

ISLAM AND LOCAL CULTURE IN TIMOR

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Abstract

Religious teachings come from Allah's revelation while culture is a human creation. However, religion and culture are two things that influence each other. Religious values and cultural values penetrate and shape the character of the community who adhere to them. This paper is a study of the life of Islam in East Nusa Tenggara Province in its interaction with local culture. Muslims in Timor who come from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds are people who are devout in practicing their religious faith. But on the other hand, they also stick to and obey their culture. In its embodiment, religion purifies culture and culture forms the character of society to be loyal to their religious faith.

Keywords: *Islam, local culture, Timor*

A. Introduction

In the midst of the large influx of religious conservatism that has hit Indonesia in recent times, the relationship between religion and culture is likely to become an increasingly acute problem. Agenda of purification of religious teachings promoted by the conservatives have escalated towards intolerant, authoritarian, even fascist behaviors.

In the socio-anthropological perspective, the intersection between religion and culture is a necessity. As a product that is divine, religion is certainly claimed as a set of pure and authentic teachings. However, it should be remembered that the religious entity which is claimed to be pure and authentic must require cultural-sociological means to reach humans.

It is in this context that the intersection between religion and culture is inevitable. So, it is natural that a religion is identical with the culture of a certain

society. Hinduism, for example, is synonymous with Indian culture. Christianity is closely related to the culture of European or Western society. Likewise, Islam can hardly be separated from the culture of Arab society. This identification is inseparable from the geographic and sociological context in which religion was born or passed down. In the next phase, when religion spreads throughout the world, contact with various cultural entities is inevitable.

This paper examines the relationship between Islam and local culture in Timor. Islam as a religion has norms and values that are found in the Qur'an. However, in its embodiment, Islam, like other religions, cannot be separated from the influence of the cultural values of the local community that have been embodied and lived for generations before religion came to offer new values.

B. The Essence of Religion and Culture

According to Emilie Durkheim, “religion is a whole whose parts depend on one another. Religion consists of beliefs, creeds and acts of worship which are all related to holy things and bind followers in a society, which is called a church”.¹ Meanwhile a German philosopher of criticism named Emmanuel Kant in his book, *Religion within the Limits of Reason*, asserts that religion is a feeling of being obliged to carry out God's commands.² According to TM Hasbi Asshidiqi, religion is a rule set by Allah to attract and guide His people to be strong minded and obey the policies that exist in it so that humans can gain happiness in the world and the hereafter. In a similar vein, Abu Ahmadi asserts that religion is a message that was conveyed by God to the Prophet as a guide for humans to be used by humans in carrying out real life procedures and regulating relationships with others and responsibilities to Allah, to society and the surrounding environment.³

Like religion, culture also has many meanings. Culture is interpreted as a way of life that is found in a group of people and handed down from generation to

¹ Adam Kuper, *Ensiklopedi Ilmu-ilmu Sosial* (Jakarta: Raja Grafindi Persada, 2000), p. 914

² Dadang Kahmad, *Sosiologi Agama* (Bandung: Youth Rosda Karya, 2002), p. 16

³ *Ibid*, p. 26

generation. In culture there is a pattern of life that grows and develops in a group of people which regulates that each individual understands what to do, and to regulate human behavior in interacting with other humans.⁴ Koentjaraningrat defines culture as all systems of ideas, ideas, tastes, actions, and works produced by humans in social life which will later be claimed by humans by way of learning. Meanwhile, according to Selo Soemardjan and Soelaiman Soemardi, culture is all the work, taste and creation of the community. Works include products of technology and other materials, taste includes the human soul in harmony with social norms and values, while creativity includes cognitive and mental abilities to practice what one knows.⁵ Ki Hajar Dewantara defines culture as the fruit of human mind which is the result of human struggle against two strong influences, namely age and nature, which are evidence of the triumph of human life to overcome various obstacles and difficulties in life and their livelihoods to achieve safety and happiness which in their birth is orderly and peaceful.⁶

The classic definition of culture according to Sir Edward Tylor is a whole complex of knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs and all other abilities and habits acquired by a person as a member of society. To put it more simply, culture is everything that members of a society learn and experience together socially. A person accepts culture as a social heritage and in turn he can reshape the culture and introduce changes which then become part of the inheritance of the next generation.⁷ Meanwhile, Kneller emphasizes that culture is a way of life that has been developed by members of society.⁸ Culture is thus a social value and social norm which then influences the level of knowledge and is also the work, taste and creation of the community. In everyday life, culture is abstract, but its manifestation can be seen from the birth of a language or behavior patterns which are all aimed at the continuity of the community life.

⁴ Paul B. Horton, *Sosiologi* (Jakarta: Erlangga, 1996), p. 124

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 125

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 57

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 58

⁸ Yaya Suriana, *Pendidikan Multikultural* (Bandung: Pustaka Setia, 2002), p. 84-85

1. Relationship between Religion and Culture

Cultural activities as physical activities that are realized, understood, and planned are closely related to values. Human action as a cultural activity is not just a matter of physical matter because it contains one goal as the incarnation of an idea. It is even a very broad field of activity, covering various aspects of human life, social, economic, political, education, art, science, and technology, as well as activities to create facilities for human efforts to carry out religious teachings. Everyone has the ability to do things differently in both quality and quantity.⁹

According to Kuntowijoyo, religion and culture are two things that interact and influence each other. First, religion influences culture in its formation; its value is religion, but its symbol is culture. Second, culture can influence religious symbols, and third, culture can replace value systems and religious symbols.¹⁰ Religion and culture have two things in common, namely, both are value system and symbol system, and both are easily threatened whenever there is a change. Both religion and culture basically provide insights and perspectives in responding to life in accordance with God's will and humanity and creating a purposeful social order.

