



## IDENTITY POLITICS IN CULTURAL AND STRUCTURAL ISLAM IN INDONESIA

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**Abstract:** This paper seeks to discuss the notion of identity politics in the context of Islamic identity in Indonesia. In this context, the discourse of identity politics is correlated with the concept of structural and cultural Islam, represented by the Indonesian people. In some cases, politics of identity is often associated with intolerance and social inclusivity. The Jakarta governor election is an example when one of the candidates was a Christian Chinese and accused of committing religious blasphemy in his speech. This study concludes that both structural and cultural Islam reflect the variety of Islamic expressions, which all deserve appreciation due to the roles they have played in the development of the Muslim society.

**Keywords:** Religious identity, Intolerance, Muslim Community

**Abstrak:** Inklusifitas sosial merupakan salah satu ajaran Islam. Umat Islam tidak dibenarkan melakukan diskriminasi terhadap saudaranya yang berbeda keyakinan dengannya. Saling menghormati, menghargai, bahkan toleransi terhadap umat beragama lain merupakan suatu kewajiban. Ada kebebasan bagi masing-masing individu untuk beragama di Indonesia. Meskipun kebebasan itu pun terikat untuk tidak mengusik agama lainnya. Ketentuan ini pun sudah diadopsi di Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia yang memberi perlindungan bagi warga negara untuk memeluk agama tanpa harus merasa mendapat gangguan atau ancaman dari pihak manapun. Bahkan dalam peraturan perundang-undangan diatur secara jelas dalam Undang-Undang PNPS Nomor 1 tahun 1965. Disinilah kemudian wujud kejelasan sikap Negara Hukum Indonesia yang tidak membiarkan pihak manapun merongrong agama resmi yang diakui negara. Fenomena yang terjadi akhir-akhir ini adalah Inklusifitas sosial umat muslim yang dianggap kurang terhadap kaum minoritas. Hal ini terlihat dari sikap muslim yang bergerak dalam beberapa aksi protes akibat perilaku penistaan agama yang dilakukan mantan gubernur Jakarta. Sehingga kemudian muncul klaim dari kubu lawan bahwa kaum muslim sedang melakukan politik identitas yang tentunya berdampak adanya sikap intoleransi terhadap kaum minoritas. Kajian ini kemudian menarik untuk dianalisis secara mendalam dan komprehensif.

**Kata kunci:** Identitas Agama, Intoleransi, Komunitas Muslim

## Introduction

There have been debates in viewing structural and cultural Islam. Some see that the introduction of Islamic cultures is one of the most effective ways of presenting Islamic missions. Meanwhile, others see that the introduction of structural Islam is the fastest way in upholding Islamic mission to address the morality of the people. In fact, the two movements are two sides of a coin that cannot be separated. In other words, these two movements can and have contributed to each other. The absence of one of these movements will hamper the mission to enforce the *shari'a*. Therefore, it would be odd to prioritize one over the other.

In essence, Islam has its uniqueness compared to other religions and ideologies. In terms of teaching, Islam is not only a religion that teaches spiritual aspects but also political, economic, social, and cultural aspects. In other words, Islam is a spiritual creed and *muamalah*, as Oliver Roy maintains in his book "The Failure of Political Islam":

“(Islam) understands all aspects of human life. Therefore it is revealed to all human beings living on this earth, regardless of race, colour, language, place, environment, historical or geographical situation, intellectual or cultural heritage. Islam understands and fulfils all of the requirements of life, past and future ... whether spiritual, material, political, economic, social, moral, intellectual or aesthetic (Roy, 1996: 92).”

Islam is an ‘ideology’ that has no defects or weaknesses because it comes from the Creator, the Substance that has unlimited knowledge, impeccable justice, and does not need anything from human beings and his creatures. Such facts are sufficient reasons for Muslims that the standardization or benchmark of ultimate justification is determined by the ‘ideology’ of Islam itself.

Islam has a universal doctrine, but it does not mean that its universal nature is similar to other religious teachings and ideologies. Based on Quran Surah Al-Maidah (5) Verse 48: “For every people among you, we give clear rules and paths.” The point is that the *ummah* (people) of Prophet Muhammad and also others have different rules and sharia. The notion of Islam as *rahmatan lil ‘alamin* is appropriate to arise various movements for the enforcement of the mission of Islam through the cultural system, as did the messenger in the era of spreading Islam (Walisongo), or by utilizing the political or structural side, that

is by fighting in state institutions to enact Islamic legislation based on the Quran and Sunnah.

