

Freedom Of Religion and Belief in Indonesia: A View From The Discursive Perspective of Liberalism Versus Multiculturalism

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Abstract: This paper aims to show the limitations of the liberal viewpoint vis-à-vis overcoming the conflict between freedom of religion and belief in Indonesia. The multi-ethnic and multi-religious condition, a unique feature of Indonesian society, demonstrates that the conventional liberal framework of the concept of freedom of religion and belief is insufficient. To complete this article, the writer employs the literature research method. This research can formulate many findings: freedom of religion and belief is not only concerned with the individual. And an individual right to choose his/her faith is strongly linked to how one legitimately expresses oneself in communities based on ethnicity and/or religion. Furthermore, plurality in a multicultural society presumes acknowledging a fundamental truth that can be expressed in many ways.

Keywords: Freedom, Religion, Liberalism, Multiculturalism, Indonesia

Abstrak: Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk menunjukkan sejumlah keterbatasan paradigma liberal hak-hak asasi manusia dalam mengatasi persoalan kebebasan beragama dan berkeyakinan di Indonesia. Konteks masyarakat Indonesia yang multietnis dan multireligius menunjukkan keterbatasan dari paradigma liberal konvensional tentang kebebasan beragama dan berkeyakinan. Metode yang digunakan dalam tulisan ini adalah penelitian kepustakaan. Tulisan ini memiliki beberapa temuan yakni bahwa kebebasan beragama dan berkeyakinan tidak hanya berurusan dengan individu serta hak individual untuk memilih agamanya, tapi lebih dari itu berkelindan erat dengan cara seseorang mengekspresikan dirinya dalam komunitas-komunitas berbasis etnisitas atau agama. Pluralitas dalam sebuah masyarakat multikultural mengandaikan pengakuan akan sebuah kebenaran fundamental yang dapat diungkapkan dalam pelbagai macam cara.

Keywords: Kebebasan, Agama, Liberalisme, Multikulturalisme, Indonesia

Introduction

One of the main threats to the freedom of religion or belief in Indonesia is that the religious conservative tendency has been recently stronger. The sudden and surprising appointment of Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) chief Ma'ruf Amin as the running mate of the then presidential candidate Joko Widodo, known as Jokowi, in the 2019 presidential elections could be seen as a political support for such conservative religious tendency. It was beyond all speculations and predictions. It is well known that as MUI leader Ma'ruf Amin ever became a controversial figure due to his conservative credential toward minority groups. For instance, he played a very significant role in the political campaign against Basuki Tjahaya Purnama, known as Ahok¹, a Christian and Chinese descent, as Ahok was running for Jakarta

¹ Basuki Tjahaya Purnama, commonly known as 'Ahok', was Governor of the Special Capital Region of Jakarta from 19 November 2014 to 9 May 2017. He was elevated from deputy governor to governor of Jakarta after Joko Widodo ('Jokowi'), Ahok's predecessor and political ally, was sworn in as president in 2014. Ahok was Jakarta's first ethnic Chinese governor. In Indonesia Ahok is a 'double minority', because he is an ethnic Chinese

gubernatorial elections. It was his decision to declare Ahok as a blasphemer in 2016, that allowed for the arrest, fake democratic trial and prison of Ahok for unfounded accusations of blasphemy. This happened despite Ahok was a close ally of Jokowi. For Jokowi and his supporting parties, this was a political strategy to win support among muslim communities as his rivals were using Islamic identity card against him. While this could be seen as a brilliant political strategy to win a presidential election, the use of religious sentiment and influence in politics pose serious threats not only to the freedom of religion and belief, but also other human rights of religious minority groups, such as political rights (election to public office) as in the case of Ahok.

Problems related to freedom of religion and belief have been debated since human history began. The story in the Old Testament of the Christian Bible, for instance, provided an account of Abel being killed by his brother Cain. The two men argued jealously about whose offering was most appropriate before God. In the modern context, this could be seen as a prequel for the debate about which religion is true and which is false (Ghanea and Wetlesen, 2010, p. 1).

