shared by Islam Nusantara. For instance, religion is expected to support mental health and public peace, is seen as a comprehensive commitment and is a guideline and motivation to obey related teachings. Intrinsic religion also governs the whole life system and functions as a manager and guide. Islam Nusantara consists of these intrinsic dimensions and religious values, which are used as the basis for developing public policies. It does not consider formal practice but regards substantial behaviour the importance of being connected to God. Therefore, this concept does not support fundamentalist or liberal Islam but exists as the solution for the controversy and offers an example of the appropriate pattern of coexistence between religion and culture, society, tradition, democracy and cross-religious community. It offers alternative contributions to develop a peaceful and harmonious global civilisation without announcing the term 'Islam Nusantara'. However, the minimum expectation is that Christianity would be able to share similar interactions and integrations with culture in Indonesia.

According to Islam Nusantara, religion identifies its followers by their practices in society and personal spiritual connections to God. The moral and spiritual standards lie with the ability of Muslims to internalise religious values into their spiritual and social awareness. Islam arrived in Indonesia as a universal religion that offered flexibility, elasticity and hospitality, adapted to situations and conditions that significantly impacted the indigenous people and accommodated local traditions according to the guidance of Prophet Muhammed. Karim (2007:323) stated Islam was regarded with uncertainty because of its undetected movement after initially entering Indonesia, but it quickly adapted to local cultures and did not shake or fluctuate because of these customs and traditions. Abadi (2012) also argued that being Muslim denotes the ability to reflect maturity by realising cultural existence, and not religious praxis, is the essence of religion. Hence, Islam Nusantara wisely absorbs local values and places all entities accordingly, be it universal, profane, absolute or relative.

Moreover, Bilfagih (2016) insists that Islam Nusantara is a cultural strategy, an agenda to maintain national culture as a heritage from the threat of globalisation. It is a role model that is against radicalism and protects the country from hyper fanaticism (Schmidt 2021). Moreover, it contributes to educational development that could be implemented in multicultural Islamic education. Baharun and Badriyah (2020) discuss K.H. Said Aqil Siroj's argument that Islam Nusantara is able to 'strengthen the curriculum in Islamic educational institutions based on multiculturalism, carry out

regeneration to strengthen organisational solidarity and instil and teach the attitude of nationalism to the community'. With this in mind, Islam Nusantara offers dialectics between religion that contains moral and universal values and the culture and traditions of Indonesians to construct a distinctive style of Indonesian Islam, legitimate from an epistemological standpoint (Ramdhan 2018). Inevitably, Islam Nusantara spreads throughout Indonesia, appears creatively in dialogue with the local culture and is in a position to accept the traditions of the community, whilst modifying or inculturating it into a new culture that is hospitable to the local community but still within the path and originality of Islam (Mustamir 2019).

Therefore, Islam Nusantara applies measurable contextualisation and does not reduce or eliminate the purity of Islamic teachings but accommodates the integration of local culture and tradition with religion. This enables Muslims to maintain and express their faith alongside respect for indigenous traditions. Islam Nusantara considers culture an inevitable object for communicating religious doctrines and should be respected instead of opposed or ignored. It emphasises vertical and horizontal relationships by stating that the essence of religious life is harmonious interaction between humans and God, as well as engagement and interaction of the religious community with the existing culture. Muslims are inseparably free from spiritual and cultural values, which constitute the core of Islam Nusantara's knowledge of religious and cultural integration.

Possibilities: Christian inculturation

Christianity is developing on discussions about the response of the religion to indigenous cultures and traditions. For instance, Agoestina (2020) argued that contextualisation can combine and merge gospel and culture. The gospel can become the light that shines in the darkness of culture without dissipating the people and could purify the practices that conflict with Christianity. In agreement, Setiawan (2020) insisted that contextualisation potentially could connect culture with the church's mission but should be followed by proving the purity and holiness of the religion (Triasanti, Ndiy & Harming 2020). Amtiran (2019) stated that culture does not need to oppose or ignore Christianity because they are integrated, and the gospel is attached to and engaged with local traditions. Therefore, *missio Dei* is in harmony with local traditions in the missiology perspective. Amtiran (2019) proposes a confident argument by saying that the Christian mission should be the encounter between the missionary and other cultures. The mission always gets along with the culture; it should not be contradicted, instead, an expected bridge that could connect them. Christianity has also prepared guidelines to merge the church and culture in this perspective, and four steps were proposed by Harming and Katarina (2019) to this effect. These four steps are understanding the culture, occupying the culture, providing resources for empowerment and creating innovation. According to Tari (2018), the primary issues experienced in this inculturation are establishing harmony and peace and constant dialogue to

