Religious Pluralism of the Indonesian Traditional Islamic Education Institutions

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Abstract

This paper examines the phenomenon of religious pluralism in two institutions of traditional Islamic education in Bone regency, Indonesia, i.e., al-Junediyyah Biru and al-Ikhlas Ujung. It is qualitative research using a phenomenological approach, in which the researchers focused on the pluralism in the Islamic context of Indonesia and religious pluralism elaborated in attitudes, ideas, and processes of internalization value within the Islamic boarding schools. The data of this study were obtained from non-participant observation, in-depth interviews and field notes analyzed using the three-stage model of Miles & Huberman including data display, data reduction, data verification, and conclusion. The research found that Islamic boarding schools play an essential role in shaping pluralist society. Pluralism, in the boarding schools, has been developed in the context of ideas, attitudes and thoughts of Islamic clerics (*kyais*), teachers (*ustazds*), as well as Islam learners (*santri*).

Keywords: Pluralism; Islamic education; Traditional indonesian schools.

1. Introduction

The plurality or diversity of religions and cultures in Indonesia, sociologically-anthropologically, is a social reality. Such a social capital should not counter-productive for the creation of a peaceful and harmonious national life (Amri *et al.*, 2017; Bin Tahir, 2015; Daulay, 2009; Madjid, 2013). Therefore, it is necessary to manage the awareness of the plurality of religions in the society, so that the positive potential contained in the diversity can be actualized correctly and appropriately. The most crucial thing is to provide a deep understanding, especially to the younger generation, about the importance of prioritizing tolerance and togetherness in the plurality.

In the Indonesian context, this is nothing new. Nevertheless, the study of pluralism remains an urgent thing to conduct. Abdullah (1999) says, the diversity (plurality) of religions living in Indonesia, including the diversity of religious understanding, is a historical fact that no one can deny. Pluralism exists and is needed not just for negative good, regarding its usefulness to get rid of fanaticism (Madjid, 2000; Shihab, 1997). Pluralism will be understood as the true link of diversity in the bonds of civility (genuine engagement of diversity within the bounds of civility). Even pluralism is also a necessity for the salvation of humanity.

Rachman (2010), in one of his works, puts forward three notions of contemporary pluralism that have been developed and used as the basis of analysis in theology and Islamic history. They are: The first, pluralism is an active engagement in diversity and distinction, to build a common civilization. Second, pluralism with the first sense means presupposing the acceptance of active tolerance of others. Third, pluralism is not relativism. An in-depth recognition to others will have the consequence of fully recognizing the values of the other group.

Thus, it should clearly comprehend that the roles and functions of religious education are not only to shape the religious attitudes of learners based on their own religious beliefs, but also to foster an attitude of openness not to oppose the existence of other religions to show tolerance (Sealy, 1986) . In other words, religious education, in essence, also contributes and plays an enormous role in fostering pluralism attitudes for the learners (*santri*) in the Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) (Tahir, 2017).

Education, especially religious education, is one of the most appropriate means to build awareness of religious plurality and to form inclusive religious features and attitudes far from extremism and anarchism due to ideological differences Rahardjo (1985). Because religious education, as a process of transfer of value and knowledge, plays a decisive role in transmitting religious knowledge and significant values for the development of the students' characters in order behave in a proper manner towards the reality of pluralistic religious life.

In this regard, Islamic boarding schools, as the basis of Islamic education which has become part of the Islamic history and culture of Indonesian, are certainly expected to provide an open, egalitarian, and inclusive morality education the young generations away from the tendency of radicalism and fundamentalism which have been proven to more disadvantages than advantages (Bin-Tahir and Rinantanti, 2016; Fathurrahman, 2010; Iswahyudi, 2010). The pattern of learning organized by the boarding schools, especially managed by *NU kyais*, is based on the study of

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yellow books full of diversity of opinions and perspectives of classical scholars (Nafis, 2008). This, in turn, forms a pluralistic paradigm in *santris* themselves to accept the differences and react positively with a great soul.

Based on the above phenomenon, it is imperative to carry out in-depth research to uncover the understanding and acceptance (or perhaps rejection) of 'sarongs' in the Islamic boarding schools against pluralism's ideas and thoughts, as stigmatized by the secular mainstream. This research is based on the question of what their understanding of pluralism in the context of Indonesian Islam is, and how religious pluralism is practiced in the Islamic boarding schools in Bone regency. The main objective of this study is to examine the urgency and acceptability of pluralism as a religious attitude among traditional Muslims, and at the same time try to dismiss the stereotype constructed by some Western analysts that Islamic boarding schools are the 'nests' and 'factories' of terrorists.

