ISLAM AND PLURALISM:
A Religious-Sociologic Analysis on the Role of Indonesian Muslims in Strengthening Social Integration

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KEYWOR	ABSTRACT
Pluralism *Social Integration* *Indonesian Muslim*	*It appears that the threat or problem of social and national disintegration is an integral part of the process of Indonesian national history. Since 1997, Indonesia still faces various social crises such as corruption, poverty, low or education backwardness, unemployment, crime, illegal logging, ethnic and community problems, religious conflicts and separatism. As a result, these conditions have led to a declining sense of nationalism which then increases the potential for social and national disintegration. For example, when President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono visited Ambon some time ago, we were shocked by the Peak Lele dance performed by supporters of the RMS movement in Ambon. GAM supporters then formed a local political party called the Free Aceh Movement Party. Supporters of the Organization for a Free Papua (OPM) raise the Morning Star flag to signal the existence of the Free Papua Movement. Therefore, all elements of the Indonesian nation should take responsibility and play an active role in strengthening the unity of this nation. Like other elements of the nation, Indonesian Muslims, as the country's majority, are also responsible and must play an active role in strengthening the country's unity and integrity. On this topic, this article focuses on a conceptual analysis of the relationship between Islam and pluralism, and then elaborates on the extent to which Indonesian Muslims play a role in promoting social and ethnic integration in a pluralistic Indonesian society.*

Introduction

Societal and national disintegration has long been an issue in the history of modern Indonesia. Among the factors which trigger this perpetuating condition are corruption, poverty, criminality, pollution, illegal logging, religion/ethnic conflict, and separatism. Evidence of this deteriorating situation can be obviously observed from recent incidents in some parts of Indonesia. Firstly, followers and supporters of RMS *(Republik Maluku Selatan)* or Southern Maluku Independence Movement suddenly appeared to perform *Pecek Lele* dance in front of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and his delegate in his visit to Ambon recently. Then, supporters of GAM or Aceh Independence Movement established a local party which was named "Partai lokal GAM" (*Republika*, 2007). Lastly, OPM or Organization of Papua Independence Movement raised the *Bintang Kejora* flag to signal their existence in Indonesian's most eastern provinces.

The three incidents above imply that the issue of societal and national disintegration should become this nation's major agenda. Every element of this nation should take part and play active roles in strengthening and maintaining the unity and existence of this country. The Muslim *Ummah*, a majority part of this pluralistic nation, inevitably plays significant role in maintaining societal and national integration of this country. It is in this light that this article focuses on sociologic-religious analysis of the relationship between Islam and Pluralism and the extent to which the Muslim *Ummah* has played their roles in strengthening societal integration in pluralistic society.

Islam and Pluralism

According to Timo Kivimaki (2005:107), in Indonesia separatism emerges in provinces which have abundance of natural resources. These provinces are Aceh, Papua, Riau, Maluku). In these provinces, amount of foreign investments is often linear to the potential to social conflict, which later results in increasing demand for separation from the central government. People supporting independence of these provinces argue that their provinces should not share revenues from their natural resources and foreign investment with the government of Indonesia. Obviously, such this argumentation may potentially lead to societal disintegration and benefit those parties that need to legitimize their struggle for independence.

However, each of these provinces seems to base their struggle for independence on varying motives. In Papua, the leader of OPM or Papua independence Organization, Jacob Prai, states that they are aiming at seizing control and authority over the region as it was left by the Dutch. Hasan Tiro from GAM or Aceh Independence Movement argues that their struggle for independence is based on Aceh's own struggle and rights in liberating the region from colonialism. On the other hand, political figures of the RMS or Southern Maluku Independence Movement bases their struggle for independence on unwillingness to accept past military pressure and threat to them. (Kivimaki., 2005:107-108).