gain the values of life. Indeed, some works in Christian inculturation have been prepared. For instance, Rumbay et al. (2022; Rumbay 2021a, 2021b) offer a harmony between Christian leadership and Minahasan philosophy, pneumatology and ancestral spirits practice and against any lack of cultural accommodation, and culinary identity and Adventism. Therefore, Labeti (2021) argues that the church ought to be more hospitable and open to any local culture.

Meanwhile, the inculturation is not adequate as several Christian scholars are against inculturation and consider it a liberalistic movement. Paembonan (2019:49–50), for instance, links inculturation with pluralist theology and argued that it has no solid foundation because it consists of religious, anthropological and theological dimensions. Religion is multicultural, while cultural pluralism acknowledges cultural and lifestyle diversity and confidently enriches human life (Newbigin 1993:19). This means that pluralism is an understanding that recognises the existence of truths from distinct perspectives. Pluralists are open to the existence of other beliefs and accept truths that exist in other religions or traditions. Hence, the position ignores the uniqueness, finality or closed mind of adhering to one belief (Gnakan 2000:45). Paembonan (2019:54–57) also listed the dangers of pluralism, namely ignoring the Bible as the final revelation, acting against Jesus, resisting the church as the agent of missiology, refusing the uniqueness of each religion and denying soteriology and its mission. These views cause conservative Christians to display inhospitable attitudes towards culture and regard traditional influences as potential dangers and destroyers of the purity of Christian teachings which contrast with their doctrines. Christ, the gospel and the Bible are the final revelations that resist additional perspectives. According to Zaluchu (2018), secularisation theology is an actualisation of modern thought, inculturation and syncretism that seeks to apply the Christian core values in wider global contexts, including cultural platforms but independent of religious and dogmatic hegemony. Hence, this study considers inculturation as a form of secularisation.

The fluctuation in Christian inculturation is still ongoing and requires a solid formula to reduce the tension. As Islam Nusantara presented a successful inculturation between religion and culture for Muslims, it is a promising constructive perspective for the improvement of Christianity. Some essential points shared by Islam Nusantara must be considered to construct a solid formula for Christian inculturation. These are respecting without destroying, contextualising without syncretising, negotiating without compromising and engaging without sacrificing. Jesus lived within a local culture and comprehensively absorbed tradition through transformation for the benefit of society and spiritual intentions; hence, he constructed a new perspective on the inculturation into religion.

Respecting without destroying

Islam Nusantara presents the patterns of respect expressed by religion towards local cultures. Respecting culture does

not mean destroying the purity of religious dogma but is essential to developing inculturation in Christianity. Jesus did not eliminate the Jewish cultures but renewed and modified them to obey the gospel (Andrianti 2013:14). There are three major positions of inculturation in Christian movements (Purwanto 2019:110), namely Christ against culture, Christ and culture in paradox and Christ transforms culture. Although arguments share rich perspectives on the tension, Christianity cannot avoid culture because their interaction is inevitable. Some scholars or missionaries consider holistic separation from the culture possible; however, their engagement is practically inescapable. Christianity respects culture by transforming it into religious intentions, thereby refraining from destroying the indigenous values. This means that the inculturation between Christianity and Indonesian culture offers a hospitable integration. Christianity respects culture but functions to protect the purity of its core doctrines.

Contextualising without syncretising

Christianity is a culture, as signified by the coming of Jesus in the gospel, which integrated into history as part of the Near East culture. The gospel works interculturally and occupies the scripture as a cultural terminology. However, Christian teachings intend to contribute to human life without considering cultural contexts. Siswanto (2017) successfully contextualised the church's mission but opposed syncretism. Traditional symbols, practices and instruments are transformed to fit Christianity. This study proposed to accommodate the cultural system by changing its essence to produce a core aimed at glorifying God on a traditional platform. Hence, Christian teachings can share a new meaning in local tradition (Lepa 2019:18). Truth, communication, purity and hospitality are Indonesian cultural values, while sin, salvation, soteriology and redemption are the core of Christianity, which can be integrated with culture. Therefore, some cultures will receive new perspectives and improve their activities according to the Christian purpose. This will enable indigenous people to recognise their culture through Christianity, which transforms the core of the tradition without modifying its form.

