
DESPERATELY SEEKING UNITY: A POSTMODERN CRITIQUE

WARDAH ALKATIRI

Department of Sociology, School of Social and Political Sciences, University of
Canterbury, New Zealand

Abstract

In the direction of postmodern critique of modern nation-state characterized by, among others, homogeneity of culture and language, this article presents a case study of Indonesia which happened to be the world largest Muslim population. The nation-building process in a deeply pluralistic society of the Indonesian archipelago—of which forcing unity into diversity was a necessity—turned to be one of the greatest paradoxes. Namely: the very idea of unity for the pursuit of equity contradicts the premise of democracy because forcing unity into diversity implies denouncing differences, and thus, a violation of human rights to be different. On that account, Indonesia's struggle with diversity has falsified Huntington's thesis, according to which cultural differences necessarily tend to lead to conflict. On the contrary, the plain reality of Indonesia shows that the conflicts stemmed from nationalism and political-economic ideologies rather than cultural differences. Furthermore, through a reading of the Qur'an, I would like to bring to attention that the rights to be in different "traditions" is associated with the rights to freedom of religion, and is a part and parcel of human dignity in Islam.

Keywords: *Postmodern Critique, Nation Building, Cultural Diversity, Human Rights, Indonesian Archipelago.*

INTRODUCTION

Criticizing Modern Nation-State

There have been ongoing debates in the last few decades that the experience of modernity has not been the same for the West as for the rest of the world. For colonized societies, modernity—which was once a largely descriptive account of the social and cognitive transformations that first occurred in the West—came to be regarded as a largely “normative account” (Featherstone 1991). Thus, there was the imperative of colonized societies to follow modernization at the expense of local contexts. This article further shows that the experience of Western democracies does not apply similarly to the West as it does to the multi-ethnic colonized societies, thanks to postmodernity. Only after we arrived at this understanding could such a critique of “modern” nation-state model be propounded.

Postmodernism runs counter to modernism which adheres to the realist doctrine. While modernism is characterized by the acceptance that general laws and truths may be reached by way of reason, science, and technology, and thus progress is possible, postmodernism opposes these theses in many ways. Postmodernism accepts relativity as the only meaningful category and bans the very category of truth from intellectual discourse, thus rejecting the idea of progress itself in favor of local, unique, personal, contextualized “truths”. Against this background, the rise of conflicts in multi-ethnic societies in post-colonial countries revealed the inadequacy of the modern nation-state model of nation-building and universal individual rights to achieve equality and social justice. Dersso writes elaborately on how ethnic-based claims for substantive equality, justice, and equitable political inclusion and socio-economic order continue to result in communal rivalries in Africa, despite the heavy centralization of nation-building processes that the African states have undertaken. In his analysis, Dersso examines the nature of the basic structure of the post-colonial African states as inherited from the colonial states. He seeks to explain why most African states have

failed to receive the acceptance of members of all the constituent ethno-cultural groups. He further examines why the nation-building process has engendered conflicts, instead of serving as a basis for social cooperation and national integration (Dersso 2012).

In this article, I present a correspondence between the experiences of African states and that of Indonesia—with “ethno-cultural” diversity in Africa’s case comparable to “religious” diversity in Indonesia’s case—and with “tribal” remnants of the primitive past being the main targets of nation-building project in Africa was comparable to Islam in Indonesia being the main target of the nation-building project through the secularization of the religion. From that vantage point, a thesis of Indonesian conflicts along lines of religion can be put forward as follows. Contrary to common wisdom, it is the concept of modern nation-state and its state-centric nation-building process that should be held responsible—rather than the religion itself—for the development of intolerant attitudes among Indonesian societies, Muslims in particular.

Alongside Dersso in Africa (Dersso 2012), Hikmat Budiman presents historical records of Indonesian government’s policies on religion and culture, which explain the epistemic background—a social construction—behind the development of cultures of “intolerance” within the Indonesian society at large (Budiman 2014). Furthermore, while in Africa “the separation of state and ethnicity” as Kymlicka terms it (Kymlicka 1995), “precludes any legal or governmental recognition of ethnic groups, or any use of ethnic criteria in the distribution of rights, resources, and duties” (Dersso 2012), this article highlights the history of suppression of political Islam in Indonesia in favor of “the separation of the state and the church”. Taken together, this article offers a sociological premise as an explanation for the rising tensions between Muslim and Christian groups, and between the Sunni majority and the Ahmadi or Shi’ite groups in present-day Indonesia. In sum, this article seeks to explain Indonesian struggle with diversity within the broader context of ethno-cultural conflicts in colonized and post-colonial world at large.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Imperative of Nation-Building