Therefore, it is obvious that dissatisfaction toward central government's management in politics, economy, culture, and religious affairs has been the driving force behind these separatist movements. Hence, it is expected that promoting the values of pluralism will help reduce potential of societal conflicts and national disintegration. This is due to the nature of pluralism which allows people or groups from different backgrounds to compete fairly in and gain access to education, politics, legal matters, economy, religious rights, and cultural expressions on equal footing (James A. Bank, 1989:3).

Appreciation toward pluralism (Amy L. Freedman, 2001:411-440) is believed to strengthen social integration of people from different ethnic backgrounds. This is similar to the role of religion, as an element of primordialism, which can counterbalance efforts toward societal disintegration. Islam, as a religion followed by more or less 90% of Indonesia's population, has strategic roles in educating the religion's young generation and the *ummah* as a whole to strengthen societal integration. In other words, the Muslim *ummah* should be in the forefront of the efforts to strengthen societal integration. Conceptually and theoretically, Islamic teachings appreciate tolerance and pluralism highly. Revealed for mankind, Islam has documented pluralism in its teachings.

Pluralism has been realized in differing internal religious sects in Islam. Allah SWT has noted this in the Holy Quran (22:34):

> And for all religion We have appointed a rite [of sacrifice] that they may mention the name of Allah over what He has provided for them of [sacrificial] animals. For your god is one God, so to Him submit. And, [O Muhammad], give good tidings to the humble [before their Lord].

In Islam, plurality of religious practices has been accepted as socio-historic realities. Similar to the notion of plurality in thoughts, emotions, residences, and behaviors, such this pluralistic attitude constitutes a common phenomenon. The source of Islamic teachings is actually singular, that is, from The One Allah. However, when the teachings are brought to the society, different interpretations and practices become inevitable. To explain this further, we can see that human have different beliefs in their live because of differences in socio-economic life, politics, culture, and geography. The role of Islam in coastal area, for example, is different from that in the inland. Similarly, differences in the implementation of Islam can be observed in the life of agricultural society and industrial society.

Islam is a religion that upholds tolerance and appreciation of each other's existence. As stated in the Holy Quran (109:6): "For you is your religion, and for me is my religion". Islam also asserts that there is no compulsion in accepting a religion (Al-Quran: 2:256):

> There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion. The right course has been clear from the wrong. So whoever disbelieves in *thaghut* and believes in Allah has grasped the most trustworthy handhold with no break in it. And Allah is Hearing and Knowing.

Islamic perspective on pluralism is relevant to the 1945 constitution of Indonesia. In Article 29 Verse 2, it is stated that "the state guarantees freedom to every citizen to follow a religion of their own choice and to worship in accordance with the religion". Islam calls to seek similarities of basic teachings among religions, that is, to believe in God as the center of religions.

Therefore, this reiterates that Islam is a religion of tolerance. Implicitly, Islam indicates its opposition to those who adopt religion exclusively. The reason is because truth is not the monopoly of an individual or a group. Frithof Schuon (2003:10-12) and Abdullah Idi (2006: 174-175) suggest two terms in this regard, namely *esoteric* and *exoteric*. *Esoteric* refers to a belief in which only a few individuals have the right to know permissible aspects of a certain religious belief. On the other hand, *Exoteric* refers to a belief in which all people have the right to know and to carry out permissible aspects of a religious belief. Just like any other entities, differences and similarities exist among religions. Based on the notions of *Esoteric* and *Exoteric*, Schuon proposes that all religions are basically the same esoterically, but different exoterically.

To establish a new Indonesia that is characterized by complex dynamics and occasional outburst of social conflicts, a better understanding of true pluralism is an important requirement. Islam should be able to represent its existence as the religion of peace and love to the universe, or better known as *rahmatan lil'alamin*. When this nature of Islam can be realized, pluralism of religions can be developed as a process of spiritual enrichment and universal morality empowerment. Hence, without willingness of religions' followers to acknowledge religious pluralism, internal and external conflicts can be easily triggered. This is obviously in opposition to the existence of Islam as *rahmatan lil'alamin.* In the Holy Quran (21:107), it is stated that "*And We have not sent you, [O Muhammad], except as a mercy to the worlds*".