2. Material and Method

This research used the qualitative method and implemented with the phenomenological approach which refers to sociological-philosophical analysis. The sociological approach is intended to examine and to explain the growing perceptions of socio-educational interaction within the traditional Islamic educational institutions, i.e., the Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) in Bone regency. Meanwhile, the philosophical approach is used as an in-depth and systematic critical analysis method in studying a concept, understanding the beliefs and ideas of thought as well as strong values. Pluralism is an understanding and conception of attitude in the context of human relations, both on an individual and social scale among groups.

The data sources ware determined by using purposive sampling and focusing on human data sources, i.e., those who can provide information about the plurality of religious understanding in the Islamic boarding schools of Al-Junaidiyyah Biru and Al-Ikhlas Ujung, as the representation of traditional Islamic education institutions in Bone regency. After the data required were gathered from the informants, they were then analyzed to find the phenomenon of pluralism in understanding the teachings of religion and a positive attitude towards pluralism.

This study used three data collection techniques, i.e., library research, in-depth interview, and observation. These three techniques were carried out not only to obtain detailed explanations about the discourse of religious pluralism but also to obtain an accurate picture of the tendency of attitudes and understanding of the religious pluralism of the Islamic boarding schools.

By the above type of study, the researcher used a three-stage model of Miles and Huberman to analyze the data (Sugiyono, 2010). The activities in qualitative data analysis were done interactively and continuously from the beginning to the end. The first activity is data reduction, in which field data were reduced by summarizing, selecting and focusing on things appropriate to the research objectives. The second activity is data display, in which the data were presented in the form of interview notes, field notes and documentation notes so that the researchers can analyze them quickly and easily. The final activity is conclusion drawing or verification, in which the formulation of conclusions supported by valid evidence at the data collection stage.

3. Results and Discussion
3.1. Pluralism in the Islamic Context of Indonesia

Today, as Shihab (1997) pointed out in Inclusive Islam; religious people are faced with a new set of challenges that are not so different from what they have experienced before. Religious pluralism, internal or inter-religious conflict is a real phenomenon. Religious pluralism, in this case, should really be understood in accordance with the root and the true meaning. It is an attempt to unify and to equalize perceptions that there will be no misinterpretation or misunderstanding.

Hence, religious pluralism can basically be understood as a form of a plurality, diversity in religion, and it is a real phenomenon that must be accepted. A person can only be considered to possess such traits if he can interact positively in the pluralistic environment. In other words, the notion of religious pluralism is that every believer is required not only to recognize the existence and rights of other religions, but also to engage by making an effort to understand the differences and the equations to achieve harmony in diversity. In other words, "religious plurality" is a condition of coexistence between religions (in a wide sense) that varies within a community while maintaining the specific characteristics or teachings of each religion.

According to Abdullah, the diversity (plurality) of religions living in Indonesia, including the diversity of religious understanding is a historical fact that no one can deny. As a historical-sociological fact, the plurality cannot be understood simply by saying that our society is plural, diverse, composed of various tribes and religions. It is just a description to show the fragmentation, but not to show the understanding of pluralism Shihab (1997).

In the view of Madjid, religious pluralism is a typical term in theology. He also stated that there are three attitudes of religious dialogue which can be taken into account i.e. the first, an exclusive attitude in seeing other religions (other religions are wrong paths, misleading to followers). The second, inclusiveness (Other religions are the implicit form of our religions). The third, pluralist attitudes commonly expressed in various formulations, such as "Other religions are equally valid ways to achieve the same truth", "Other religions speak differently, but are legitimately the same truths." or 'Every religion expresses an important part of truth' (Shihab, 1997).

Understanding plurality is to place plurality as a reality. That plurality is the ontological state of cosmic creation and its contents. Plurality is God's grand design. Therefore, "we exist" together with the cosmic, then there is no other attitude for humans except to accept it as a reality or a fact. In the Holy Quran, the explanation of plurality is

directly related to the identity of human anthropology, such as religion, ethnicity, nation, language, gender and so on. This is what will underlie the emergence of acceptance attitude towards pluralism as a consequence of plurality.

The religious violence occurred in recent years in Indonesia shows that pluralism in the country has not been understood and deeply experienced by the people of Indonesia. The violence occurred in almost all aspects of life (spiral of violence) in society today actually shows how significant the actualization and the socialization of pluralism in Indonesia is since the reality of plurality is never out of the conflict.

Conceptually, the Holy Qur'an has not only provided an important path or instruction needed by Muslims to solve the universal human problems such as the reality of the plurality of human religiosity, but also demanded tolerance of the reality for the achievement of peace on earth, because Islam considers that the requirement to make harmony is the recognition of components that are naturally different.