One of the most fundamental problems post-colonial states were faced with at independence was how to address the demands of their diverse communities, who were incorporated—often by force—into large nation-states under the arbitrarily contrived colonial boundaries and structures (Bodley 1990; S. V. R. Nasr 2001; Ricklefs et al. 2010; Pringle 2010; Dersso 2012). In case of Indonesia, when independence from colonial power was finally achieved, the Indonesian people were not really sure who they were—whether they belonged to their regional (Southeast Asian), or ethnic, or religious, or ideological identity (Alkatiri 2016). The same situation applied to Africans. Dersso noted:

What made this problem particularly formidable is that almost all African states, as the product of the colonial process and its system of divide and rule, lack national cohesion. Not only did their populations lack any shared consciousness of belonging to one country, but they were also ethno-culturally divided and socio-economically and politically unequal. The fragility of the post-colonial states was further compounded by the weak institutional foundation and capacity of the independent governments, a situation exacerbated by extremely underdeveloped and fragmented economies (Dersso 2012; Nwabueze 1973).

Given that, nation-building became the most plausible top agenda of the post-colonial states. In this regard, Dersso noted that the independent governments had two options. The first was based on the dominant model of the nation-state that had been popular at that time, while the other was what may be referred to as a multicultural model of nation-building exemplified by Switzerland and India. However, with the conditions and arguments of Africa as follows (Dersso 2012), the wholesale adoption of the dominant model of nation-state was opted for by all African states.

1. There was deep ethno-cultural division in the population.
2. There was lack of shared political history among diverse ethnicities.
3. It was widely held at that time that African ethnicity, dubbed as tribalism, was an impediment to modernization and national unity.

Against that background, African post-colonial states undertook the assimilationist and integrationist approach of the state-centered nation-building processes. For the particular context of Africa—which I will argue to be comparable with Indonesia—the following political paradigms were dominant at the time of independence of post-colonial states. It is upon these rationales that the nation-state model appeared as the only legitimate form of political organization both normatively and for the context of Africa and Indonesia.

Firstly, the possession of a single homogeneous national identity was seen as a necessary condition for generating the sense of common purpose required for democratic government. Dersso noted further:

For influential 19th-century liberals such as John Stuart Mill, a democratic system of government is possible only where the people of a country share a common sense of nationhood. Mill put it thus: “Free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities. Among a people without fellow-feeling, especially if they read and speak different languages, the united public opinion necessary to the working of representative government, cannot exist”. According to him, therefore, it is “a necessary condition of free institutions that the boundaries of government should coincide in the main with those of nationalities” (Dersso 2012).

Along this line, French philosopher Rousseau earlier expounded, a more powerful argument on the need for homogeneity as a condition necessary for popular sovereignty or the “general will”, which is the basis for the legitimacy of the modern nation-

state. According to Rousseau, it will be difficult to form a “general will” in a society where “factions arise and partial associations are formed”. Thus he saw the cohesion and homogeneity of citizens as a necessary condition for the formation of the “general will” as an expression of popular sovereignty. He put it, The greater harmony that reigns in public assemblies, the more, in other words, that public opinion approaches unanimity, the more the general will is dominant (Rousseau 1968; Dersso 2012).

He even went as far as saying that a state needs a “religion”, that is, “the religion of the citizen”, which is:

The religion established in a single country; it gives that country its gods and its special tutelary deities; it has its dogmas, its rituals, its external forms of worship laid down by law; and to the one nation which practices this religion, everything outside is infidel, alien, barbarous; it extends the rights and duties of man only so far as it extends its altars (Rousseau 1968; Dersso 2012).

Dersso commented that Rousseau’s paradigm favors not only a majoritarian system of government but also insists on the necessity for a state of achieving socio-cultural and linguistic homogeneity. In France, it offered the philosophical foundation to pursue a homogenizing nation-building process that turned peasants and distinct communities in the country into French men and women (Dersso 2012). Apparently, in post-colonial states it did not work as well.