Pluralism is indeed a challenge to religions. The quest for convergence among religions is indeed a salient issue to be catered. Among the purpose of convergence is to position proportionally the tendency to expose one's own religion as the only truth (Harold Coward, *Kompas*, October 17, 1997). Islam, as implied in the Holy Quran Chapter 2, Verse 256 and Chapter 109, Verse 6 above, acknowledges the rights and existence of other religions and people of the Book. This acknowledgement constitutes a principal Islamic doctrine toward religious pluralism and socio-cultural differences.

In this era of religious pluralism, many of adherents of religions are still exclusive in their characters and dominate claim of religious truth and salvation. Such this perspective and attitude often triggers socio-political conflicts and brings about wars among adherents of different religions.

Munawar Rahman (*Kompas*, October 17, 1997) states that the view that one religion is intrinsically better than another is perceived by many experts of religious studies as a common norm. With increasing awareness of the importance of being inclusive, equal, and democratic, it is viewed that all religions tend to be relatively absolute in certain issues, as termed by Seyyed Hosen Nasr—or absolutely relative.

In Islam, pluralism constitutes the will of God *(sunnatullah)*, and therefore it is important to establish inter-religion convergence. This effort is part of theological belief, according to Islamic doctrine, which means Al-Quran invites people of other religions to seek similarities *(kalimatun sawa')* among religions, as stated by Allah SWT in His Book:

> "Say (O Muhammad): O people of the book, let us all come to seek similarities (*kalimatun sawa'*) between us and you so that we do not worship anything but Allah and we do not ally you with anyone....."

Efforts to seek similarities among religions need to be perceived from the same view, that is, that religions come from the One God. At the transcendental level, said Frithjof Schoun, all religion will come to convergence point. In other words, the esoteric foundations of religions are actually the same (Huston Smith, in Abdullah Idi, 2006: 117-118). In the perspective of perennial philosophy, this similarity is called transcendental unity of religions. It can also be said that in the level of common vision, termed by by Houston Smith, or in the level of transcendentalism, as used by perennial philosophers, all religions have unity and similarity of basic thoughts. In Islam, this is called "basic religious message", which refers to submission to the Almighty Allah SWT and always being aware of His presence in our daily lives.

In religious context, acknowledgement of existence of common vision indicates meaning to relate back *the many*—as the exoteric reality of religions—to their origin—*The One God*—who has been given different names through the history of human spirituality and culture. The empiric nature of religious pluralism is not only evident through factual phenomenon, but also in the reality that symbolic language of the word "religion" becomes the same bond binding all religions.

All of this discussion leads us to conclude that although pluralism of religions exists, all of them aim toward one truth—that is the truth of God. Thus, truth is also plural in nature. For the pluralists, each religion has truth because basically all religions and knowledge come from the One God. In Islamic terminology, all truths must come from one absolute truth. Moreover, Islam teaches its followers to be tolerant and inclusive toward followers of other religions. In the early age of Islam, exclusive characters were explicitly demonstrated by the Quraisy tribe toward Prophet Muhammad's religion—Islam. Because of their intolerance, the Quraisy refused and forbade a religion that came later than theirs. They became unsympathetic to Prophet Muhammad and his followers.

Indonesian Muslim Societies and Social Integration

It is the God's will that Indonesia is predestined to a multi-ethnic, religion, race, and culture nation, the so-called plural society. J. S. Furnivall (1980: 86-103) mentions, a type of tropical society, either having authority or being authorized, has different races. Dutch as the minor group has increased in numbers in the late of 19th century as well as in the authority of indigenous people as the third class in their own nation. The foreign east people are in the second class between European and indigenous people. In Politics, the obvious indication of the pluralistic Indonesian society is that there is no common will in which they totally consist of separated elements among others due to different races and they are the individuals from the total organ. As the social individuals, they live impaired. Dutch came to Indonesia to work, but they do not live permanently. Their lives are around work, and do not see the social, politic, and economic problems happening in Indonesia as

the Indonesian citizens, but as the capitalists or boss of their labors. Similarly, foreign west people such as Chinese, the inlanders' lives are also impaired, that is as the servants in their own nation. (Idi, 2006:3).