Although religion and culture are closely related because they both regulate social life and are interrelated, religion and culture must be distinguished. The most significant difference is that religion is a teaching that regulates life in relation to God and others. Meanwhile, culture is a social order which is regulated or formed by humans themselves for the sake of mutual continuity.

There are several mindsets that view the relationship between religion and culture differently: First, the radical attitude sees religion as opposed to culture. This is a radical and exclusive stance, emphasizing the conflict between religion and culture. According to this view, all the situations and condition people against the wishes and will of the religion. Therefore, humans must choose religion or culture because one cannot serve two masters. Thus, all practices in cultural elements must

⁹ Musa Asharie, *Manusia Pembentuk kebudayaan dalam al Qur'an* (Yogyakarta: Lembaga Studi Filsafat Islam, 1992), p. 113

¹⁰ Kuntowijoyo, *Paradigma Islam* (Bandung: Bandung, 1991), p. 235-236

be rejected when associated with religion. Second, the accommodative attitude which sees religion as belongs to culture. This attitude shows the harmony between religion and culture. Third, a mixed attitude that places religion above culture. This attitude shows an attachment between religion and culture. Human life must be oriented towards the divine and human ends; human life must have two goals at once. Fourth, the attitude of renewal which shows that religion must renew society and everything that is connected to it. This does not mean making a new understanding of culture; it is renewing cultural output. Therefore, if religious people want to practice cultural elements, it is necessary to improve them so that they do not conflict with religious teachings. Due to the development and progress of society, every time new cultural results emerge. Therefore, efforts to renew culture must be continuous. In a sense, if local people are influenced by cultural products from outside their socio-cultural community, then they are obliged to renew them so that they can be accepted, suitable, and appropriate when functioning or using them.¹¹

2. Culture in Islam

Culture in Islam is the manners or ethics that apply in Muslim life in general. *Adab* is good manners revealed by Allah in the Qur'an and sent down through the angel Jibril to be conveyed to the Prophet of the end of time, namely the Prophet Muhammad. Allah made the Prophet Muhammad as the best role model for his people.¹²

Prior to the arrival of Islam, the *jabiliyah* (ignorant) Arab society had many cultures that were against Islamic teachings. One of them was the worship of idols in belief to worship God who always protect them. Therefore, the Prophet Muhammad and his guidance in the form of the Qur'an were sent to straighten out the mistakes of the *jabiliyah* Arab population at that time.

¹¹ Moh. Asror Yusuf (editor), *Agama sebagai Kritik Sosial* (Yogyakarta: IRCiSoD, 2006), p. 126

¹² Hasan Hanafi, et al, *Islam dan Humanisme* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2007), p. 214

Islam allows several human customs that are not against the Shari'a and Islamic manners or are in line with it. Therefore, the Prophet Muhammad did not erase all the culture and customs of Arab society that existed before the arrival of Islam. However, the Prophet Muhammad prohibited cultures that contained elements of *shirk*, such as worship of ancestors, and cultures that were contrary to Islamic manners.¹³ So, as long as the customs and culture do not contradict Islamic teachings, they are permissible but if they have elements of *shirk* or something that is not in accordance with Islamic law then they are prohibited (*haram*). So, it can be concluded that local culture can be followed and needs to be preserved as long as it does not come out of the context of Islamic Sharia teachings. However, if it leads to *shirk*, religious deviation, and religious destruction or contamination, then it should not be followed. Islam came to organize and guide society towards a good and balanced life. Thus, Islam does not come to destroy the culture that has been adopted by a society, but at the same time Islam wants humanity to move away from things that are useless and bring harm in their lives. So, Islam seeks to straighten and guide culture that develops in society towards a civilized and advanced culture and enhances the degree of humanity.

C. Relationship between Religion and Culture in Islam

In Indonesia, Muslims generally can be divided up into two groups. The first is the moderns who call for the implementation of creed and religious observance (*ibadah*) in accordance with the original teachings. The second is the traditional group who wants all practices that uphold the religious propagation (*syi'ar*), whether in the field of worship (recitation, *tablil*, *samrah*, *kasidah*) or faith (*tawasul*, *hirmat* to guardians, *karamah*), may be carried out as long as there is no prohibition in religion. They are of the view that all forms of practice that support the propagation of Allah's teachings are considered part of preaching. For example, commemoration (*haul*) of the birthday of someone's death, in which there is a ritual of reading *tablil*

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 215

and celebrating the Prophet's birthday by reading *barzanji* and *diba'i*.¹⁴

What is more important to observe is that although sometimes it turns out that due to the influence of Islamic popular culture it has a mystical color, in subsequent developments popular culture in Indonesia has absorbed a lot of Islamic concepts and symbols so that it often appears that Islam becomes a source of culture that is important in popular culture in Indonesia. Many Javanese and Malay vocabulary adopt Islamic concepts. Javanese and Malay languages absorb words or terms relating to science. Terms such as revelation, inspiration, or wali, for example, are borrowed terms covering new concepts that were never previously known in the tradition of popular culture.¹⁵

Ritual expressions in Indonesian popular culture also often show a strong Islamic influence. For example, the Javanese "*pangivahan*" ceremony can demonstrate this. The ceremony is intended so that people can become "*wowobo*", become noble. So, for example we have to glorify birth, marriage, death and so on. All the rituals are meant to show that human life is noble. The concept of the glory of human life is clearly colored by Islamic culture which views humans as noble beings.¹⁶

The influence of Islam is also deeply felt in popular socio-cultural ceremonies. In Sumatra there is a "*tabut*" ceremony as well as "*sekatén*" in Java to commemorate the *manlid* (birth) of the prophet. Even in traditional popular art performances, we also see the strong influence of Islam. Starting from dance, music, calligraphy, literature, architecture, one cannot deny the influence of Islam in Indonesian popular culture. Around Yogyakarta alone there are hundreds of traditional arts organizations influenced by Islamic culture. *Srandul*, *Kuntulan*, *Emprak* and *Bedouin dance and sendati* dances in Aceh shows how strong the influence of Islam in the culture.¹⁷

