

Indonesian Context and Javanese Muslim's Experience of Being Religious: Between Arabization and Purifying Islam

Retno Hanggarani Ninin

Abstract

Religious affiliates put religion as a matter of worship practices based on the law that is enforced in the religion they affiliate. In Indonesia, Islam developed through the arrival of traders from middle east around the 13th century and it spread through lectures and local cultural media such as *wayang* (Javanese's traditional shadow puppet). In fact, the spread of the religion worked in a way that enlarges ingroup polarization, one maintains religious practices claimed to be in accordance with the practice in Arab country, and the other practices religion within the framework of traditional Javanese culture. The Arab-Islamic group seemed to focus religiosity on the implementation of Islamic law as applied in Arab land, and claims it as the only truth of Islam. The propaganda succeeded in causing numerous Javanese people leave their Javanese culture for fear of becoming "un-Islamic". Triggered by the increasing frequency of Arab-Islamic groups engaging in power-oriented political activities, and by being intolerant to other religions and other Islamic subgroups, some of Javanese Muslim either personally, group, or organization persuade people to be critical in understanding Islam. The actions of the Arab-Islamic groups aroused the Javanese-Islamic groups awareness that thus far the label "Islamic law" has been used to hegemonize Javanese people for compliance. This awareness rose public discourse to critically thinking of the Islamic laws propagated by Arab-Islamic groups, whether was it referred to the Qur'an, or it might be based on Arab values? This is the moment where the Javanese Muslim people initiate over movements to purify their understanding and practicing of Islam from the influence of Arab values.

Keywords: Javanese muslim, Indonesia, religion-related hegemony, arabization

Author Bio

Ninin works as a lecturer in the Faculty of Psychology, Universitas Padjadjaran, Indonesia, and actively performs psychological services to the community as a psychologist. She is interested in social psychology, focusing on religious self, spiritual psychology, psychocultural studies and psychological related community development.

Email: rhninin@unpad.ac.id

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Historical background

Islam entered Java in the 13th century, brought by traders from the Middle East. The spread of Islam with Javanese culture occurred through various dynamics and a long process, including through the use of Javanese culture such as *tembang* (songs of a collection of poetries), *wayang* (Javanese traditional performance), and also through warfare. The infiltration of Islamic values gave rise to a Javanese Muslim society, namely a society that lives a life with two values simultaneously, namely Islamic values and Javanese. At the individual level, Javanese is characterized by the self referred to as the composite self (Lu & Yang, 2006), which is the self formed by more than one construal. In this case, the construals came from Javanese and Islamic culture. This fact justifies the statement that religion is a cultural phenomenon as well as a psychological phenomenon (Baumeister, Bauer, & Lloyd, 2010). The integration of Islamic and Javanese values at the individual level that occurred collectively in one community, namely the Javanese Islamic community, reached its peak in the 17th century, marked by the existence of the Islamic Mataram kingdom. The territory of the kingdom covered more or less most of Central Java.

The 18th-20th centuries were a period of European colonization on various islands in the archipelago (at that time not yet merged into Indonesia) which was resisted by the Javanese Muslim community with the paradigm of "struggle to maintain the Islamic religion". Resistance occurred due to the prohibition of carrying out religious activities, especially Islam at that time. It was in the context of resistance to colonialism that Islamic religious leaders, Islamic movements, and Islamic organizations, emerged on the island of Java. The goal of the resistance was independence, so that people would regain their freedom to live Javanese and Islamic values. In order to achieve this goal, people in various archipelagos joined forces to carry out a collective resistance to colonialism. Uniting into a unified Indonesia gave rise to a more solid resistance force until the achievement of the declaration of Indonesian independence in 1945. Ethnic Javanese are one of many ethnicities that merged into Indonesia, just as Muslims are one of a number of religions that make up Indonesia.