Totally, J. Nasikun (1995: 302) insists, Indonesian society in the era of Netherlands E. Indies was a society growing based on castes without any religious relation. Dutch, Chinese, and inlanders through their own religion, culture, language, viewpoint, and lifestyle indicate no common will.

Indonesia as the pluralistic nation, in one side, is a blessing and wealth that should be thanked. In the other side, pluralism even results on the reverse, placing this nation susceptible to social disintegration (Abdullah Idi and Toto Suharto, 2006: 113) and national disintegration as noted by Schulte Nordholt and Hanneman Samuel (2004: 1-2) as follows:

"After decades of authoritarian centralist governance, attempts to introduce political and economic change seem doomed, in the face of bureaucratic sabotage, corrupt power politics, short-term opportunism, and the absence of a widely shared vision of the future. In the light of the recent outbursts of ethnic and religious violence in various religions of the archipelago, regional resistance movements, the inability to corruption, pessimists are inclined to classify Indonesia in the category of "messy states". In short, they predict further disintegration which may eventually lead to the breaking up of the nation-state."

Syafuan Rozy (2003: 92-93) highlights that social conflict happens, because of the worth social structure causing people easier to get angry. Franz Magnis Suseno (2003: 121-122) maintains that at least there are four factors supporting social conflict in Indonesia. First is cultural conflict. It is related to primordial conflict based on religion, race, ethnic, and region. Second is related to the accumulation of jealously and envy. People are easily provoked by others and tend to behave exclusively based on religion and group (ethnics). Third, one's behavior is influenced by violence within the society. Fourth, the system of new socio-political system (Orde Baru) in Indonesia which positions military power tends to overcome problems with non-democratic approach.

Parsudi Suparlan (2003: 79) also claims that as the pluralistic society, the future of Indonesia will be more sensitive to various conflicts. He adds the disintegration potential results from individual and group competition on numerous social resources that use ethnicity to strengthen power. To influence each other will manipulates ethnicity as a way to gather power basing on group and solidarity and then utilize it within conflict to reach certain power. On the power of local social structure, like politics and ethnicity, is potential to break up both social structure and communal levels.

Realizing Indonesia as a pluralistic nation which is resistant to social conflict, the government has implemented a number of ethnic policies to enhance social integration. R. William Liddle (1997: 282-283) argues that the government of new socio-political system called *Orde Baru* (1996-1997) has implemented a number of ethnic policies as a way-out effort. Management phase/conflict policy in the country. *First* is ethnical conflict management before 1965. In 1928, youth declaration (28 October 1928) aimed to grow up nationalism to establish national unity. *Second* is conflict management under democratic representative (1950-1959) and administrative democracy (1959-1965) that allowed the ethnics to express their votes through open-political system, where political parties competed in the election to be parliament members and the government was established based on parliament majority. Under administrative democracy, Soekarno tried to face the ethnics and groups' aspiration through a combination of: coercion, persuasion, and co-optation. Two important conflicts in 1950s were the relation between Islam and state; and regional and national rebellions. *Third* is conflict management under new socio-politics (19965-1997). This government overcome the social conflicts by the combination of : coercion, persuasion, exchange, and co-optation.

Particularly on Chinese (Tionghoa), Barbari (1984: 690) says that the policies of *Orde Baru* are focused on a certain number of policies (*First* is general policy. It is the efforts of new socio-political system to unite different ethnics into one unity. *Second* is specific policy. It is as the details of the general policy which apply assimilation strategy in various aspects such as social, politics, economics, culture, and education). The reformist government of B. J. Habibie (1997-1999), appeared to be good at socio-culture and politics. Habibie, for example, gave an opportunity to Chinese to express their political aspiration by establishing Chinese political party. They are also allowed to practice their own customs and traditions.