In Javanese life, *kejawen* and *kebatinan* are both influenced by Islam which is

¹⁴ Abdul Karing, *Islam Nusantara* (Yogyakarta: Gama Media, 2013), p. 156

¹⁵ Kuntowijoyo, *Paradigma Islam*, p. 235

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 236

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 237

interpreted in the realm of Javanese culture. Proponents of Islamic forms closer to Arabic textual sources often view Javanese cultural Islam with distrust. At the same time, religion from a cultural perspective makes a major contribution to the preservation of religion so that it remains in accordance with the context of the community life and ultimately religion can be accepted and culturally meaningful for social problems.¹⁸

Islam is a universal religion in terms of time, place, and the content of its teachings that was sent down by God as a blessing for the entire universe. It comes as a guideline and a parameter to filter various cultural norms and values; the good ones are allowed and even preserved, while the bad ones or those that can have bad consequences and distort the nature of their lives are repaired and straightened out. In many ways, religion depends on the culture and customs that develop in a society. For example, issues of *muamalat*, behavior, buying and selling, profession, level of income, level of dowry, and various lines of life are given the boundaries and norms of culture and customs, provided they do not contradict Islamic teachings and principles or human nature.¹⁹

To filter these cultural norms or to achieve the positive Islamization of culture so that good culture does not disappear by sticking to Islamic principles, Islam provides two conditions for cultural practices and customs; first, culture or customs are not in conflict with Islamic principles and human nature. For example, the culture of usury, gambling, dating, and so on, all of which are contrary to Islamic principles and norms. Second, the existence of that culture or custom in a society is standardized, ingrained, and does not change so that it can be used as a standard practice.²⁰ Islam not only comes to filter the culture that develops in certain societies, but also has a very vital role in filtering the penetration of other nations' cultures into Islamic society. Misunderstanding of the role of Islam in seeing this foreign cultural infiltration often has fatal consequences for the integrity of the

¹⁸ Hasan Hanafi, et al, *Islam dan Humanisme* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2007), p. 230

¹⁹ Al-Hajj Mohammad Djamia'at Al-Hasyimi, *Tanbid & Ma'rifat* (Yogyakarta: Mida Pustaka, 2011), p. 214

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 223

religious socio-cultural order in Islamic society.

D. Culture in Islam in Timor

The character and life pattern of a society is shaped by its culture. Culture shapes the behavior of a society in interacting with others, with the natural environment and with God. The attitude and behavior of a society influenced by culture is what distinguishes a tribe or nation from other tribes or nations. When the identity of a community is threatened, the existence of the community or nation in question is also threatened.

Religion and culture are two things that are interconnected with one another. A group of people cannot exercise religious orders without being influenced by the culture of society in which the religious mission. Culture can be an entry point or means of preaching or religious missions. On the contrary, religion can provide purification of the cultural values that inhibit the development of human civilization leads to more advanced.

Almost all religions have the view that it is important to see culture in the development of religious missions. In Islam, culture is seen as an inseparable part of the embodiment of religious faith. Culture as a value becomes a guide that is in harmony with religious values to become a guide or pattern of community life. Based on this kind of belief, Muslims in Timor interpret that in every major religious moment, Muslims do not only carry out rituals of worship such as praying or reciting the Qur'an, but also learn to recognize and understand cultural values.²¹ It is very apparent in some ceremonial religious such as, among others, the celebration of the Prophet's birth (*maulud*). In celebrating religious holidays like this, Muslims in Timor in their rituals are often combined with a parade carrying fins which is a cultural element. The procession was accompanied by tambourine music and religious poetry containing praise to the prophet.

In the culture of marriage, there is a ceremony for the procession of the

²¹ Mr. Burhan in Kampung Islam Air Mata Kupang in an interview emphasized that when religious rites were combined with cultural elements, at that time people were actually studying the spiritual values contained in cultural symbols.

bride and groom while praying for the bride and groom in the form of songs and praises. At the birth of a child there is a ceremony of reciting *barzanji* and praises to the prophet. Forty days after being born, girls are circumcised and during the circumcision a *barzanji* is read. At the time of death there is a *tablilan* ceremony, there are those who perform *tablilan* for up to seven days and seven nights. In marriage, the night before the marriage contract, a cultural ceremony is held characterized by Arabic called *dana-dani*. Towards Eid there is a grave pilgrimage. All of them are Islamic religious practices in Timor which are influenced by cultural elements.

Tablilan of the deceased is a form of expression of faith in togetherness to conduct *dhiker* to Allah. In the Islamic belief that follows *ablus sunnah wal jamaah*, it is revealed as a form of children's obedience to their parents through increasing *dhiker* and prayers even though the parents have died. This is according to the Prophet's command that a child is obliged to always make *dhiker* and pray to be gifted to parents. Besides that, Muslims of *ablus sunnah wal jamaah* always adhered to the principle that it is not allowed to terminate a good relationship, which is part of the most important to spoil fraternal relations between the neighbor and to multiply the windfall gain.²² Teachings of *ablus sunnah wal jamaah* always encourage to multiply the charity on behalf of parents who have died. Islam of *ablus sunnah wal jamaah* in Timor has the view that in *tablilan* the congregation is invited to gather to pray and give thanks in the form of eating together, not as a waste or showing off wealth but as part of almsgiving and gratitude in worshipping Allah.