3.2. Pluralism in Attitudes and Religious Understanding at the Islamic Boarding Schools in Bone Regency

Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) culturally is an educational institution which has its origin in Indonesian culture, and historically contains not only the concept of Islam, but also the concept of Indonesia, because the embryo such kind of education has already existed in the Hindu-Buddhist era. Islam continues preserves and Islamizes it Rahardjo (1985).

The findings of some studies found that the coaches/teachers (*ustadz*) and students (*santri*) in the Islamic boarding schools in Bone have known and familiar with the term pluralism, although at the level of philosophical discourse is not deeply understood especially by the students. They clearly understand both pluralities, as a reality or nature of something denoting differences or diversity, and religious pluralism as a notion or attitude toward the reality of religious plurality.

Fathurrahman, the leader of Al-Junaediyyah Biru Islamic boarding school, agrees that pluralism and diversity are the law of nature (*sunnatullah*) that Allah has established on all his creatures. Therefore, none of the creatures are exactly the same as the others. Man is created with differences one another. The Islamic belief affirms that Allah is the only one supreme God and never more than one. The plurality of beings essentially shows the oneness of the creator (*al-Khaliq*) (Fathurrahman, 2010).

The same thing expressed by Lukman Arake, Deputy Director of the Islamic boarding school of al-Ikhlas Ujung. According to him, the students (*santris*) are fully aware that the differences between men and women, racial, ethnic, ethnic, linguistic and religious differences (belief) are an undeniable fact. Plurality is the nature of life in nature. The unifying and uniformity of all these differences in one language or religion for example are intrinsically opposed to the natural law (*sunnatullah*) and humanity (Fathurrahman, 2010).

Both Fathurrahman and Arake, each is holding the view that every religion, whatever its form, possesses and believes in the concept of truth contained in its teachings. In other words, every religion is true according to its believer. One religion has no right to deny the truth and blame the beliefs of other faiths. But on the other hand, every adherent of religion must believe and hold on to the truth of the religion he embraces.

Judging from the implemented practice of learning, the Islamic boarding schools in Bone regency instill tolerance and openness to religious differences among the students. One of the founders of al-Junaediyyah Islamic boarding school, rejects the view that Allah Almighty actually wants only one religion embraced by all human beings, so that all forms of belief and religion considered not the religion of Allah are vanity, infidel (*kafir*) and must be eliminated from the world because it is assumed to be contrary to the wisdom of human creation and God's own justice (Muallim, 2010).

In relation to the existence of religious law in multi-religious societies such as Indonesia, both Fathurrahman and Lukman Arake acknowledge that every religion in general has its own ideology and legal order to be practiced by its adherents. However, both firmly reject negative perceptions concerning other religions such as discrediting other ideologies and religious systems of law, considering that all the rules of law not by divine revelation are vanity, injustice and heathen. Consequently, the rule of law and the value of other religions must be rejected and ultimately claim that Islamic law is the only law upheld in life even if this negative act is against the interests or even harm the other religious adherents.

According to Lukman, in al-Ihklas Islamic boarding school, the students are taught that every religion aims to realize the goodness and salvation for its adherents. So what needs to be grown in every Muslim, especially the younger generation of Islam, is the willingness to cooperate and to interact with other believers in bringing about peace and the common good, as the application of the Quranic call to unite in the *phrase sawā*.

Interestingly, all the informants interviewed by researchers, both teachers and students expressed their willingness and openness to interact socially and economically with followers of other religions except in the case of marriage. Although Islamic history indicates that the women of the *Ahl al-Kitab* is permissible to be married and Prophet Muhammad SAW married a woman of *Ahl al-Kitab*, they still disagree with interfaith marriage. This indicates that the discourse or the phenomenon of inter-religious marriage is still a very crucial issue in the Islamic boarding schools in Bone regency.

Responding to the diversity and differences in understanding the religious law, the Islamic boarding schools in Bone regency look more open and far from the impression of radical and rigid. They (teachers and students) believe that in Islam, diversity of understanding of the teachings of Islam is existed. The interpretation of the Qur'an, the dogma of theology and the product of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) are diverse, regarding the method, school of thought (*mazhab*), style and perspective of the interpreters. This implies that in Islam itself, there is a diversity of understandings which could never be united.

Therefore, every school of thought, belief and even an individual should not claim to be the correct group in understanding the teachings of Islam presented in the revelations of the Almighty God. The founders of the Islamic boarding schools revealed that what needs to be realized is an open understanding and dialogue between all groups.

A Muslim should not have a negative view of the different interpretations or ways of practicing religion (Jaya, 2013). Therefore, in the religious learning system at al-Ikhlas Islamic boarding school, Jaya emphasizes the awareness of pluralism as a basic attitude in understanding religion. According to him, in addressing the differences and pluralism of religious understanding, the students need to put forward a rational (not emotional) attitude, openness to understand the truth of others' opinions, and making substantial values (such as *mashlahah, al-'adl, tawassuth*) as a foundation in achieving the truth.