Secondly, for the unity and political stability of a modern constitutional state, the possession of a commonly shared identity by a state and its nationals was seen as necessary. Therefore, a “nation” was needed as the basis of the state. This is because, as Ernest Barker argued:

There must be a general social cohesion which serves, as it were, as a matrix, before the seal of legal association can be effectively imposed on a population. If the seal of the State is stamped on a

population which is not held together in the matrix of a common tradition and sentiment, there is likely to be a cracking and splitting, as there was in Austria-Hungary (Barker 1951).

Thirdly, nation-state serves the functional requirement of the modern society. Gellner argues that the modern state requires a culturally homogenous society for its effective running, given that members of society must conduct transactions with each other, run the bureaucracy, operate the same court system, and the like (Gellner 1983). Consequently, it necessitates a standardized language and common cultural attributes and historical symbols shared by all the people. Thus, Taylor noted further that the constitutional state must enforce a kind of homogeneity of language and culture through the education system as well as the media (Taylor 1998). Henceforth, in nearly all post-colonial African states:

1. National unity was pursued through homogenization. National unity in terms of homogeneity and oneness was highly praised, whereby ethno-cultural diversity was seen as a weakness and antithetical to the process of nation-building.
2. Heavy centralization and restriction of political and ethno-cultural pluralism were prevalent. The constitutions, laws, and development policies of these states have all been used as instruments in a highly centralized, unitarist, and homogenizing nation-building process. Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan observed:

“Too often, the necessity of building national unity was pursued through the heavy centralization of political and economic power and the suppression of political pluralism” (Annan 1998).

These paradigms were fully appropriated by the post-colonial African elites. In comparison, the following section highlights the akin nation-building process in Indonesia.

Indonesia. Land of Thousands Island

From the sixteenth century onward, the history of Southeast Asia has been marked by colonial aggression and exploitation by almost all the great imperial powers (England, France, Holland, Portugal, Spain, and the USA). Indonesia was a Dutch colony. It was formed from the nationalized colony of the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, VOC), which came under the administration of the Dutch government in 1800. Most Indonesians believe that they were under the Dutch for nearly 350 years, with the arrival of VOC in 1609 as its starting point. The archipelago was one of the most valuable European colonies and contributed to the Dutch's prominence in spice and cash crop trades. Even if some would disagree to accuse the Christian missionary activities of having been part and parcel of Western colonialism, historically, it is true that much of the Christian missionary activity happened during the heydays of the colonial enterprise (Evers 2014). To deal with the plural population in the archipelago, politics of segregation was imposed. Budiman highlights historical events related to policies in the course of pre-independence Indonesia (Budiman 2014).

The colonial government divided the population into groups that were strictly monitored and was extremely discriminatory. *Algemene Bepligen van Wetgeving* (General Regulation on Legislature Principles) of the Dutch colonial divided the population of the East Indies into two categories based on religious orientations, namely, European, who embrace Christianity; and natives, for that of all non-European. In 1885, colonial government divided the population not based on religion but on race into three groups: European, In-lander, and Foreign Orientals (Indian, Arab, Chinese). On 17 August 1945, Indonesia proclaimed its independence. The archipelago turned to be a country of cultural diversity with some 300 ethnic groups. Migration, trade, colonization, diffusion, and adaptation have given rise to these distinct cultural groups across this country, which

consists of a large archipelago of more than 17.000 islands straddling the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. The largest islands are Java, Kalimantan, Sumatra, Sulawesi, and Papua (formerly Irian Jaya, which is the western part of New Guinea). Indonesia's total land area measures 1.9 million square kilometers (750.000 square miles). This is three times the area of Texas, almost eight times the area of the United Kingdom and roughly fifty times the area of the Netherlands. Apart from fertile land suitable for agriculture, Indonesia was, at the time of its independence in 1945, rich in a range of natural resources, varying from petroleum, natural gas, and coal, to metals such as tin, bauxite, nickel, copper, gold, and silver. It is important to note that the country has also been characterized by cohabitation of both Muslims as the majority (slightly more than 87% in 2009) and Christians (less than 10% in 2009), together with two other significant minorities, i.e. Hindu (2%) and Buddhist (1%). Both Indonesian Muslims and Christians equally claimed their role in the nation-building. Notably, each version was at odds with the other.

Forcing Unity into Diversity

After the independence, multicultural setting and all kinds of diversity were seen as threats to national stability. Sukarno, the first President of Indonesia, seemed to be preoccupied with the idea of "nationhood" and came up with the notions: "Natie" and "Nationale Staat", defined as:

Nation of Indonesia embraces entire individuals who according to the geopolitics decreed by Allah coexists in the union of all islands across Indonesia from the Northern tip of Sumatra to the farthest end of Irian (Budiman 2014).