The period of 1945-1965 was a post-independence transition period. The dynamics of world politics and Indonesian society place the Javanese Muslim community not in a position to face territorial colonialism but ideological colonialism (Nakagawa, 2021). For example, the perception that communist ideology is at odds with Islamic values,

activates the emergence of movements to prevent it from developing in Indonesia. At that time, the Javanese Muslim community through various Islamic organizations not only participated in the resistance, but even became the main supporter. This resistance to ideological colonialism is carried out not only in the form of physical war, but through formal education in educational institutions, as well as community education in worship centers and community association centers, through de-ideologisation (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). At this time, the Indonesian government order, which "in the name of" preventing the development of communism, then regulated the state with the approach of increasing the "restrictions" of community activities. Unfortunately, when such restrictive policies were implemented, this includes restrictions on religious activities. The "restrictive" approach caused people to no longer have freedoms to carry out their religious activities, because what can and cannot be done is fully regulated by the state. This is what became the originator of the emergence of resistance movements from various religious groups to the state, as a resistance between the oppressed and the oppressive (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). Resistance is increasingly massive when people perceive that the policy of restriction is not based on facts, but rather a form of hegemony from the government to the community.

Hegemonic phase - 1

Period of pre reform (1965-1998)

This was a period when for 33 years Indonesia was led by only one president. At this time religious, political, and speaking activities were severely restricted. The government restricts everything to ensure that in every general election, the same party and government won. In such a political situation, people's religious activities, which are supposed to be personal activities, are restricted. All religious activities involving a group of people must be carried out with the permission of the government, and if it is suspected that there will be talks or provocations aimed to questioning the government's policies or oppose the government, then the activities would be prohibited. Even ongoing religious activities can be stopped by security forces if their content is deemed "harmful". The government was warning the public that there was a threat from the communist party that was still trying to seize power in Indonesia. Gradually the public became aware that the communist threat essentially existed but not as much as it needed to worry about in such a way as to allow the military to monitor every community activities. The threat is more of a hegemony to cover up the real fact that the government needs to secure its power from possible insurrections or coups by Indonesian people.

The "iron fist" approach by the new order government accumulatively for decades aroused the strong desire of the people, especially religious groups, to become empowered and regain their freedom (Kloos, et al., 2012), especially freedom in worship. The saturation of the people in the new order government, which has lasted

for about thirty years, culminated in 1998 through a reform movement to demote the president. The movement was led into the emergence of numbers of Islamic figures. They were supported by many Islamic organizations, as they declared that the movement was interpreted as a movement for religious freedom, against a tyrannical government that restricted many things, mainly restricting people's freedom in carrying out religious activities.

First part of reform period (1998-2014)

The people's movement to oust a president who had been in power for 33 years was successful, and it began a new chapter in Indonesia called the reform period. This period was marked by the conduct of general elections involving a number of new parties. For the first time after thirties years of elections being controlled by "the government party", a number of faith-based parties emerged and gained a large number of voters. Before this period, elections were just a formality that was sure to win the government party.

Knowing that Islamic-based parties attract a large number of voters, the next election has given rise to more and more parties that use Islamic symbols and claim to be "religious parties" that have religious value as the ideology of their party. With Indonesia's Muslim population reaching between 85-90% of the population, getting the "vote" of Muslim voters would be very advantageous. It was in this period that groups of activities, organizations, even many businesses used Islamic names or symbols. Unfortunately, some groups, organizations, and businesses use Islamic identities and symbols not for purposes related to religiosity or spirituality, but rather for political, economic, and power reasons. It is a kind of ritualistic-discourse which served as a purpose to put people involved in symbolic political participation instead of having direct political participation (Schaebler, 2013). As a type of hegemony, the method has succeeded in attracting the interest of the Indonesian Muslim community to join as members, and even donate their money. These ordinary people joined forces and gave support with generally purely religious intentions, without realizing that by doing that, they became contributors to political groups that used that support for the non-religious purpose.