The government of Abdurrahman Wahid (1999-2001) issued Presidential Decree No. 6/2000 and Presidential Instruction No. 14/1667 concerning the breaking up of Chinese customs and traditions. Megawati Soekarno Putri re-strengthened their existence to practice the custom and traditions (Abdullah Idi, 2006: 5). In the government of Soesilo Bambang Yudhoyono (2004-2009), ethnic policies are more focused on the clarity of inter-ethnical relations (UU PDRE) and the harmony of inter-religion (PBM-KUB No. 9 & No. 8/2006). The legalization of PBM-KUB No. 9 and No. 8/2006 shows the SBY government positive respond on various social conflicts. It shows that social conflicts – ethnical or religious – with any reasons still become threat and challenge within national life which disintegrate social and national unity. A number of efforts should be done by the government to anticipate the conflicts within the internal of ethnic and religion. Joint-ministry decree-21 March 2006- had been signed by minister of religion and internal affairs, namely Number. 9 year 2006 and Number. 8 year 2006 concerning guidance of governor/regent and vice governor/regent in the harmony of inter-religion relationship, empowerment of inter-religion forum, and establishment of worship places.

It indicates that the government principally has realized that as an archipelagic nation, the ethnics, races, and religions existing in this nation are sensitive to social disintegration and even national one.

Even though a number of regulations and constitutions has been issued during 1999 t0 2007, the conflict potential seemingly cannot be reduced well. It is proven that various ethnical and religious violence up to recent time (2007) still happen symbolizing that ethnicity still becomes a threat to the future national existence. Rozy (2003: 92) mentions that the fact is the sign that cyclical events of oriental despotism, disintegration and violence from east caused by the worse social structure as the previous heritage. The pluralistic society is limited only on resulting on the strength of power and dominant power structure; and isolation of culture and structure of minority.

The Indonesian economic structure tends to show certain minor migrating ethnic rather than major indigenous ethnic. This imbalanced socio-economic condition often becomes the source of ethnical and religious conflicts as happened in 1998. If there is no adequate concern on the development policy, the imbalance between minor and major ethnics can have negative impacts on inter-ethnical and religious relation of a nation in the future as well as social and national integration. The economic condition of indigenous people which is generally bad needs an affirmative action.

BPS data (2007) shows that from the total population of South Sumatra (6.9 to 7 millions), there are 11, 625,000 people (23. 6%) in poverty. If seen from ethnical and religious background, those people are indigenous. If the majority (Muslims) feel inflicted loss in many things, social conflict sensitively happens and it takes long time to reduce. Numerous ethnical and religious conflicts in Indonesia, between fellow local ethnics or between local and certain migrating ethnics are generally due to imbalanced economics. As a logical consequence from the conflicts, they have caused trauma and bad image between local and migrating ethnics disappearing uneasily. So, the concrete development policy which takes side with all ethnics is highly required in order that the traumas and injures do not happen anymore and can gradually be cured, so the process of social

integration enhancement can be well-established.

If the major indigenous ethnics (Muslims) are in subordinate position, and the minor migrating ones are in super ordinate, it will implicate on the complexity of relation establishment between both groups harmoniously and substantively. Ideally, G. E. Simson and J. M. Yinger (1972: 12-13) mentions that minor migrating ethnic has several characteristics: *First*, they are one part of the more complex communities (nation). *Second*, they have the characteristic to lower self-esteem. *Third*, they have certain similar characteristic, either beneficial characteristics or defeating ones. *Forth*, the membership in minority can inflict loss to the next generation even though there are no more conspicuous physical and cultural characteristics. *Fifth*, they tend to marry people from their own ethnic.