This problem is as relevant today as it was in the past. In Indonesia, such an ancient conflictive view based on religious belief finds new expression in the forms of, for instance, false teaching in relation to the claim of truth on basis of the opinion of the religious majority, judgment that label others as heresy, and the unlawful ban on building new houses of worship. This tendency has been getting stronger since the beginning of the reformation period as the promotion of false religious teaching and stigmatization toward other religious groups find more room in public arena, while genuine efforts to pursue intellectual tradition of inter-religious dialogue only has little space and continued to be sidelined. The obvious results so far is bloody conflicts and violence in the name of religious freedom and belief. This condition indicates the failure of the state to protect the basic human rights of its citizens. There is the inability of the state to manage a balance relationship between religion and politics (government affairs), and 2) between public and private morality based on religious belief. Making this worse, the state even promulgate various controversial policies and laws, such as blasphemy law, education law, restriction on building house of worship and banning certain religious minority groups, which provide room for radical groups to channel their violent rhetoric and actions. In many cases such violent rhetoric and actions have even led to terrorism in the name of religion, communal conflict in places such as Ambon and Poso, unfounded accusation of blasphemy and rejection to build new house of worship (Bagir 2014: 10). These have as a result infringed on the freedom of certain groups of citizens to follow a religion or a belief of their choice and to freely practice it.

This phenomenon raises the question about the extent to which certain religious groups, in particular the majority of the dominant ones, in multireligious communities may deprive other religious groups, in particular the minority ones, of their freedom of religion and belief. Of particular importance in this question is the issue of liberty and equality before the law that is used to be the main concern of liberalism and commitment to cultural diversity as being advocated in multiculturalism.

The idea of freedom of religion is generally regarded as a problem of liberal or negative rights. From the liberal point of view religious freedom means that a person can never be forced by the state,

christian. Ahok was also Jakarta's second non-Muslim governor (Peterson 2020). In 2017 Ahok ran for the gubernatorial election as an independent candidate against Anies Baswedan. Ahok's rival, Anies Baswedan, used Islamic based identity politics in campaign against Ahok. After some big demonstrations against him due to allegedly 'defamation of religion', Ahok was condemned of blaspheming against Islam and the Qur'an. He was then sentenced to two years jail. Ahok lost the gubernatorial run-off election to Anies Baswedan in April 2017 when he was still on trial.

or anyone, to follow a particular religion or belief. Religion is here understood as a private right. It is a traditional paradigm in understanding and describing the topic of religious freedom (Bielefeldt, 2016). This article shows that the traditional liberal framework is not sufficient and incapable of explaining the complexity of freedom of religion in Indonesian society characterized by cultural and religious diversity. In such a society as Indonesia religion is an identity-marker (Wilfred, 2019). Religious freedom in such society is therefore not only related to individuals and their choice of religion. It has more to do with legitimate self-expression of communities or groups characterized by their collective religious identities (Wilfred, 2016). Therefore, beyond liberal paradigm, this article is going to interpret the problem of religious freedom in Indonesia in the light of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism is here understood as a view that states “adopt various group-specific rights or policies that are intended to recognize and accommodate the distinctive identities and aspirations of ethnocultural groups” (Kymlicka, 2007, p. 61). Multiculturalism is a critique to liberalism that only emphasizes the idea of justice and individual rights, and places cultural differences in the private domain. In the liberal point of view the cultural differences are less relevant in the public arena although their protection is guaranteed by liberal democratic law. In this regard, multiculturalism arose as an antithesis for the traditional liberal strategy in addressing social differences (Kymlicka, 1995; Kymlicka, 2002).

Method

Genealogically, attempt to provide a proper feature of the relationship between religion and state in Indonesia began with a discussion between two prominent founder of the republic, Soekarno and Mohammad Natsir (Suhelmi 2012). Soekarno represented the secular nationalists who pursued the separation of religion and state. On the other hand, Mohammad Natsir expressed the aspirations of the Muslim nationalists who advocated for a non-separation of religion and state, pointing out that religion is not only about the relationship between humanity and God, but also influenced the way people related to each other in the socio-political arena.

These days, this debate continues to be voiced by various Muslim groups which can be categorized as being in one of two blocks, namely those who are liberal Muslims or those who are literal Muslims (Utama 2013: 262). Liberal Muslims stand by the opinion of Soekarno regarding the separation of religion and state. They promoted secularization of Islam in order to properly adapt to the world changes as it has been popularized again by Nurcholish Madjid and other liberal Muslims, such as Ulil Abshar Abdalla, Luthfi Assyaukanie and Akhmad Sahal. According to them liberal Islam is a movement which is responding to problems connected with the relationship between Islam and present-day challenges of the society, such as pluralism, individual rights, democracy and the concept of the state. Literal muslims include Hartono Ahmad Jaiz, Ja’far Umar Thalib and Habib Rizieq, who want to Islamize Indonesia. Rizieq uses the expression, “NKRI² Bersyariah” which in English could be translated as “The United Islamic Republic of Indonesia”. This idea closely resembles to the Jakarta Charter:³ Indonesia is a democratic republic, where Islam has priority (Utama 2013: 263).