What has been reflected by Sukarno invoked Francis Deng's observation of African states:

Unity was postulated in a way that assumed a mythical homogeneity amidst diversity (Deng 1997).

In addition, Sukarno's doctrine of *Natie* and *Nationale Staat* are the veracities of Benedict Anderson's "imagined community" in the literal sense of the term (Anderson 1983). In his passion for unity, Sukarno strived hard to formulate a platform that could mediate the pre-Indonesia nations (Budiman 2014). This too, should invoke Renan who said that "nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness; it invents nations where they do not exist" (Renan 1882). Toward that end, Sukarno established *Pancasila* (Sanskrit: five principles) as a state ideology that was hoped to become a foundation for national identity. It was hoped that it would be a guide in creating a harmonious society based on religious tolerance, humanism, nationalism, democracy and social justice. *Pancasila* was arguably prescribed to serve the function of 'religion of the citizen' as conceptualized by Rousseau.

Nationalism was the dominant force of Sukarno's regime, with Sukarno as its chief commander. In 1957, Sukarno declared Guided Democracy, a non-system of personal, authoritarian rule. He assumed, and many Indonesians agreed, that he alone could achieve national unity (Pringle 2010). Thus, his famous statement:

"I have made myself the meeting place of all trends and ideologies. I have blended, blended, and blended them until finally they became the present Sukarno" (Latif 2008).

It is worth noting the following remarks, In the same vein, of African leaders:

"In three or four years, no one will remember the tribal, ethnic or religious rivalries which, in the recent past, cause so much damage to our country and its population" (Touré 1959).

"We must insist that in Ghana, in the higher reaches of our national life, there should be no reference to Fantes, Ashantis, Ewes, fas, dagombas, stranger's, and so further, but we should call ourselves Ghanians—all brothers and sisters, members of the same community—the state of Ghana" (Nkrumah 1961).

On the other hand, Sukarno was also aware of the incompatibility between Islam and the idea of a nation-state. In one of his speeches, Sukarno rhetorically asked, "...can the Nationalist movement be joined with the Islamic movement, which essentially denies the nation?... With full conviction, I answer: 'Yes!'" (Sukarno 1970 in Burhanudin and Dijk 2003). The government banned and eliminated Islamic political power, and in the 1960s also began to restrict the political activities of Muslim politicians (Hasbullah 2002). Many activists were put in jail. People became aware that his Guided Democracy was tyrannical, and therefore had to be overthrown (Noer 1987; Hasbullah 2002). Hasbullah further noted that Muslim hatred of Sukarno and his chief supporters, the communist party (PKI), was great, and perhaps this was why Muslims were active in helping the New Order demolish the Old Order.

After Sukarno, the second President, Suharto and his New Order were widely known for its emphasis on "unity" as well. Because the Javanese ethnic was the most dominant, the government attempted to homogenize the nation and create a common culture, symbols and values based on Javanese cultural style and values, thus, incited a bitter indignation on the part of the Outer Islanders. For them, nationalism was merely Javanization as part of the hegemonization of the ruler in Jakarta. Beginning in 1978, a national indoctrination programme, P4 (*Pedoman Penghayatan dan Pengamalan Pancasila*), was undertaken to inculcate the values of Pancasila in all citizens, especially school children and civil servants. Pancasila, as an expression of nationalism, was now used as an instrument of social and political control. Further, the regime stipulated the *azas tunggal* (single ideological foundation) policy which obliged all associations (including the Ulama Council, Majelis Ulama Indonesia, MUI) to be based on Pancasila and nothing else (Bruinessen 2013).

Budiman shows that the concept of a unitary state, which implies that the government places priority on preserving political sovereignty, often advanced at the expense of diversity of language,

ethnic, local differences, indigenous normative ordering, and religious law (Budiman 2014). He also highlights three political instruments that the government has invented in the past, which, in my view, turned to sow the seeds of intolerance of the nation to deal with diversity in post-modern and globalized world era in the future. They are:

1. *Firstly*, forcing unity into diversity whereby the homogenization impulse was accompanied by rhetoric and practices that restrict diversity in terms of both political and ethno-cultural pluralism.
2. *Secondly*, the stipulation of official religions whereby only five religions were acknowledged by the state.
3. *Thirdly*, the standardization of ethno-cultural diversity whereby diversity was encouraged not as recognition of differences but as a means of promoting economics of the state's project on tourism.