The forms of adaptation and inculturation of culture into Islam, particularly in the cricle of Nahdlatul Ulama in Timor quite vary. A prayer ceremony in laying the groundwork for building a building for public use, for example, is always combined with local culture. In the beginning, middle, or end of the construction of house, there are always prayers and thanksgiving to the Divine. This religious practice is a collaboration of local culture and Islamic values. In addition, forms and designs of mosque are always varied in accordance with the local culture, so was born the

²² Arivin Junaidi, at.al, *Ansor Dalam Dinamika Nahdlatul Ulama* (Jakarta: LTN, 1955), p. 56

mosque shaped dome, *joglo*, as a form of Islam adopting local cultural wealth.

Muslims in Timor believe that the mix between local culture and the religion of Islam to be seen and understood by the critical, so not all the cultural elements can be combined with the religious elements of Islam. There are cultural elements that cannot be combined with elements of the Islamic religion because they are contrary to Islamic values or teachings. For example, songs and dances that are not in accordance with Islamic teachings cannot be included in worship or religious ceremonies. If that cultural element is not in accordance with the Quran and the Sunnah, then it must be avoided.

In maintaining the truth of worship so that it does not deviate from the teachings of Islam, institutionally Nahdlatul Ulama always adheres to *ablus sunnah wal jamaah*. This means that all religious procedures and behavior of Muslim religious life individually or collectively follow the life pattern of the Prophet Muhammad. Everything that was done by the Prophet was taken as a guide in carrying out all life activities of Muslims, both those related to worship and in the behavior of everyday life.

The term *ablus sunnah wal jamaah* is a fusion of three words with regard to attitudes and patterns of religious life of Islam. The word *ablus* means family or group, *sunnah* means carrying out all religious procedures based on the Quran and Hadith, as well as the example of the Prophet, and *wal jamaah* means collectively. The legacy of the prophet in the form of his life example and teachings was passed down to friends in a straight line. *Ablus sunnah wal jamaah* is a religious understanding that respects local cultural values.

Every Muslim is *ablus sunnah*, but all *ablus sunnah* are not necessarily *wal jamaah*. Muslims of Nahdlatul Ulama have been considered as the Muslim community of *ablus sunnah wal jamaah* because every ceremony in both religious nuances and worldly affairs are carried out in congregation. The principle of mutual cooperation and solidarity become the core foundation of understanding *ablus sunnah wal jamaah*; values of *ubudiah* are always applied in the form of

togetherness.²³

In the view of Muslims of Nahdlatul Ulama, there is no clash between the positive cultural values with the values of Islam because as religion, culture is closely related to everything that concerns human life. However, the adaptation or inculturation of local cultural elements into religion or *ubudiyah* has limitations, namely between what is sunnah and what is obligatory. What is sunnah can adapt to cultural elements while what is obligatory cannot be contaminated by external elements and must follow everything that has been stipulated in the Quran and be carried out purely.

Only certain ulama who have the authority and responsibility to filter or refine and define practices of culture that can be adapted to the teachings of Islam. In the structure of the Nahdlatul Ulama in Timor, this authority is called *mustasyar* and below it is called *Rois*. Thus, there is a group of ulama called *mustasyar* and *rois* who have the authority to filter cultural rites so that the Nahdlatul Ulama can carry out all religious rituals without contradicting the rules outlined by the Qur'an and Sunnah.

Ulama who carry responsibility as *Mustasyar* and *Rois* are wise people who understand religious and cultural issues. Not all ulama can hold this big and noble task because if the ulama do not understand deeply about the issue of religious and cultural relations it will also affect policy making, and this will have a negative impact on the lives of the people. The appointment of someone as *Mustasyar* or *Rois* must go through a two-stage process; first, through natural processes in society by which community selects scholars who are appropriate and in accordance with the rules regulated in Islam to be selected as *Mustasyar* or *Rois*. Second, the public selection results are submitted to the election committee consisting of the scholars who are under the organization Nahdlatul Ulama through Congress held to elect definitive *Mustasyar* and *Rois*.

Outside Nahdlatul Ulama, there are several Islamic religious organizations that

²³ *Ibid*, p. 34

have different views on the relationship between religion and culture such as Wahabi and Muhammadiyah. These Islamic organizations are of the view that Islam must not be contaminated with other teachings or values, including cultural values. All forms of Islamic *ubudiah* must be in accordance with the Quran and Sunnah. Culture must be separated from religion. In other words, religious values should not be contaminated by cultural values. Religious values or messages come from God while culture is a creation of man.

In Muhammadiyah, the relationship between culture and religion always adheres to the teachings of the founder KH Ahmad Dahlan, who emphasized that the foundation of Islam is the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet. Art is human nature and Islam is a religion of nature.²⁴ Affairs of arts and culture is a human affair as beings with intelligence and understanding. Efforts to achieve rational and virtuous goals must be in line with religious norms. Arts and culture are world affairs therefore human affairs. Basically, the law of art and culture is *mubah* (permissible) because in the *fiqh* principle it is stated "*al-ashlu fil mu'amalah al-abahah*" meaning that the basic law in *mu'amalah* cases is permissible. The law of *mubah* applies as long as the arts and culture are in accordance with Islamic religious norms.²⁵

Muhammadiyah has the view that culture must provide good benefits for humans in fostering love, mutual respect and being able to get closer to Allah, thus art and culture can become media of da'wah. Arts and culture are the embodiment of a sense of beauty in every human soul that have been entrenched and felt by human beings in the course of his life, and therefore they must be nurtured and channeled properly in accordance with the requirements prescribed by God.²⁶

Muhamadiyah's views on art and culture are very clear. Having art culture is the nature of every human being, therefore the law is permissible. Muhammadiyah strongly supports the development of art and culture. Nevertheless, Muhammadiyah emphasizes that in its implementation, it must still pay attention to Islamic values

²⁴ Zainuddin Achied, *Kiprah Perjuangan Muhammadiyah di NTT* (Kupang: Muhammadiyah Press, 2011), p. 98

²⁵ *Ibid*, 102

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 74

and norms.²⁷ In Muhammadiyah's view, culture that is owned by each ethnic group or nation can become wealth which strengthens the appreciation of religious faith, as long as it does not conflict with religious norms. How to dress, for example, has been regulated in Islam; all female genitalia must be covered. If someone is dressed differently from the provisions of these norms, it is contrary to Islamic teachings. Likewise, as long as local culture does not conflict with Islamic values, Muhammadiyah can accept it. If they violate norms or are not in accordance with religious beliefs, they will be rejected. Muhammadiyah has limited norms in seeing or exploring cultural values.