² NKRI: Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia (United State of Republik of Indonesia)

³ The Jakarta Charter is a document set up by the members of *Badan Penyelidik Usaha Persiapan Kemerdekaan* (BPUPKI= Indonesian Investigating Committee for Perpatory Work for Independence) on 22 June 1945. This document became the fundament of the preamble to Indonesian Constitution. The main character of the document is the obligation for Muslims to practice Sharia Law. This document is related to the debate between Soekarno and Mohammad Natsir about the future ideological fundament of Indonesia.

In the multireligious community of Indonesia, discourse on the relationship between religion and the state will remain relevant as long as the republic still exists. As a modern democratic states it is necessary to re-think, discuss and look for a forum which is appropriate in the public arena, to air views on the relationship between religion and state. Hard-lining views and actions in the name of religion can be seen as resulting from the side-lining of religion from public arena, considering it as a purely personal matter (Madung 2011: 252). Unfortunately, the tradition of a healthy intellectual discourse for a constructive dialogue as being developed in Europe and initiated in this country by Soekarno and Natsir, has often been replaced by rhetoric of religious hatred and violence.

The debate described above can be seen from the perspective of discourse between liberalism and multiculturalism. The view of Soekarno who proposes the separation between state and religion can be categorized as a liberal perspective, whereas Natsir's point of view is close related to the multiculturalism. This study aims to interpret the discourse on the relationship between state and religion in Indonesia and its impact on the issue of freedom of religion and belief from the discursive perspective of liberalism versus multiculturalism. This study uses a literature research method supported by secondary empirical data.

Indonesia, like most Asian societies, is multi-ethnic and multi-religious. While diversity on the basis of religion is a source of strength, it can also trigger various conflicts, including religious ones. Freedom of religion and belief is most likely problematic for religious minority groups to overcome this problem in the multi-ethnic and multireligious context of Indonesia, the conventional liberal framework alone is inadequate. This is because freedom of religion is not only dependent on the individual choice to believe, but it is also strongly linked to the way one legitimately expresses oneself in communities that have a religious identity but get caught up in different conflicts for social, political, cultural and economic reasons.

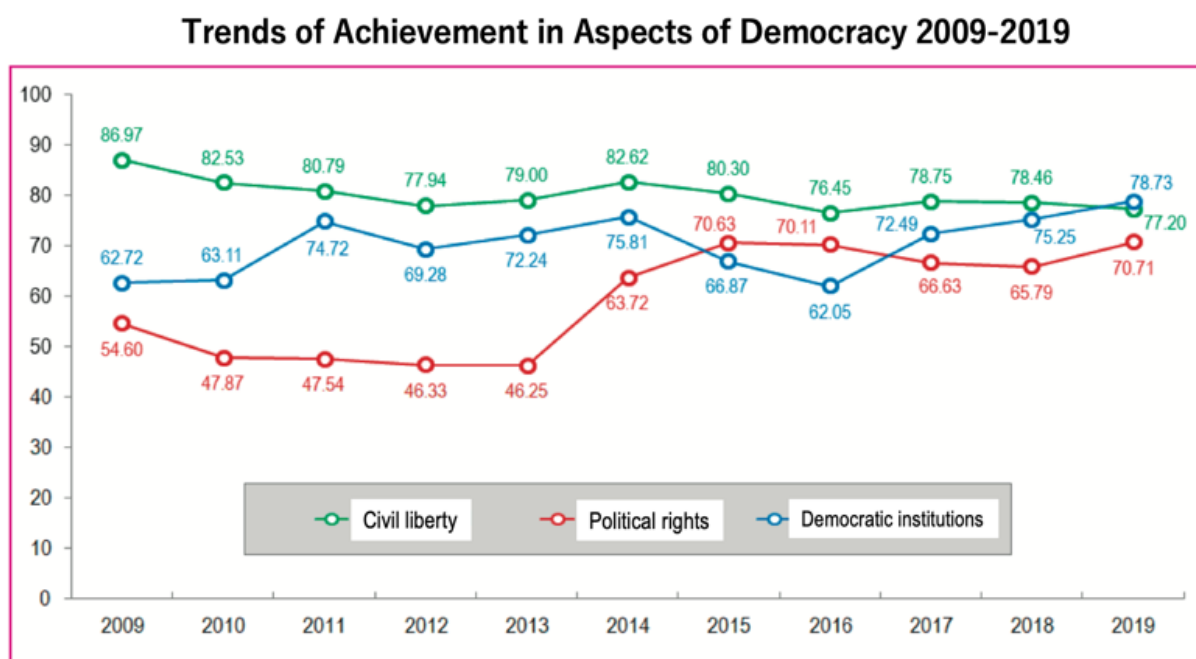
In order to place this discussion and analysis in the proper context, section 2 will lay out the background knowledge and data about the condition of the freedom of religion and belief in contemporary Indonesia. This data will be analyzed in the light of the tension between the framework of liberalism and the paradigm of collective rights or multiculturalism as described in the third and fourth parts of the article. In the last section, I will note a number of findings that have been presented in the main section of the article.