Down to this day, Indonesian political figures continued to claim that, in fact, Indonesia is a miniature of the world's diversity (Alles 2016):

If, and when Indonesians will succeed as a nation, we will have to be optimistic on the fact that peace and harmony can be possible in every corner of the world.

Pancasila has always been glorified to be the "secret recipe" of its success story:

Pancasila and Bhineka Tunggal Ika [Unity in Diversity, Indonesia's national motto] can be a model for future relations between various religions and civilizations. Our experience with Pancasila demonstrates that it was the right choice (Alles 2016).

More importantly to the topic of this article, Pancasila is believed to be the solution that provides rooms for interreligious dialogue between Islam and Christianity (Intan 2006).

Pancasila is the only viable alternative if Indonesia is to maintain its unity and its diversity. In dealing with the two conflicting ideologies, the solution offered by Pancasila is that Indonesia would be neither a secular state, where religion is absolutely separated by the state, nor religious one, where the state is organized based on particular faith. In short, both Pancasila and “secularization as differentiation” allow us to avoid choosing between a secular and a narrowly religious state (Intan 2006).

However, this article would like to remind that in reality, the history of Indonesia is characterized by religious warfare, interreligious conflicts, and political religious contrasts (Pringle 2010; Ricklefs et al. 2010; Bruinessen 2013). The dispute over seven words that disappeared from the first principle of Pancasila, namely, “*kewajiban menjalankan syariat Islam bagi pemeluk-pemeluknya—the obligation for adherents of Islam to carry out Sharia*” has been and continues to be the sorepoint in the memory of conservative Muslims against the Secular and the Christian groups altogether, since Indonesia’s independence in 1945 (Pringle 2010). A specific booklet was written elaborately on this issue by Bambang Setyo (Setyo 2011). Down the years, as the country’s development has only brought about a wider gap between the well-off Christian minority and the deprived Muslim majority, Pancasila once again became the bone of contention—and the dispute over the seven words resurfaced. The State’s inability to bring prosperity has posed Pancasila to a competition with religious ideologies (Sulaiman 2011). Moreover, to the conservative viewpoint of the oppositionist Muslim groups (Islamists generally), an obedience to a purely secular Pancasila is always an act of making partner to God (*shirk*)—the greatest sin in Islam. Not the majority, though. The dominant discourse was modernist and broadly supportive of the government’s development programme. Thus, Pancasila is regarded as a Taghut. Refers to idolatry, or to the worship of anything other than Allah.

To highlight the point of dispute, the following section provides chronological events of the nation-building and the development of Pancasila, from two opposing viewpoints: one of the Muslims, and the other of the Christians. It demonstrates how the underpinning philosophy of respecting rights to be in different traditions in the Sharia law was misunderstood by the secular and Christian factions. I will argue further in section 3 that the different conception of religion between Islam and the European has been at the heart of the matter.

The Seven Words that Never Went Away

Pancasila was developed in the final days of the Japanese occupation (1942-1945), forged by nationalists to create a social contract among the citizens of the future nation of Indonesia. A federation of reformist and traditionalist Muslims, Masyumi (Majelis Syuro Muslimin Indonesia—Consultative Council of Indonesian Muslims), was established sponsored by the Japanese military authorities and explicitly created to support the Japanese in World War 2. Masyumi was born in 1943 and was intended to draw on a genuine Islamic base. Since October 1944, Japan's position in the war became more critical, and its military government in Indonesia had to take a concrete step to fulfil the promise of independence already given. On March 1, 1945, the Japanese established an Investigating Committee for Preparatory Work for Indonesian Independence (BPUPKI) to draft a constitution. The representatives of Masyumi were present in the committee with the other secular and Christian nationalists. The draft of the future state ideology, Pancasila, was signed on June 22, 1945, as the Djakarta Charter by the future President, Sukarno, the future vice President, Hatta, and others, including seven Muslim politicians as the representatives of Masyumi. On August 17, 1945, the independence of Indonesia was declared by Sukarno and Hatta in Jakarta. However, one day after the proclamation, seven of the words on the first principle (*sila*) of Pancasila stipulated in the Djakarta

Charter (signed two months earlier), disappeared. In the *charter*, it was specified as “Belief in God with obligation for adherents of Islam to carry out *Sharia* (Islamic Law)” but in the constitution proclaimed on August 18, 1945, it was altered to the simple “Belief in God.” The intrigues behind the incident were complex.