The contextualisation approach, which does not oppose the church's doctrines, has been promoted by several Christian scholars. Hidajat (2018) proved that a particular event in the scripture practiced contextualisation in the church's mission. In the New Testament, a house was used for social and economic purposes, but the disciples shifted the function to religious intentions. They occupied the house as the mission and worship center and transformed it to suit the church, thereby implementing a measurable contextualisation, which led to a significant improvement in Christianity in the first to third centuries. Scriptural occasions where contextualisation was performed unfortunately receive little attention from the church presently and may even be ignored. Regardless, this example indicates that cultural instruments can be used to develop the influence of Christianity. It displays a perfect form of engagement between religion and culture and expresses that cultural instruments are available for transforming functions. This means that ritual symbols do not always relate to practices that oppose Christian principles but may potentially support the church's mission.

Regoh (2016) also introduced the contextualisation concept proposed by Phil Parshall. It involves an incarnational approach, spiritual theologies to bridge local worldviews and Christian teachings and religious rituals to accommodate local cultures that can establish Christian biblical indigenous communities. Hence, the inculturation of religion and culture in Indonesia leads to the establishment of Islam Nusantara, which shares the uniqueness of Islam. Its formulation is distinct from other global Islamic concepts but embodies similar purity. The merge of Christianity and culture does not require the syncretism of the teachings and core doctrines but contextualises its mission according to Indonesian culture. Therefore, contextualisation rather than syncretism is required to enable the development of a new indigenous community that shares the originality and purity of Christian teachings through cultural identity.

Negotiating without compromising

Negotiation refers to dialogue and discussion to find a meeting point and must be implemented without compromise to establish Christianity inculturation. Besides their differences, religion and culture have some common features that can be integrated, such as hospitality, harmony, togetherness, respect and other social values, which create an opportunity to begin a constructive negotiation. Panjaitan and Siburian (2019) insisted that Christians should have a firm and solid foundation, alongside a proper understanding of the church's mission and teachings, before engaging in negotiation. They argued that Christology is the core doctrine which can be employed as the center of negotiations to generate a contextual mission, as applies to cultures. This is because inculturation should aim to create a congruence through a combination of evangelical values and local cultures, which possibly produce a harmonious atmosphere for the people to glorify God (Batmyanik 2012).

Tumbelaka, Lattu and Samiyono (2020:8) stated that rituals are the foundation of religions or beliefs and are part of a religious expression that has been presented historically. Engaging in cultural practices does not denote rejecting or ignoring the existence of modern religions, including Islam or Christianity, but signifies their acceptance and negotiation. This means that culture is not performed to seek, meet and communicate with ancestors but as a part of the integral preservation of the social glue that must be maintained to promote civilisational harmony. Therefore, Christianity is required to renegotiate its position towards cultural practices to allow for discussion and sharing of common ground. This formulation does not sacrifice the purity or dogma of Christian teachings but negotiates for contributive engagement.

Conclusion

Islam Nusantara offers constructive contributions to religion and cultural activities in Indonesia and even globally. It displays perfect inculturation of ways religion can respect

the existence of traditions without degrading its dogma and purity. Islam Nusantara has succeeded in developing and improving a new formulation where religion accommodates and integrates with culture. The possibility of applying this concept to Christianity is available, as religious and cultural meetings are inevitable, though inculturation may be controversial. Inculturation encourages and even forces Christianity to integrate with local tradition. Hence, this study propagates the formulations of respecting without destroying, contextualising without syncretising and negotiating without compromising.

This finding, however, encourages Christianity in preparing a stage for a humble encounter with the local culture in Indonesia. Islam Nusantara performs in adequate form on how a religion should combine with culture. By doing so, Christianity enables the establishment of new Christian civilisations with an Indonesian cultural appearance and the core of church teachings.

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