Findings and Discussion

The Condition of Freedom of Religion and Belief in Indonesia

According to the Central Office of Statistics, Indonesia Democracy Index in 2019 was at 74.92, an increase of 2.53 from 72.39 in 2018 and from 72.11 in 2017. This puts Indonesia in the moderate scale (60-79 scale) of its Democracy Index (below 60 scale: bad and from 80 scale: good). The 74.92 rate was the average rate arising from results of an evaluation of the three main aspects of democracy index: civil liberty (77.20, a decline of -1.26 from 78.46 in 2018), political rights (70.71, an increase of 4.92 from 65.79 in 2018) and democratic institution (78.73, an increase of 3.48 for 75.25 in 2018) (Kemenko Polhukam, Badan Pusat Statistik, 2020). While the moderate scale indicates that general condition of Indonesia democracy is not bad, as properly summarized by Kemenko Pulhankam "a number of factors related to civil liberties and political rights have not been properly fulfilled; and the performance of democratic institutions is still not yet optimal" (Kemenko Polhukam, Badan Pusat Statistik, 2020, p. 22).

Even though there is a general trend toward a rather close achievement between the three aspects, a close look at each aspect indicates that different from political rights and democratic institutions that have increase trend, civil liberty aspect has decline or minus trend.



Source: adapted from Kemenko Polhukam, dkk. (2020: 22)

Figure 1. Trends of Achievement in Aspect of Democracy 2009-2019

Source: (Kemenko Polhukam, Badan Pusat Statistik, 2020, p. 22)

This finding provides a picture of the problem of the freedom of religion and belief in Indonesia in the present day. This declining trend of civil liberty indicates that the Indonesian democracy is not built upon a solid foundation, because it is unable to protect the private rights of citizens including their right to exercise freedom of religion and belief and their right to be free from discriminatory practices.

Research by Setara Institute has confirmed similar findings of the vulnerability of civil liberty toward religion and belief in Indonesia. On 31st March 2019, the Setara Institute revealed that in 160 incidents that happened throughout 2018, there were 202 violations of freedom of religion and belief that involved both the government and the community at large. This number is an increasing number compared to the previous year's number, in which in 155 incidents throughout 2018, there are 201 violations of freedom of religion & belief (Rahman, 2019).

This finding demonstrates that the duty of the state to guarantee the freedom of religion and belief is far from being a reality. Attacks against this freedom have been more frequent and intensive in line with the rise of right-wing populism over these past six years. This can be seen in the movement promoting conservative moral behavior based on religious belief in the national and regional political discourses and practices (Hadiz, 2017, p. 261). The domination of a conservative interpretation of religious belief in the public arena has strengthened the anti-liberal tendency in the democracy of Indonesia. This also affects the individual rights (rights to liberty) of certain groups of citizens, in particular, the vulnerable and marginalized groups, such as LGBT communities. A research report by the Indonesian Survey Institute and the Wahid Foundation published in August 2016 has confirmed that

LGBT people were the most disliked group in Indonesia (Kwok, 2016). In the same year, Human Rights Watch (2016) provide a similar finding on sentiment toward LGBT communities in Indonesia, where there were widespread practices of discrimination and violent threats against LGBT groups. The report revealed that this anti-LGBT campaign often involved state officials, conservative (radical) Muslim groups, and other religious leaders who made known their conservative and discriminative interpretation of religious belief and teaching in the public arena about the existence of LGBT as a threat to the Indonesian national identity.

If things continue as they are, threats to the freedom of religion and belief will result in the destruction of the common Indonesian home which has been built upon the foundation of unity in diversity (Madung, 2021). Without acknowledging diversity in the struggle for equality, tolerance, and respect, Indonesian society will be torn asunder. To avoid this risk, a true understanding of the freedom of religion and faith and respect for it must be continually communicated to all elements of the community.