However, the attitudes and views of both movements are seen by some people as a form of politics of identity that can lead to intolerance to other religions. This also occurs to those who declare Islam as the only true religion than any other religion. Referring to the discussion above, it is crucial to examine in more detail about the roles of these two movements, in particular, the impact of these two movements that are seen as the form of politics of identity.

From the above explanation, some basic questions arise, including: How is the role of cultural and structural Islam in the enforcement of the Islamic mission? What are political identities generated from these two movements which lead to the accusation towards some Muslims of being intolerant towards other religions?

### **The Meaning of Politics of Identity**

The discourse about politics of identity is borrowed from an existing philosophical term. Etymology means identity, while politics is defined as knowledge of constitutions ([kbbi.kemdikbud.go.id](http://kbbi.kemdikbud.go.id)). Politics of identity can be interpreted as the constitutional identity of the nation and state. Terminologically, Muhtar Haboddin explained that politics of identity refers more to political processes or mechanisms that make identity a political vehicle in organizing political resources and means in power struggles. Politics of identity is a political construction to determine the position and role of someone in a political community. Politics of identity gives a strict limitation to the community of a group, who can be part of the group and who cannot. So membership is permanent (Abdillah, 1999).

According to this understanding, actions to defend Islam or another kind of actions are not considered the manifestation of politics of identity. This is because anyone can participate in the movements without any limitations, and without being a part of the organization. Participation in the movement is based on the act of consciousness. However, a mass Muslim gathering, where Islam is used as the basis of the gathering regardless of political, economic, and social-cultural elements, can be categorized as politics of identity.

Political relations and the power of identity, in the politics of identity, are constructed in the identity building of a person or a group of people. The social construction of identity always occurs in the context of power relations. Castells mentions three forms of identity building, namely: a) legitimizing identity is the identity introduced by an institution that dominates society to rationalize and continue its dominance over social actors; b) the identity is a process of identity formation by social actors who are under stress with dominance and stereotypes by others, thus forming a different identity and identity resistance from the dominating party, in order to survive the group and its class. This terminology is mentioned when Calhoun identifies the emergence of identity politics; c). Project identity is an identity in which social actors form a new identity that can determine new positions in society as well as transform the structure of society as a whole (Castells, 2000: 8).

The politics of identity in Indonesia allegedly began to emerge along with the issuance of Law Number 22 of 1999 concerning the Decentralization of Politics in Indonesia (Habodin, 2012: 116). Initially, politics of identity was used to name inclusive political groups and minority political groups, which later gave birth to the political term, ethnicity. Politics of identity was initially intended to promote freedom of politics and tolerance towards minority groups who wanted to be considered as part of society. However, current development sees the politics of identity as an intolerant political mechanism and can endanger state pluralism. Thus, the purpose of politics of identity becomes biased, and it resulted in the conflict between its goals and interpretations.

Leaders of a group commonly use “them and us” in politics of identity to mobilize political power and to achieve their interests, both in economy and politics (Habodin, 2012: 120). Referring to this notion, then, Islamic movements will be more or less in line with the politics of identity, considering that they involve mass mobilizations to realize their common interests, which among them are to create social justice for Indonesian people. Unfortunately, the politics of identity is frequently regarded as a negative composition in politics.

## The Dominance of Structural and Cultural Islam

Cultural Islam implies that the socialization and institutionalization of Islamic teachings are done through efforts that emphasize on the change of consciousness and the behaviour of society without the involvement of the state and without changing the national system into an Islamic system. While structural Islam (political Islam) emphasizes on the Islamization effort through the establishment of a national system as well as Islamic public policies. Such an effort can be made without an Islamic political party, although it requires political wills of the policymakers.

In cultural Islam, the Islamization movement is conducted through non-political activities. These activities include mass organizations, *da'wa* (proselytization) activities, social institutions, etc. Meanwhile, the structural Islam uses political activities through Islamic political parties, which can be identified through the use of names, principles, goals or symbols of Islam (Abdillah, 1999). These two kinds of movements use two methods in carrying out its missions, such as individual renewal through *da'wa*; and the enforcement of Islamic spaces. As Oliver Roy maintains:

“Re-Islamisation takes place following two axes: individual renewal through *da'wah* and enforcement of Islamic spaces, both within the context of practical considerations and networks (Islamic banks). One can prepare Islamic societies through local militancy, associations, cooperatives, and other institutions” (Roy, 1996: 101).