While the Nahdlatul Ulama argued that if the value of assimilated into Islamic culture and values are applied in accordance with the teachings of *ablus sunnah wal Jamaah* it will wake a sense of togetherness, solidarity and fraternity. Through culture, people will increasingly get to know the values of their religious faith, and through religion people will increasingly know and love their cultural values. Culture helps people to better understand the values of faith taught by religion, and religion purifies cultural values that are contrary to religious faith. With the inculturation of local culture into religious worship, it will affect the development of religious faith so that religion will be better understood. Through a community culture approach will be closer and easier to get to know the value of religion. Local culture is a door for people to learn deeply about religious values and practices. On the other hand, religion can purify cultural values that are integrated into people's lives.

There are different points of view between Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama in the relationship between religion and culture. There are certain cultural practices in Nahdlatul Ulama that can be combined with a religious ceremony, but in Muhammadiyah they should not be done, because it is considered contrary to Islamic values. For example, *maulud* as a celebration of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, in Nahdlatul Ulama held in the mosque, there are offerings, leaf, flower fire, divide the prize. Muhammadiyah Muslims do not held this, because it

²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 75

was not the culture of Islam taught by the Prophet Muhammad. According to Muhammadiyah, such religious practices are influenced by Hindu teachings.²⁸

Muhammadiyah Muslims do not held *tablilan* when people died, while Nahdlatul Ulama Muslims saw that prayer is a form of prayer for the deceased. This prayer is a form of sending to the dead. In the prayer revealed a relationship or communication antara who have died and those still alive. Between the dead and the living there is a spiritual relationship or relationship that is expressed in the prayers of the living.

According to the understanding of Muhammadiyah Muslims, there are three things that a person can bring when he dies, namely *first*, if he has a *cimut* (knowledge, skills) that have been taught to people while still alive and people practice, the reward will be received when he dies. *Second*, have godly children. Parents who educate their children well and become godly children who are useful to society can become provisions for parents for salvation in the hereafter. *Third*, live and practice their religious life properly and correctly. People who during their life really live their religious faith well will bring them to salvation in the hereafter. On this basis, *tablilan*, namely prayer together to be sent for people who have died, is not practiced in Muhammadiyah Muslims.

In the religious life of Timorese Muslims, cultural elements not only affect the field of ritual or religious rites but also affect the construction of the construction of houses of worship. As a religious organization, Nahdlatul Ulama does not prohibit to build mosques combined with elements of the local culture. Likewise, Muhammadiyah does not prohibit building mosques in accordance with local cultural elements, because it is considered not to violate religious law. The shape of the building for a mosque may be in accordance with the local culture as long as there is no human image, for example standing or sitting. Muhammadiyah Muslims prohibit the inclusion of human images or paintings in mosque buildings. In Timor, there are no mosques that were built as a result of a combination of elements of

²⁸ Zainuddin Achied, *Kiprah Perjuangan Muhammadiyah di NTT*. p. 68

local Timorese culture and Islam. In general, mosques are in the form of *joglo* which is influenced by Javanese cultural elements.

In a marriage rite, both Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah do not prohibit the wearing cloth motifs which is the area of local cultural products, provided that cover the genitals as prescribed in Islam. Islam emphasizes that women must cover all their genitals. Beyond that, it means that it is against the law. For Muhammadiyah, using culture as an art to make religious ceremonies lively and wisdom is not against Islamic values.

The distinction between religious organizations of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah in dress culture really is not too flashy, because both Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah adhere to the teachings of the Quran that is close the genitals. The shape or style of clothing depends on the taste of the person who wears it. For example, in the case of wearing a headscarf, there are various colors and shapes as long as it covers the genitals.

Muhammadiyah Muslims respect and accept any culture as long as religious standards or norms are met. Yet, one of the things that stood out in the past was salvation, even now in our country it is still valid, for example to build a magnificent building or build a large bridge, it is necessary to plant a buffalo head. Muhammadiyah has never accepted this model. Or like in Java, in outside Java there are certain ceremonies to thank for the harvest or for fishermen get a lot of profit from the fish they catch, they give offerings to the sea. Such models in the religious practice of Muhammadiyah Muslims are not accepted.²⁹

Although Muhammadiyah rejects offerings in religious ceremonies, the form of sacrifices and offerings as part of religious rites is still practiced by the majority of Muslims, particularly Muslims who still adhere to local culture, namely Islam *ablus sunnah wal jamaah*. For Nahdlatul Ulama, offering is a cultural

²⁹ Mr. Makarim, chairman of the East Nusa Tenggara Province MUI said that in Islam it is not permissible to buy any animal as a symbol of spiritual sacrifice to Allah, because it is against Islamic teachings. Allah is all-powerful, all-loving and merciful, only to God man hopes.

practice, but its meaning does not contradict with the teachings of Islam as it is part of the sacrifice and submission to God, and almost all religions recognize the nature or value of the offerings of the faithful to the God. The form of gratitude and supplication by believers to Allah is carried out by giving offerings and it is believed that the person who brings the offering will then be rewarded.