A Liberal Framework for the Freedom of Religion and Belief

The principle of the freedom of religion and belief gives a guarantee of protection for each person to choose a particular religion or belief. As a human right, freedom of religion and belief has both positive and negative aspects simultaneously. Negatively, it means that a person can never be forced by the state, or anyone, to follow a particular religion or belief. Someone cannot be forced to join any particular religious community, to change religion, or to remain in a particular religion. Positively, the principle of the freedom of religion and belief holds that each person is free to choose a religion or belief, to join a religious community, to begin a new religious community, or to worship or to participate in public or private religious practices. This positive right even includes the freedom to choose not to have a religion (Die Religionsfreiheit in Kuerze, 2019).

The advent of the concept of the freedom of religion and belief was related to the religious wars that raged in Europe for almost 500 years. Western Christianity rejected the concept of the freedom of religion and belief. It was regarded as heresy by the church (Ziebertz, 2015, p. 15). This is why a collective effort to have freedom of religion and belief in Europe was pursued through a bloody struggle, as it took place in a homogenous religious society, where the non-separation between religion and politics remained firm. As a result, the history of Europe in the past had been colored with forced conversions, blasphemy accusations, the spread of heresies, and religious war. This religious war came to an end after all parties agreed to sign the Peace Accord of Westphalia in 1649 (Brieskorn, 2008, pp. 15-28).

The inter-religious wars, which devastated almost all of Europe, forced the political thinkers of the time to search for an answer to the basic question on how to synthesize the concept of religious truth and political freedom? This fundamental question was answered in the Bill of Rights in England in 1689, in the Bill of Rights of Virginia 1776, and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen proclaimed in France in 1789. These documents, particularly the one from the French Revolution, emphasized the importance of freedom of thought, the freedom of religion, and religious tolerance as fundamental conditions for peaceful coexistence in a pluralist society. This marked “the beginning of the end” of absolutism and the uncontrollable dominance of feudalism which had been the hallmark of European socio-political life during the previous centuries. Since then, politics was no longer derived

the source of its legitimation from religious authority, but from the implementation of civil rights among citizens.

The modern understanding of religious freedom is based on the assumption that religious morality is linked to humanity's relationship with God. The political and legal system, on the other hand, regulates community life and humanity's relationship with the authority of the state. The law guarantees social harmony and freedom because it is a precondition for an individual's ability to live out his/her personal beliefs, including religious beliefs (Böckenförde, 1990, p. 27). Emphasizing the role of law in protecting the truth and morality and guaranteeing peaceful coexistence, Böckenförde added, "Law, as it emerged from the misery of the confessional civil wars, has, precisely for the sake of freedom, renounced being itself already directly order of truth and morality; it wants only to make truth and morality possible and to secure external coexistence. It makes no claim at all to those qualities which the traditional doctrine wants to ascribe to it" (Böckenförde, 1990, p. 29).

The law guarantees freedom for citizens to worship their God and worship according to their beliefs, while also protecting those basic rights from outside interferences, including interference from the state. This means that freedom of religion or belief has limitations and such limitations must be based on certain conditions and regulated by the law. As stipulated in article 18 (3) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, "Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to [certain] limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others." Otherwise, the law that limits the freedom of religion and belief, or being used to limit them should be seen as an important political issue, because it endangers peaceful coexistence.

As indicated earlier, the concept of the freedom of religion and belief as a human right has developed over time in the liberal tradition. In the paradigm of liberalism, the principle of the dignity of human being is regarded as sacrosanct. The protection of the dignity of the human being is expressed through respect for freedom and basic human rights. Freedom is an essential element of human nature. The most fundamental aspect of human freedom is expressed in the freedom of conscience, which includes freedom of religion and belief, or presumes a certain way of life (*Weltanschauung*). There can be no pressure forced on conscience. Religion and belief must be free from any kind of force (Courau, 2016).

In Western democratic countries, the freedom of conscience and freedom of religion are often spoken of and given a great deal of attention. This can cause an imbalanced view on individual rights. An example of this is the common practice for parents not to educate their children according to a certain religious tradition, in the name of freedom of religion. This viewpoint stems from a mistaken sociological assumption, that a person grows up in an empty void which is value-free. Children who never live in a social environment where traditional values are expressed, will grow up alienated from religious values. Because of this, they will not decide to join a particular religious tradition (Courau, 2016).

However, this model of understanding only expresses one way of understanding freedom. If freedom is only seen as the negation of what is around a person, if the positive aspect of freedom "for" is ignored in a community, such freedom will tend to impoverish society. Because negative freedom is unable to empower a person to communicate with, and cooperate with, another person (Courau, 2016). Negative freedom must be balanced with positive freedom. Positive freedom connects people and enables people to live in a community.