Hegemonic phase – 2

Second part of reform period (2014 – present)

After years using religion as a symbol of their group and gain a large mass base, then placing many people in the house of representatives and government seats, the group began to elevate their intention to not only gain power position, but to take over the control. At the stage when a person is overpowered by a strong desire to master or become a ruler, then he will have a tendency to do all means, if it makes him able to gain the desired power. In this regard, they consistently choose to use religion as a tool to gain power, based on the fact that religion is the main reference

for the lives of most Indonesians. Since the religion with the most affiliates is Islam and the tribe with the most members is Javanese, the movement to use religion to capture votes and support is carried out massively on the island of Java, targeting the Javanese Muslim community.

History shows that Java was the center of the war on Japanese hegemony, the center of the rise of the Indonesian youth movement to unify the archipelago, and the center of saving the state ideology of Pancasila from the values of communism. This history proves that Javanese people are not only spiritualists, but also nationalists. Apparently this nationalism is an undesirable trait for opportunist groups who want to control the country, because the nationalists will not allow any group of people to control the country. Nationalists will prioritize social justice and the welfare of society without placing religion, gender, or ethnicity, as differentiating factors. This is detrimental to opportunist groups because they lose the opportunity to control various resources and distribute them in their own groups.

On the basis of this situation, a number of opportunist groups yearning for power, supported by people and groups that once took over state assets and were threatened with having to return their assets, then looked for ways to prevent nationalism from developing in Indonesian society. The way taken by the opportunist group is to define the nationalism group as a group that is not religious, so that the group got no support from the community, or even be shunned. The claim given by the opportunist group to the nationalist groups that nationalist are not religious, was based on the fact that the nationalist groups had an affinity with Indonesian people from various backgrounds and then it meant that they were not part of the Muslim community. Because of Indonesian citizens are predominantly Muslim, so nationalists are either, then opportunists are trying to abort their "Islamicness" by labeling them as "un-Islamic" or even "traitors to Islam".

To prove that nationalists are not Islamic, opportunist groups define that true Islam is one that uses Arabic terms in everyday talks, uses Arabic to name their children, groups, organizations, and companies, uses Arabic-style clothing, and sends their children to Islamic schools. Those who do not use these attributes or reject them are considered non-Islamic. This method works in the "non-ethnic Islamic" group, that is, those who no longer adopt the values of their ethnic culture or the culture in which they grew up, as values that are internalized into their self-worth.

In contrast to non-ethnic Islamic groups, nationalists are groups that have a strong commitment to maintaining cultural and ethnic values as part of Indonesian values. This group realizes that the cultural values of various ethnicities in Indonesia do not conflict with Islamic values. Being Islamic does not have to abandon the cultural values of its ethnicity nor where it grew up, and internalizing cultural values does not mean being un-Islamic. It is clear to nationalist groups that opportunist groups of power-seekers have used religion as a tool to destabilize society, for the real purpose of getting "votes" in various levels of elections for heads of government and members of house of representatives, covering from national level to municipal level.

Phase of critical awareness

When opportunists found that their propaganda were successful for some societies, and the societies supported them by defining non-Islamic and Islamic in their own way, they further expand their hegemony by claiming that cultural activities, whether dressed, language, writing, knowledge, or the arts, are un-Islamic and therefore should not be carried out. It was at this stage that Islamic academicians and culturalists began to realize the existence of Arabization propaganda, based on a collective understanding in those groups that the propaganda was no longer Islamization but Arabization. This understanding revealed the next facts, that there were a hegemonic and power motives behind the propaganda, that Islamic symbols were used only as tools. Believers believed that religion should benefit the individual and contribute in social harmony. When it comes is used for the interests of certain parties and polarizes society, it can trigger members of society who believe in free will as a guide to moral choices, to organize themselves to fight back (Baumeister, Bauer, & Lloyd, 2010).