The effort to form the students' mindset and the pattern of pluralistic attitude in Islamic boarding schools is held in the following ways: 1) to give freedom to the students in expressing their opinions, 2) to direct the students to understand the opinions of others, 3) to invite the students to engage in dialogue with non-Muslims and parties who are different from them. This dialogue is not held with the aim of creating contentious, hot, emotional debates that give rise to egoism, but is aimed at educating the students to understand and to be tolerant to anyone different from them. From the perspective of educational sociology, the function of the Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) can be categorized into two things: The first, *pesantren* as an institution of social change that is an institution for changing the structures of ideas and thoughts in society. The second, *pesantren* is an institution of culture change that is an institution for changing the various cultures in society (Nafis, 2008).

In this regard, the Islamic boarding schools in Bone have embodied both functions. At the first level, the awareness of pluralism is developed in the ideas and thoughts of *kiai*, *ustazd*, and *santri*. The effective means for planting this value is through the process of learning and education which are represented in the policies and curriculum implemented in the boarding schools. At the second level, the *pesantrens* instill and develop the awareness of pluralism by getting to know and being more accustomed to the value of plurality existing in society. The habituation of the *pesantren* world with people outside of religion and belief will foster a pluralist culture of *pesantren*. For example, students are often invited to hang out and dialogue with "the other" so that will build a more open-minded paradigm. Things like this that will change the exclusive thinking and culture become more inclusive.

Familiarizing the people of *pesantren* to interact with those who have different religions and beliefs will foster a culture of pluralist *pesantren*. For example, the students are often invited to hang out or to hold a dialogue with "the other" for the sake of building a more open-minded paradigm. Such things are expected to transform the exclusive way of thinking into a more inclusive one.

Fathurrahman explicitly says, a boarding school is basically not an institution aimed at producing Islamic extremism (harsh, radical, rigid, narrow-minded Muslim generation who do not want to accept the truth of the other believes (Fathurrahman, 2010).

In Amri *et al.* (2017) view, Islamic Education in the boarding schools are aimed at providing faithful and cautious, intelligent, skilled Muslim generations who can live in a democratic and open society. Therefore, *pesantren* is a very effective system of education to internalize social values, among them is pluralism as an attitude or understanding to accept differences, which views diversity as a way of achieving the common good.

The result of such an education system can obviously see in the sociological conditions of students at al Junaediyyah Biru Islamic boarding school. According to Fathurrahman as the founder of the boarding school, and the researchers' direct observations, the students have shown a pluralistic way of life and never been come into horizontal conflicts, fights, due to differences in ethnic groups, languages and understandings of religions.

One of the students of the boarding school acknowledges the values of pluralism formed in *pesantren*, although they are not necessarily relevant to the concept of Western-style pluralism. She reveals that the lessons and religious learning system applied in the boarding school really support the establishment and the encouragement of pluralism values in the students' perspective and this will positively affect their social life interactions in the community

Similarly, Iswahyudi (2010) stated that a student of al-Ikhlas Islamic boarding school, states that after going through education at the *pesantren*, he began to understand that a Muslim should not see himself as distinct from others, more righteous, nobler and more faithful follower, and the most survived on the day of vengeance. He also recognizes that other people also do well and hate evils. Therefore, as a Muslim, Iswahyudi declares his willing and open to making friend with others whose religions are different from as long as it still conforms to the teachings of Islam.

The existence of solidarity, brotherhood, and strong and high commitment in the Islamic boarding schools are very valuable assets for the application of the pluralism value. The social structure of the boarding schools should be able to support the process of transforming the attitude and spirit of pluralism due to its unique social structure and culture which has established its own inter-personal communication system.

4. Conclusion

In the context of Indonesian Islam, pluralism is not relativism as some think, in which all religions are considered equal and relative, that everyone can reject absolute truth in every religion. This doctrine should not be interpreted as directly acknowledging the truth of all religions in its real everyday form, but the doctrine of religious pluralism emphasizes a basic notion that every religion and religious understanding have a right or a freedom to live and to express them as a way of salvation and truth, which will eventually meet on common platform that is '*Kalimantan sawa*'.

An Islamic boarding school in its role as the agent of social change; which might function to change the structures of ideas and thoughts in society, and as the agent of culture change; which might also function to change

the various cultures in the community, the boarding school is then considered very instrumental in shaping a pluralist society. In this case, pluralism has been developed in the idea and thought of *kiais*, *ustazds*, and *santries* and an effective means for planting this pluralism value are through the process of learning and education. Patterns of life and scientific tradition familiar with differences and plurality of thoughts have energetically fostered a pluralist culture of the Islamic boarding schools.

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