Cultural vision is part of the appreciation of religious life for all Nahdlatul Ulama residents. However, there are a small number of people who claim to be part of Muhammadiyah but their religious practices appear to be similar with Nahdlatul Ulama. Therefore, in certain cases it is difficult to distinguish the followers of these two organizations. In everyday life there are people who identify with the organization Muhammadiyah organization, but their religious practices are closer to Nahdlatul Ulama or otherwise. The differences between the two religious organizations are not fundamental. The only difference is in matters of worship, for example in the Fajr prayer. Muhammadiyah Muslims do not use *qunut* or additional prayers. Whereas the Muslim Nahdlatul Ulama community use it because it is seen as a tradition to hone the mind. In social life there is almost no difference between these two religious organizations.

In the Islamic organization Nahdlatul Ulama, all citizens who wish to enter the marriage stage must pass two stages, namely the marriage contract and the dowry. In a wedding ceremony, there are processions with various attributes to enliven, for example *ondel-ondel*, mountains with all kinds of decorations. All of that is taken from cultural elements combined with Islam. When entering the month of Ramadan, a *sabur* bath is carried out which is called a *balimau* bath, which is a bath while washing the head with lime. Such a religious tradition is only carried out in the Muslim community of Islam *ablus sunnah wal jamaah* or Nahdathul Ulama, not found in the religious rites of Muhammadiyah Muslims or other Islamic groups or organizations.

In celebration of *maulud* Nabi, people always prepared fruits to be distributed as an expression of gratitude in being together at once to enliven memorial feast of the nativity of the Prophet through sharing the products of hard work in the form

of fruits, vegetables and others. This is part of the local cultural influence combined with Islamic religious rites. The practice of cultural rites combined with religious rites is also only present in the organization or the people of Islam *ablus sunnah wal jamaah*, are not included in the organization or the people of other Islamic. Muslims Muhammadiyah holds that cultural ceremonies can be incorporated into religious activities not as religious rituals, but as an artistic addition to make religious ceremony more interesting and lively.

Islamic teachings do not say that in worship ceremonies all Muslims must wear special and luxurious clothes and jewelry. Likewise, wearing necklaces and wearing certain models or motifs is not mentioned in Islamic teachings. These things appear in religious ceremonies because they are influenced by cultural factors, for example Javanese culture which is influenced by the Hindu culture. When the nine *wali* spread Islam in Java, they passed on cultural values to their followers.

Islam is of the view that hadith is the word of Allah spoken by the prophet, so that whatever the hadith teaches is not against religion. Meanwhile, culture can be ignored if it is not in accordance with religious teachings. In general, both the Qur'an and the Hadith have a positive view of cultural values. There are positive cultural values that do not conflict with accepted religious values and can be combined with Islamic values and there are cultural rites that are contrary to Islamic values so that they are rejected. For example, in Arabic culture, parents only accept boys; when a girl was born, she would be immediately buried alive. With the arrival of Islam, such culture was abolished. In the life of the Arab world, before Islam came, the treatment of slaves was very sadistic, but with the arrival of Islam, slaves were positioned on the same level as human beings with dignity.³⁰ Thus, in relation to culture from an Islamic perspective, there are cultures that can be eliminated and some that can be developed.

³⁰ Pelipus Tule, et al, *Wacana Identitas Muslim Pribumi NTT* (Mauwere: Ledalero, 2015), p. 116

E. Meeting Islam with Local Culture in Timor

East Nusa Tenggara is a province located in the Southeast Indonesia with its capital in Kupang. The province consists of several islands, among others, Flores, Sumba, Timor, Alor, Lembata, Rote, Sabu, Adonara, Solor, Komodo, and Palue. Nusa Tenggara Timur Province consists of about 550 islands, the three main islands are Flores, Sumba, Timor.³¹ This province is commonly known as the earth of Flobamora which stands for the names of the big islands namely Flores, Sumba, Timor, Alor, in addition to the many other islands in it. In the island lived various tribes and sub-ethnics with different languages and customs and traditions. Each tribe has its own culture and uniqueness which is manifested in the form of houses, clothes, songs, dances, food, musical instruments, and others. All of them are wealth as well as pride for the citizens who own them.

In everyday life, the community of East Nusa Tenggara live in accordance with each culture and they are proud of its culture. They live in a typical house, wear typical clothes, sing and dance with typical clothes and songs. In various official ceremonies whether cultural, religious, governmental, or in marriage ceremonies, births, deaths, and various other cultural ceremonies, the people of East Nusa Tenggara always show that distinctiveness in dressing, singing and dancing, music, from their respective regions and tribe.

At the beginning of the independence of Indonesia's territory includes region of Sunda Kecil Province with the capital city of Singaraja. Then the Sunda Kecil region was divided into three provinces, namely Bali, West Nusa Tenggara and East Nusa Tenggara. Currently Nusa Tenggara name used by two, namely the administrative regions of West Nusa Tenggara and East Nusa Tenggara Province. The province is putting the western part of the island, while the eastern part of the island is the former province of Indonesia, which is an independent East Timor and became Timor Leste in 2002.³²

Like the people of East Nusa Tenggara in general, the Muslim community of

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 117

³² *Ibid*, p. 120

Timor as part of the people of Nusa Tenggara Timor live according to customs, language, and culture according to their respective ethnic and ethnic groups. They live in harmony with people from other tribes and ethnicities and feel proud of their respective ethnic and ethnic identities.

In the practice of worship and religious rites, Muslims in Timor are influenced by the elements of local culture, a culture that come from the outside and the values of Islam. The local culture is a culture that is owned by the people of Timor and Nusa Tenggara Timur, which formed the character and personality of people of East Nusa Tenggara. While the outside culture is a culture that came from outside Timor and East Nusa Tenggara brought by preachers such as culture of Java, Melayu, and Arabic are also affecting the religious life of Muslim community in Timor. Meanwhile Islamic values are values as taught in the Al-Qur'an and Hadith.