In fact, particular minor migrating ethnics in Indonesia even show the reverse thing, in the super ordinate side. Simson and Yinger's viewpoints are not all apparently relevant with the reality of indigenous people (majority) and certain migrating ethnics. The first group tends to have control in economics and the latter tends to be the contrary one. As an illustration, from 10 richest people in Indonesia, *Globe Asia Magazine version – August 2007 ed.,* only two people (20%) are indigenous: Arifin Panigoro and Aburizal Bakrie (Sumatra Express, July 31, 2007). This inter-ethnical relation, as stated by M. Kurokawa (1972: 44), is susceptible to social conflicts because each tries to maintain a certain social structure for the sake of a particular need. The main problem will grow and relate to social, politics, and economics institutions which describe the relation of indigenous people (majority) subordinated by minor migrating people.

It is acknowledged that in the era of reform, social conflicts result from ethnic, religion, and region. They do not only happen for those who have the same ethnic and religion, but also those in the same ones due to economic, politic, and regional matters. It cannot be denied that social and national disintegrations are included in national agenda. The agenda becomes a fundamental fact of diversity in the global era (Military, 18 October 1997). This problem crystallizes when related to phenomena of social conflicts on ethnics, religions, races, and groups in the last years. Whatever reasons, the cases of Situbondo, Tasikmalaya, Rengasdengklok, Poso, and Ambon were principally related to relationship among religions.

Nationalism is viewed as the unifying force of the plurality of cultures and religions. The existing diversity has become an undeniable fact. One way to support it is to develop exclusivism in religions. By this, one is required to believe that his religion is the right one in one side, and at the same time he is tolerant to and be friend of other religion followers in the other (Kompas, 17 October 1997). Through it, social and national integration can be established because those integrations are interrelated. National integration only exists if social integration has already been established. Various social and political events occur in Indonesia in the last 20th and the early of 21st century were the matters of social and national integration.

A number of demands to be independent from various regions in the last time such as Aceh, Riau, Papua (Irian jaya), RMS-Maluku (ambon), and East Timor (already independent), the establishment of local party (GAM-Aceh), the display of *Bintang gejora* flag, and the show of *Kecak Lele* dance (Ambon) when the president SBY visited Ambon are national integration matters. Conflict between Muslims and Christians in Ambon and Poso, inter-ethnical conflict in Sampit (West Kalimantan-Dayak and Malay; and Madura), inter-village conflict in any regions become the reality of social disintegration in this country. In short, what this country is facing so far lately is the threat for social and national disintegration.

Various experts with different backgrounds state that the multi-crises happening since 1997 has caused various social, political, economic and cultural matters. These all significantly have disturbed national prosperity and then threat social and national integration. The economic and

other crises (e.g. social, political, economic, and cultural crises) principally originated from moral-ethic crisis of this nation. Corruption, collusion, and nepotism apparently become entrenched in. Ironically, the nation with Muslims majority is in the category of high corruption. Due to the badness of national social life, everyone should have responsibility for the importance of social and national integrity through his or her role and position.

Conclusion

Since 1997 – 2007, a number of policies has been issued and implemented to reduce social conflicts. Principally, those policies have not overcome the substantive matters of ethnics. The fundamental problem is related to imbalanced economic distribution experienced by numerous indigenous people. The demand from indigenous ethnics to be independent can be done through plurality acknowledgment in general. Research finding suggested that most of social conflicts resulted from imbalanced striking social and economics within a plural society. The region autonomy is required to empower the indigenous ethnics in various aspects of life. Plurality, in Islamic perspective, requires the ethnical empowerment policies for all groups. Proportional support toward all ethnics and religions recovering the process of social and national integration enhancement and the threats can be detected. As the majority (90%), Muslims have strategic roles toward the enhancement of social integration.

Muslim society which is in subordinate level in a variety of aspects, particularly in economics, will be equal to others (equilibrium) if they have self- awareness and try to improve weaknesses by promoting intention, moral, knowledge, ethics, skill, and fairness in competition. Besides, plurality and social integration requiring the affirmative government policy to all ethnics fairly will have positive impact on the process of social and finally national integration.

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