To the Christians’ viewpoint, the original *sila* seemed to imply that the state would be responsible for implementing this provision, and would thus be some sort of quasi-Islamic State.

From the beginning, the Christians took part fully in the process of formulating the Pancasila or the Five Principles of statehood. It was primarily a result of Christian insistence that there should be no discriminatory treatment of any group that seven words in the original draft of the preamble of the constitution, which would have made it imperative for Muslims to abide by the *Sharia*, were dropped few hours before the ratification of the constitution on 18 August 1945. Without much theological reflection, the Christians in Indonesia from 1945 on were protagonists of equal rights for all citizens, irrespective of creed, race and ethnic origin, as expressed in the Pancasila (Simatupang 1985).

They [Christians, my addition] insisted on a revision of the Jakarta Charter by deleting these seven words that gave advantage to Islam; without this they would stand outside of the Republic of Indonesia. Ngelow argues that the removal of the seven words of Jakarta Charter was the Christian contribution defending the nation’s unity and constituted a historical moment in which Christians played an important role in the political arena (Setyawan 2014).

When the second term of the BPUPKI plenary sessions was held in mid July 1945..., some of the members, including Johannes Latuharhary from the Christian faction, expressed their objection to the seven-word clause. He warned that the clause would bring a serious danger to the other religions and would bring disorder to the people’s customs in regions such as Minangkabau and

Maluku; meanwhile the Islamic faction argued that it would not cause any danger or disorder. After an endless debate the sessions were closed without any clear agreement or consensus. Soekarno closed the debate by recalling that the controversial clause was a compromise between the Islamic and the nationalist factions. On this basis he appealed that the main points in the Preamble be accepted. ...Soekarno once again appealed... "I know that this means an enormous sacrifice, very especially from the patriotic brothers Latuharhary and Maramis who are not Muslim. I beg with a weeping heart that you are willing to make this offer to our country and nation, a sacrifice for our desire that we can solve this quickly so that the independent Indonesia can be quickly in peace" (Aritonang and Steenbrink 2008).

It was reported that one day after the proclamation of independence on August 17, 1945, the Japanese Navy intervened, claiming that Christians in its area of responsibility, Eastern Indonesia, would separate themselves if the seven words were not deleted (Pringle 2010; Aritonang and Steenbrink 2008). Yet, the seven words do not mention an Islamic state. They merely say that Muslims, not anyone else, would be bound by the tenets of Sharia law.

Finally, the seven words were aborted in response to objections by Indonesian Christians. For Indonesian Muslims, on the other hand, the loss of those seven words has stripped Pancasila bare of its spiritual meaning.

Discussion: Human Dignity in Islam

To open up a discussion on what social arrangements that could best serve the intrinsic nature of human—that is grouping and creating multiplicity—in the most-likely postmodern and post-Westphalian future, this section explores what Islam teaches about human dignity concerning human rights to freedom of religion. It begins with bringing to attention the differing concepts of 'religion' referred to by the Qur'an, and the one understood in the Western

tradition which has inspired the whole conceptions of modern nation-states and the secularization theory.

The Arabic term of religion, *al-dīn*, carries a lexical meaning of “obedience, reward and subjugation”—which are closely associated with “tradition”. In this sense, *al-dīn* means at once religion and tradition in its most universal sense. Further, it:

Is at once *al-dīn* in the meta-historical transcendent reality, which embraces all aspects of religion and its ramifications, *al-Sunnah*, or that which, based upon sacred models, has become tradition as this word is usually understood, and *al-silsilah*, or the chain which relates each period, episode or stage of life and thought in the traditional world to the Origin, as one sees so clearly in Sufism. Tradition, therefore, is like a tree, the roots of which are sunk through revelation in the Divine Nature and from which the trunk and branches have grown over the ages (S. H. Nasr 1994).

In contrast, the “religion” term comes from the Latin “*religare*” which has the root meaning “to tie” or “to bind”. It is what binds humans to God. The different notions of religion between the West and the Oriental traditions in general, has been identified by few scholars in religious philosophy such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr. According to Nasr, the limited meaning that the term “religion” has gained in European language has caused certain authors in religious philosophy to limit this term only to the Western religions, especially in their exoteric expressions, distinguishing them from Hinduism, Taoism, and the like which they call “tradition” rather than religion (Kamali 2012). In this article, I argue that the long-standing feud between Indonesian Christians and Muslims over “the seven words” is an implication of the differing conception of religion between Christianity and Islam, in which the concept of religion as *al-dīn* (tradition) was not well addressed. Moreover, the feud can also be best interpreted through the lens of Christian tradition that insists the “separation of the state

and the church” which was adopted by secularism, and which stands at odds with Islamic tradition.