A more comprehensive view of freedom was proposed by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), a moral philosopher of modern times when he provides an inseparable link between the categorical imperative principle (unconditional obligation) and the principle of freedom (Kant 1785/1992). For Kant, the categorical imperative principle is the *ratio cognoscendi* (rational foundation) of freedom, while freedom is the *ratio essendi* (essential foundation) of the categorical imperative principle. In other words, freedom and responsibility are two sides of the same coin. If we reject responsibility, this also means we negate freedom, as responsibility is the fruit of freedom. However, in the development of modern - individualistic society, freedom has often been reduced to freedom from responsibility, the negation of morality, and the categorical imperative. Freedom often does not lead to respect for the other, but rather the opposite.

If the above thesis is applied to the concept of the freedom of religion, we can see that in modern liberal countries, faith in the context of freedom of religion is defined negatively as freedom from responsibility. Faith such as this cannot be integrated into a religious collective (community) because it is essentially individualistic. On the other hand, in Western countries, in particular, the previously socialist ones, being religious meant merely belonging to a religious collective. This kind of faith aims to free a person from a religious tendency that is associated with a personal and free conscience (Courau, 2016, p. 9).

However, faith (belief) and religion are closely intertwined. Faith is the internal aspect of religion, while religion is the external (social and cultural) manifestation of faith. Faith can develop into the social and cultural dimension of religion, such as ritual, while religion has its essence in faith. How such a relationship between faith and religion in the context of freedom can be understood and applied in the multicultural society of Indonesia is a question that will be addressed in the next section.

Understanding the Politics of Multiculturalism

Indonesia is a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society. Here freedom of religion is not just an individual's personal prerogative. It is tied in with the legitimate expression of one's identity as a member of a community that is based on religion and ethnicity. Plurality in a multi-cultural society allows for the acknowledgment of the truth which can be expressed in a multitude of ways. Recognition of a plurality of expressions of truth does not just relate to tolerance, but it also relates to spirituality and mysticism. This can promote an attitude of respect for other religions and can become a new basis upon which substantive freedom of religion can be built. For this to happen, alongside the liberal framework, the concept of freedom of religion and belief in Indonesia must be placed in a framework of collective rights and multiculturalism.

One central aspect in the discussion about multiculturalism is the politics of recognition. This is mainly because the politics of recognition is a political design rooted in and developed through the discourse of multiculturalism. As in the case of liberalism, political recognition stresses the importance of respecting the concepts of a good life, including those that form a human identity, which is basic to all cultures. Politics of recognition also promotes and acknowledges every cultural and traditional model of a good life (Nohlen & Schultze, 2002, p. 21).

The notion of the politics of recognition stems from the basic thesis that the human identity is formed either by recognition, rejection, or mistaken recognition in a multicultural society. The absence of recognition or a mistaken form of recognition can activate a social pathology or suffering for an individual or another group. The absence of recognition, which basically means ignorance toward

human identity, may lead to various forms of oppression (Taylor, 2010). In the context of multiculturalism, recognition may help to avoid any form of oppression, because it “is not only a political, outer-directed level of discussion but it seems also an inner-directed process that contributes importantly to the emergence of one’s identity” (Broekman, 2003, p.19) as a basic condition for social acceptance. This is different from traditional liberalism that places cultural differences in the private domain. They are less relevant in the public arena although their protection is guaranteed by liberal democratic law. In this regard, multiculturalism arose as an antithesis for the traditional liberal strategy in addressing social differences (Kaloianov, 2010, P. 82).

The main concern of multiculturalism focuses on how to best organize common life in a way that is fair and peaceful, and in an atmosphere where people recognize each other. People form a pluralist society, where differences based on race, ethnicity, culture, and religion are acknowledged as being normal. Such multiculturalism can be liberal or radical. Liberal multiculturalism strives to dismantle all forms of legal, political, and social discriminatory law while conserving culture. Liberal multiculturalism also stresses the importance of collective political culture which is seen as guaranteeing social unity (Kymlicka, 2005). However, it will be effective and has legitimation only as far as it does not oppose the principle of individual welfare, as it is built upon the notion of basic human rights and constitutional rights of all segments of the society without discrimination (Kymlicka, 2007, P. 61).