Timorese Muslims come from various backgrounds such as Java, Flores, Solor, Sumatra, Ternate, Sulawesi. The character of the Muslim propagators in spreading Islam is very much influenced by their background and origin. The local culture that has been studied and absorbed by a preacher will influence the person concerned in the spread of religion. In a new area, in addition to the local culture are accommodated, the culture of origin of the preachers is not removed, so that the increasingly rich Islamic values and the spread of Islam accepted by the local community.

The life of the Timorese Muslim community in several ways has different characteristics from the life of Muslim communities in other regions in Indonesia. One cause of the uniqueness of it is a majority Muslim society is not an indigenous Timorese, but immigrant communities from various regions in Indonesia. These Muslim communities who come from various regions form a Muslim Timorese society with their uniqueness. In addition, the Timorese Muslim community also lies in a society that is still very adherent to its original customs and culture.

Although the Muslim community Timorese living in the community still holds

strong traditions, in the religious life they are less colored by the local culture of Timor or Nusa Tenggara Timur. The life character of the Timorese Muslim community is more influenced by Javanese, Bugis, Arabic and Sumatran culture. For example, the color of Islam in Kupang is more influenced by the culture of the area that became the origin of the arrival of Islam, the Malay culture, Arab, including Sumatran and Javanese culture. The building of a synagogue or mosque in the form of a *joglo* is a Javanese influence. The procedures for daily religious life such as the *maulid* ceremony are influenced by Sumatran and Arabic cultures.

Apart from different regional backgrounds, Timorese Muslims also come from various Islamic organizations, each of which has distinctive characteristics both in understanding and in worship practices. The typical and habits of each organization are combined into one, forming a model of worship that is typical in it an element of culture from a variety of backgrounds. For example, in the Islamic community, *Air Mata* and *Bonipoi* can be seen at the *maulid* ceremony, fasting, and Eid. Likewise, the form of cloth, the language of worship, has several characteristics such as Arabic, Javanese, and Malay. Arabic is used in *ubudiah* or worship, recitation of the Prophet's birthday, *ziba* or promise, praises to the prophet. There are also types of Arabic food such as *kebuli* rice.

Even though Islam has long entered Timor and continues to be in the midst of a local community who strongly adheres to tradition or culture, it does not appear that there is a fundamental Timor or East Nusa Tenggara culture that is incorporated into Islamic religious rituals, such as in marriage ceremonies, death, circumcision, and others. Elements of culture that stands out is the element of culture outside of Nusa Tenggara Timor namely Arabic and Java, Indonesia. Ways of circumcisions, weddings, bridal procession are influenced by elements of Malay culture. The mosque building was influenced by Arabic and Javanese culture. There is not much combination of elements of local Timorese culture or East Nusa Tenggara with Islamic religious rites. One of the reasons is that the majority of Timorese Islam are immigrant Muslims, who when entering Timor brings along the culture and customs of their respective regions of origin.

Values that can be seen as a combination of Islamic values and Timorese culture are the spirit of family life, togetherness, hospitality, care for others which in Islam is called *istiqamah*. Although values like this exist in every culture, the spirit of kinship expressed in helping each other can be said to be one of the strengths of Timorese culture. Moral is equally strong in the culture of the people of Timor, quite an impact on the lives of Muslim communities. The similarity of Islamic values and local cultural values like this makes it easier for Islam to live and develop in Timor.

Apart from the values mentioned above, *silaburahmi* is one of the teachings commanded in Islam. Islamic values like this are also not foreign to Timorese. The values culture of the local community of East Nusa Tenggara in general, and the East in particular, stresses very much on unity and kinship between human beings. People greet each other, get to know each other, learn from each other, and enrich each other. Gathering fosters a spirit of tolerance, hospitality, and brotherhood.

With their blend of Islamic values and local culture then there was a process of symbiotic mutualism between Islamic values and local culture. Islamic values encourage to purify and animate and develop local cultural values, on the other hand, local cultural values strengthen young people to understand, accept, and live Islamic values. Although Timorese cultural symbols are not very visible in Islamic religious rites in Timor, the cultural values that have similarities with Islamic values are quite influential in the Muslim community of Timor and East Nusa Tenggara.

In various ceremonies related to Islamic religious rites, external cultural symbols are very dominant compared to local Timorese cultural symbols. Cultural symbols that come from outside are packaged in religious ceremonies very well. The influence of Sumatran culture, for instance, can be seen in the way of dress and procession at marriage or weddings ceremonies. Meanwhile, the Betawi influence is revealed in the *maulud* ceremony in the form of trinkets, *ondel-ondel*, coconut flowers. The *siripuang* is a Hindu influence was brought by Islam from

Java. Tambourine is an Arab influence. The rhythm they played was a Malay rhythm, exactly the same as Sumatra, Palembang, Riau, Pekanbaru, and even Pangkal Pinang. Islam in Timor is Islam that is adaptable to a wide variety of early Timorese culture.

In the event of *tablilan* there is a meal as a thanksgiving to God for His gift. Gathering to pray and eat together implies religiosity as well as social significance. This kind of religious and social messages are in accordance with the Timorese culture of upholding the values of solidarity and kinship. Religious da'wah by presenting a form that is familiar with local culture like this is one of the first factors that is easily accepted by all levels of society.

In the marriage and circumcision ceremony performed by *ablus sunnah wal jamaah* Muslims, there is a prayer ceremony and burning incense. Especially for circumcision, there are Arabic texts or *syair* and circumcised children wearing necklaces as jewelry. Circumcised children are dressed like people going to Mecca and dressed in robes like the clothes of the pilgrimage. These religious practices such special happening in the Islam *ablu sunnah wal jamaah*. Islamic organizations outside NU see cultural values as at circumcision ceremonies or parties that are not ordered the Qur'an can be regarded as waste, showing off wealth made them unattractive and unnecessary.