In what follows, three references from the Qur’an that are often quoted to defend rights to freedom of religion in Islam, are explored to argue that the freedom implies freedom to be in different traditions (*Dīn*) as well.

1. Say, “O disbelievers,
 2. I do not worship what you worship
 3. Nor are you worshippers of what I worship
 4. Nor will I be a worshipper of what you worship
 5. Nor will you be worshipper of what I worship
 6. For you is your *Dīn*, for me is my *Dīn*”
- (QS. Al-Kāfirūn [109]:1-6)

Let there be no compulsion in Dīn. The right course has become distinct from the wrong. So, whoever disbelieve in Taghut and believes in Allah has grasped the most trustworthy handhold that will never break. Allah is All Hearer, All-Knower.

(QS. Al-Baqarah [2]:256)

Those verses suggest that even to the extent of “non-believing” (the *kufr*), Islam teaches to let it go, which implies respects for human rights to hold different opinions. This principle underlies the inclusivity of Sharia law, in which the non-Muslims are free and protected to retain their *Dīn*; and the politics of Islam exemplified by the Medina convention. The logic behind freedom of religion in Islam is buttressed further by a thought-provoking verse of the Qur’an as follows:

And if your Lord had willed, He could have made mankind one community; but they will not cease to differ.

(QS. Hūd [11]:118)

For the sake of further discussion, in what follows I would like to highlight that freedom of religion is encompassed within

the overarching concept human dignity in Islam. Human dignity is hardly a universal concept. It is a composite concept that can embrace a variety of objective values as well as those that may be relative and subjective within the context of particular legal and cultural traditions (Kamali 2012). The most explicit affirmation of human dignity (*karamah*) is found in the Qur'an, in a clear declaration:

Verily We have honored the children of Adam. We carry them on the land and the sea, and have made provision of good things for them, and have preferred them above many of those whom We created with a marked preferment.

(QS. Al-Isrā' [17]:70)

Elsewhere, the manifestations of human dignity are declared by the Qur'an, for instance, the spiritual ranking of human beings above that of the angels, in which the angels and the Iblis (satan) were asked to bow down to Adam:

And We have certainly created you [on Mankind] and given you [human] form. Then We said to the angels "Prostrate to Adam"; so they prostrated, except for iblis. He was not of those who prostrated.

(QS. Al-A'raf [7]:11)

Recall when God said unto the angels: I'm creating a mortal from a ringing potter clay made of decayed mud. So when I have made him perfect and breathed unto him of My Spirit, then you must fall down before him in prostration.

(QS. Al-Hijr [15]:28-29)

These verses suggest that human dignity is central to Islam, even though "human rights" in the Western sense of the term—namely, rights held simply by virtue of being a human being—are often quite foreign to Islam as to other non-Western cultural traditions. Finally, it is worth noting a contrast concepts of human between the Qur'an and the Darwinian paradigm held in the West, in which races were

thought to represent different stages of evolutionary advancement with the white race at the top.

O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted.
(QS. Al-Ḥujurāt [49]:13)

The Qur'an tells that God created mankind in races and tribes so that they know one and another—not to conquer, or convert, or exploit.

CONCLUSION

At least three conclusions can be drawn and discussed further from the narrative of Indonesian diversity and the concept of religion in Islam. *First*, based on the narratives of diversity in Africa and especially Indonesia, it would appear that contrary to Huntington's thesis which suggests that cultural differences necessarily tend to lead to conflict. Indonesia shows that culture and religion do not appear as a single factor of conflict. Rather, the authority's "desire to control" is the one that turned out to be the major cause. *Second*, from this perspective, Huntington's proposition appears as a kind of "power-trip"—that is, an expression of fear of losing control. From the exploration of Islam, it suggests that an understanding of religion as tradition may contribute to the conflict and peace studies. *Third*, for the postmodern aspirations that celebrates diversity, the understanding of human dignity in Islam, whereby rights to freedom of religion are extended to assume the rights to be in different traditions, shall contribute to perfection of social humanization.

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