Radical multiculturalism on the other hand stresses the existential meaning of each different collective identity (Dusche, 2004). It strives to save cultural groups that are under threat of extinction, by bringing their plight into the public arena and calling for recognition of their special needs by way of, for instance holding a referendum. The policy of radical multiculturalism has positive aspects, but it can also be dangerous, threatening the social cohesion of a state, as happened in Canada (Nohlen & Schultze, 2002). Therefore, anti-discrimination laws and equal opportunities are important political instruments in the realization of the ideal of multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism as a form of coexistence of distinct cultural groups in a society should not be regarded as a negative or evil force, instead of as a positive value that should be supported by proper and just public policies (Bauböck, 2006, p. 382). The politics of multiculturalism should be directed toward constructive public policies that can protect and nourish such positive values of coexistence. Such policies must be able to translate the given fact of social multiculturalism into a structural and institutional political condition. Only by doing so, the social, economic, and cultural condition of a multicultural society, including important elements of social reproduction such as group identity, language, and culture, can survive in the public arena because their existence is guaranteed and supported by the state (Bauböck, 2006, p. 382).

Reading Freedom of Religion and Belief in Indonesia in the Framework of Multiculturalism

As a multi-ethnic and religious country, Indonesia has always been in a great need of the above-mentioned politics of multiculturalism. What is important is the commitment to translate core dimensions of multiculturalism into concrete policies and legal norms that enable a peaceful coexistence between citizens from different religious and ethnic background. In this regard, the multicultural paradigm seems to provide the most appropriate approach for addressing the issue of the freedom of religion and belief in Indonesia, in contrast to the framework of liberalism.

Everything associated with liberalism paradigm sounds allergic for some in the Muslim community, who may otherwise use it as common enemy and exploit it based on religious sentiment for

their own political interests (Bourchier & Jusuf, 2022). For instance, in 2005 MUI issued a fatwa-ban, stating that “secularism, liberalism and pluralism” is a prohibited ideology which is against the teaching of Islam. This ban gave an ideological base for several radical Muslim organizations such as Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia, and Front Pembela Islam (all of which have been disbanded) to violently oppose government policies and movements which supported multiculturalism and democracy by some moderate Muslim organizations (Heffner, 2014, p. 35). This is why, from the perspective of political strategy, the proponents of the freedom of religion and belief movement in Indonesia are reluctant use liberal and secular terms so as not to get caught in conflictive and partial ideological debates (Heffner, 2014, p. 37).

Even though Indonesia is well-known for her pluralistic society, the way plurality is understood is different from that of the liberalism (Fenwick, 2016). In the multicultural society of Indonesia, religious truth is considered as something that can be expressed in different ways. Such a recognition of the plurality of expressions of the truth has contributed to the building-up of a society which is tolerant not only toward social and cultural differences, but also toward anything that is spiritual and mystical. This tolerant attitude can promote a habit of deep respect for other religions and create necessary conditions for freedom of religion and belief (Wilfred, 2019, p. 69). Having a different belief system in the form of spiritual and mystical practices that are different from conventional institutional religions is to most extent acceptable.

In Indonesia, as is generally the case in Asia, the inter-religious boundaries are often fluid and open. A Catholic from Flores, for example, despite adhering to the Christian teaching, will at the same time continue following the religious traditions of his/her ancestors when conducting funerals or wedding ceremony (Lina & Wijnarko, 2022). Through such traditions, interaction and mutual learning take place spontaneously daily in the community. Although it is a bit syncretistic, this daily practice of living together between people with different religious background strengthens religious dialogue and help to establish substantive freedom of religion (Kane, 2021). The fact that in public domain there has been religious conflicts is mainly provoked by struggle for power and influence over politics and economy. This substantive freedom of religion or belief provides room for believers to embrace the concept of living a good life, having certain ideologies and using religious symbols to promote a harmonious living. In this way, the example of living in harmony can be a contribution of the Indonesian society to international community which has been gradually facing a crisis of global populism.

For the people of Indonesia, religions are symbols of identity. Pancasila as the basis of the Indonesian state compels all Indonesian citizens to follow one religion. This means there is no place for atheism in Indonesia. This is of course problematic from the perspective of freedom of religion as human right. Freedom of religion here is closely related to the recognition of religious identities and the creation of a number of socio-political conditions necessary for the building-up of peaceful and harmonious coexistence. The guarantee of freedom of religion is a common responsibility of all communities involved. Freedom of religion is also closely associated with the balance of power in the political field and the protection of minorities, especially where there is a continuity of religious and ethnic minority identity (Setio, 2020).