In *tablilan* there is a *dhikr* ceremony, a prayer to ask God for salvation. Although human salvation is completely in God's hands, Islam believes that whoever is close to prayer will be loved by God. Prayer for the salvation of both the living and the dead is God's command. Not all Islamic organizations have the habit of practicing *tablilan*; this practice of Islamic life can only be found in Nahdlatul Ulama.

Islamic propagation by *Wali Songo* is influential version to Timor and East Nusa Tenggara, in addition based on the Quran and the Hadith and the example of the messengers of Allah who will be the main source or the subject, but also accommodating local values as the door of proselytizing. As long as it does not contradict and destroy the creed, culture can be used as a basis for preaching. For example, in Kudus and Demak, every month of *Suro* the gamelan is played. The

voice of the gamelan in the days of *Suro* essentially is an invitation to hear propagation. Local cultural values have adapted to Islam. *Dakwah* run by the prophet is taken as the basis for propaganda by Nahdlatul Ulama for the suburbs and hinterland.

Cultural values are very strong and influence the course of life of Islamic *ablus sunnah wal jamaah* Muslims and inherited. But specifically, in the construction of the mosque, not visible mosque in Timor which takes the form of cultural or traditional house Timorese. Likewise, in religious rites, elements of Timorese culture are not clearly visible. People of Muslim Timor mention mosques in Timor as Pancasila mosque because of its shape does not highlight a particular culture or flow.³³

Timorese Muslims who study religion in Java generally study Islamic values with a very strong Javanese culture. When they returned to Timor, they animate the model of worship as experienced and learned in Java. For example, in leading prayers, the *imam* and *khotib* should not be drawn from different Islamic religious organizations. If there is other Islamic organization who follow the prayer, for example *khotib* of Muhammadiyah was about to lead congregation together Nadhatul Ulama or *ablus sunnah wal jamaah*, then the *khotib* of Muhammadiyah must understand and respect the religious ceremony of Nahdlatul Ulama. There are up funerals corpse, no invocation (*talkin*) in the cemetery. No other Islamic organizations outside Nadhatul Ulama, the ritual was not performed. If those who die are Nahdlatul Ulama residents, then it is obligatory to do the *talkin*. Whereas outside the Nahdlatul Ulama, if not asked to be prayed for, it does not matter, because it is not one of the pillars of obligation; it matters of the sunnah. But Nahdlatul Ulama Muslims see that this is an inseparable part of the process of taking care of the corpse that is influenced by cultural elements.

³³ The shape of mosques in Timor varies widely, not accentuating any particular group, sect or culture. Therefore, according to Mr. Burhan, a religious leader from NU who lives in the village of Air Mata Kupang, Muslims call the shape of the mosque in Timor the Pancasila mosque, which means that the shape of the mosque in Timor upholds cultural diversity.

Islam recognizes two forms of worship, namely sunnah and obligatory. Islamic worship can interact with local culture.³⁴ Sunnah observances are adaptable to local culture, for example the celebration of *maulud* Nabi. Another religious practice as a form of interaction with local culture is *Siri Puang*. Such a practice is not unknown in the organization of Muhammadiyah, but Nahdlatul Ulama has long adopted elements of this culture and synchronized it with Islam. Apart from *Siri Puang*, there are also ceremonies or religious rites that use incense. This is a local tradition that was adopted into Islamic religious rituals. Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha celebrations also contain cultural elements such as *silabturabmi*, *balalbibahal*, which are family values that exist in the culture of the local community.

Meanwhile, religious rites that are classified as mandatory cannot be contaminated with local culture or teachings outside the Qur'an and the Sunna.³⁵ The basic foundations of obligatory religious rites are the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Nahdlatul Ulama as a moderate Islamic organization adheres to this principle. Therefore, there are scholars who are chosen to stipulate obligatory worship and sunnah so that in religious embodiment there is no conflict and leads the people to syncretism.

F. Conclusion Remarks

The spread of Islam in Nusantara really shows Islam as *rahmatan lil alamin* which means that Islam is a blessing for the universe. This is unlike the model of the spread of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula and Sub-Saharan Africa, where the spread of Islam is mostly done through structural preaching which tends to be political. The provisions of creeds, morals, worship, and the provisions of Islamic law are disseminated through the application of laws and statutes. Not infrequently, efforts to preach Islam are carried out by coercion and violence.

³⁴ Mochammad Ichwan, *Keindahan Islam* (Jakarta: UI Press, 2014), p. 122

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 123

The spread of Islam in the archipelago was not like in the Arabian Peninsula. The spread of Islam in the archipelago which was initiated mostly by Muslim traders from Gujarat and Persia adopted a different model of da'wah. Islam in the archipelago is spread through a cultural da'wah strategy that is more friendly to local religions and traditions that have existed before. This method has proven effective; the archipelago which was once the largest Hindu and Buddhist community in the world has now turned into the largest Muslim country in the world.

This cultural da'wah model is clearly manifested in Islamic da'wah in Timor. When Islam entered Timor, the da'wah model used was da'wah with a cultural approach. In Islamic life in Timor, Islamic scholars who came from various regions in Indonesia still adhere to the cultural values they adhere to. On the one hand, Timorese Muslims are Muslims who are devout in living the religion they profess, but on the other hand, the cultural values inherited from their ancestors are not left behind. Rites and cultural values become means of preaching and bringing Muslims closer to getting to know, understand and live their religion.

This model of preaching through a cultural approach is what Muslims should develop in this era. Efforts to purify Islamic teachings framed by the call for *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* should be ideally carried out in the large landscape of Islam as a religion that is *rahmatan lil 'alamin*; Islam that spreads love, not harm, to mankind.

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