In Javanese society, which holds strongly to almost all the values of the judiciary transmitted across generations through formal school education, cultural, economic, and artistic activities, when Javanese culture was regarded as forbidden in Islam, the Javanese Muslim community began to question the "truth" of the propaganda persuaded by the group that claimed to be an "Islamic group" with its "Islamic Movement". The critical awareness of the Javanese Muslim community has meanwhile been awakened and does not simply regard any propaganda as a truth. They discovered the fact that Javanese cultural values are not different from Islamic values on many things, including the value of divine spirituality, servitude, respect for fellow human beings and other creatures of God, and values in working and establishing relationships in society. More specifically, evidence shows that Islam and Javanese culture are dialectically related, both in terms of genealogy, spirituality and teaching orientation (Susilo & Syato, 2016). Referred to Naim and Qomar (2021), religious practices and culture of people who adhere to that religion cannot be separated.

On the contrary, propaganda-promoting groups that regard cultural activities as prohibited, even display behaviour that is contrary to Islamic values. Many of the behaviours presented on social media and public spaces are behaviours that are negatively and contradictory to Islamic values, such as negative praying for others, reporting information that turns out to be factly untrue, considering oneself and his group to be right and others who are different from his group is wrong, violates state rules, damages public property, and using people's money for the benefit of themselves and their groups, etc. Such critical awareness arises in the form of a critical question, is it true that Islam is as propagandized?

The inconsistency between self-claiming as the most "Islamic" while its behaviour is not in line with the main values in Islam, and even the behaviour it displays is more negative than the values in Javanese culture, making the Javanese Muslim

community doubt the spiritual integrity (Islam) of these groups. Instead of following it, nowadays people are already aware of the hegemonic motives behind their propaganda and behaviour so the response is to try to counter the hegemony. They realized that Javanization would bring them closer to Islamic values than Arabization.

Phase of action (Recommendation)

Research and evidence.

Javanese Muslim academicians and culturalists need to have facts that can prove that Islamic propaganda is due to religious or non-religious purposes such as politics, power, or economics. This can be done through scientific studies of the Quran. The following analysis is an example of proving that an Islamized propaganda is inherently un-Islamic: 1) The Quran letter 49 verse 13 mentions that various tribes and cultures are the creation of Allah. Based on the verse, the correct behaviour towards tribal and cultural diversity is to respect it. Thus, the behaviour of considering cultural diversity is not Islamic and forbidding it, is not in line with the Quran as the main reference in the Islamic religion; 2) The Quran letter 5 verse 92 mentions that at the level of Allah's messenger, when socializing Islamic values, his task is only to convey. There is no command of God to commit acts of coercion in order for others to change. The change of a person is entirely his own responsibility. Thus, imposing Islamic values on someone who rejects them, is not in line with the Quran.

Education and empowerment.

As proving the untruthfulness of propaganda requires research, it is difficult to expect all components of society to do it independently, especially people whose educational background is at the basic education level. The level of education influences belief system, thereby influencing the strength of belief in the truth of religion and readiness to act on behalf of the belief (Cranney, 2013). Therefore, the responsibility to act falls on those with higher education. In addition, research proves that spirituality and religiosity are factors that play a role in determining morality, namely the psychosocial ability to carry out social responsibilities (Hardy, Zhang, Skalski, & Melling, 2014). For that reason, academician and culturalist groups need to become facilitators to carry out collective actions in forms of: 1) Advocating for the creation of official government accounts and community collective accounts to spread the truth about Islamic values; 2) Confronting any propaganda that considers Javanese cultural values to be contrary to Islamic values, by objectively evaluate every values and put it in public domain; 3) Ensuring the availability of learning and educational media about Javanese and Islamic values, 4) Socializing Islamic values using Javanese cultural instruments. *Wayang orang* (Javanese traditional musical drama), *wayang kulit* (Javanese traditional shadow puppet show), and *tembang/serat* (Javanese scripture consist of poetries) are Javanese cultural

instruments that have proven to be functional as a medium for socializing values. They have survived for hundreds of years and are effectively transmitted across generations to the present day. In Islam itself, poetry (*shi'r*) are important for spiritual literacy and construct religious thoughts (Hussein, 2016).

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