In the paradigm of liberalism, the freedom of religion is more associated with the issue of protecting the religious community from illegitimate interference by state or socio-political actors of the religious majority. However, from the aspect of multiculturalism, freedom of religion is also associated with the issue of protecting the identity of minority groups. This is in accord with the situation in Indonesia where

religion is very much in the public domain. Primarily, religion does not rank as a civil right but as a collective right. Hefner has argued that in the Indonesian context, the concept of individual autonomy in the framework of liberalism cannot be taken as a basis for arguing the idea about freedom of religion. He puts forward the view that an important argument for freedom of religion in Indonesia is not the liberal or individual argument, but rather the idea that without freedom of religion, religion itself will be tarnished by those who use violence, thus harming the very religion they defend (Heffner, 2014, p. 38).

This idea is somewhat different from the approach to freedom of religion that views it as an unencumbered individual right (*ibid.* 74). In practice, neither the liberal nor the Marxist theory is able to provide an explanation that truly makes sense about minorities, let alone regarding minority religion and the freedom of religion. In the paradigm of liberal individualism, only the relationship between the individual and the state has a role. Communal identity has a less significant role under the dominance of the individual domain. This is different from the communal and individual role in Asia in general and in Indonesia in particular, where freedom of religion is firstly and primarily is a communal concern. The recognition and acceptance of a religious community is a precondition for discourse about the freedom of religion for an individual.

Freedom of religion also embodies an intra-religious dimension. This means that an individual is not always restricted to being under the hegemony of his or her community, particularly when it comes to doctrine, morality or gender issues. On the contrary, an individual remains in possession of his or her right to have a difference of opinion without fear of punishment. So, the freedom of religion remains a project that needs to be always negotiated both in the intra-religious domain and also in the inter-religious arena. A formal statement about freedom of religion as an abstract universal right might not be very helpful without being read and interpreted in connection with concrete issues, personal practices within religious communities, and public manifestations of religious symbols, and so on. These are integral to a holistic understanding of the freedom of religion in Asia.

The Asian experience of respect and tolerance towards other religions is a valuable inheritance that has stood the test of time while the continent has been struggling to manifest freedom of religion. In many traditional Indonesian societies, hybrid religious life is not seen as negative. For example, the people of Flores who are Catholic, will not just go to their Catholic priest to seek a solution when they experience an existential problem in their lives. They will also consult a soothsayer, or bring offerings to their ancestors' graves. Practices such as these will strengthen inter-religious dialogue and nourish the freedom of religion and belief. However, there will be always risks that it can be weakened, in particular when purification movements based on religious identity by those who think that they have the only version of the truth, are active (Vähäkangas & Fridlund, 2017). Besides, the emphasis of religion as a collective identity (multiculturalism) explains the fact why the state has to guardian the people or groups of people who try to destroy, tarnish and damage religion (Menchik, 2014). Therefore, Indonesia's law prohibiting blasphemy or the defamation of religion still applies, even it is oppressive and against human rights (Menchik, 2017). However, it does not mean that Indonesia is going to become a theocracy. Indonesia is neither theocratic nor secular. Jeremy Menchik calls Indonesia "pious democracy" (2017). As Greece and India, Indonesia seeks "to promote religious values while trying to synthesize liberal individual rights and group rights" (Menchik, 2017). It is assumed that belief in God is a necessary condition to a moral person. Therefore, the religious education is compulsory in Indonesia.

The goal is that we can live in a society where “individuals, organizations and the state are partly responsible for one another’s moral condition” (Menchik, 2017).

Conclusion

This study has shown that carrying the framework of liberalism alone for guaranteeing the freedom of religion and belief in Indonesia will be inadequate. This is why the multiculturalist framework allows for a politics of recognizing people. With multiethnic and multireligious backgrounds, coexisting is equally imperative. In this multicultural society, freedom of religion is not simply concerned with the existence of individuals and their rights to follow a religion or belief system. It is also about creating a condition that enables legitimate self-expression based on collective identity among communities with different religious and ethnic backgrounds—such recognition of a plurality of expressions of the truth. In a multicultural society is a prerequisite for tolerance towards freedom of religion and belief. This presupposes, first, an education system that can lead to an open and constructive discourse to reveal and accept the given multicultural reality of Indonesia as a prerequisite for peaceful coexistence. This may include the change of mindset that what matters most in a multicultural society is not the exclusivity of power and dominance between different religious and ethnic communities but the inclusivity of cooperation and participation among individuals and communities from other religions and ethnic backgrounds. Second, such education and intellectual discourse must also lead to substantial changes in the legal system. And public policy (such as blasphemy law) and any public attitudes threaten not only a peaceful coexistence but also those that are hostile to other religious communities to practice their freedom of religion and belief.

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