Cultural Islam movement is oriented towards an individual renewal through *da'wa*. In other words, this movement is done step by step, so the method is very slow. This is because the target or object of the mission is the individual who has not accepted Islam. On the other hand, structural Islam uses legal channels to enforce Islam. This method is regarded as the method of ‘impatience’ or forcing individuals to comply with the stipulated requirements.

From the above explanation, it can be seen that the methods used by the cultural Islam movement are more relevant and fundamental to individual objects. This is because the individuals, who accept the *da'wa* with consciousness, are likely to apply Islamic values in their lives, and then apply Islamic values in their lives. In this process, there has been a direct interaction between the *da'i* and the object of *da'wa*. Nevertheless, the structural Islam movement is equally important in

a more global and general scope, not only individuals. This is because Islamic law enforcement movement is done through formal channels or governmental bodies that have the power to force the members of society to obey rules or regulations.

Many things seem to be insignificant but have a significant influence on the enforcement of Islamic values. For example, *da'wa* aims to encourage individuals to perform various daily Islamic practices such as praying, fasting, consuming halal food, wearing headscarves for women, and the provision of alternative public transport such as separating men and women and so on. These activities are accompanied by local social activities, which take place in meeting rooms, libraries, schools for children, as well as cooperatives (Roy, 1996: 101). To achieve the success of *da'wa*, it is crucial for the *da'i* to use various media, such as oral and written (*kitab*) media, as well as actions. It becomes clear that these two movements have equal roles in creating a more religious and Islamic nation.

### **Cultural Islam Movement in Indonesia**

Values in cultural Islam come from the Quran and Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad, which includes monotheism, justice, equality, peace, dynamic, and freedom. Then, these values are embedded in the lifestyle of the community through a tolerant and non-confrontational approach. Thus, the formation of a cultural lifestyle in society is part of the culture of society itself (Sutaman, 2004: 17).

This can be seen in the history of Islam in Indonesia when Islam was propagated by the saints (*wali*). All activities performed reflected the values derived from the Quran and Sunna and were in accordance with the existing culture. It seemed that there was no force involved, and no rights suppressed. The cultivation of Islamic values to the community in cultural Islam movement cannot be separated from the characteristics of *da'wa* of cultural Islam, namely: *First, Tawhid*, the principle of unity of God. The substance of this principle is translated into the form of human equality. The principles of tawhid are not only interpreted as beliefs but also used as the foundation of the culture in society. *Second, Perpetual peace*, The Cultural approach in promoting Islam is to create peace on earth with the basis of normative and sacred values, and empirical values: creative and reflective mindset, critical

observations of nature, harmonization and cultural reconciliation, balance in developing art, reduce Extreme trends (Sutaman, 2004: 18).

Cultural *da'wa* includes two main ways: conventional means and communication. Conventional means conveyed the teachings of Islam through lectures, sermons, interactive dialogues, and other *tabligh* activities. These methods have been existed for a long time, and still in use today. The communication is defined as a process of interaction of values that affect each other. For individuals, this has resulted in changes of understanding, faith and Islamic practice. For society, this has led to the changes in the structure and norm of life towards civil society.

Cultural *da'wa* deliberates the universal values of humanity; accept local wisdom; and prevent evils (*munkar*), by taking the uniqueness of human nature individually and socially into account. The way of *da'wah* is "ease" and "joy" in upholding Islamic values in various aspects of social life, economy, politics, and culture ([www.islamlib.com](http://www.islamlib.com)).

The approach of cultural Islam attempts at establishing Islamic social forces outside the circle of the state. The cultural movements work on social areas that have been untouched by the interests of the state. As an approach and a strategy, cultural *da'wa* functions gradually in accordance with the existing conditions to build Islamic social order. Substantially, the orientation of cultural Islam seeks to influence the relations of society, state, and nation, to achieve the ideal value of Islam, namely *rahmatan li al-'alamin*. Instead, the realm of Islamic culture has presented itself as an area of contestation, including the contestation of religious identity. This phenomenon is observable in the issue of tolerance, conflict resolution, democracy, pluralism, and multiculturalism discourse that dominates the relation between Islam and culture (Haq, [www.at-tin.org](http://www.at-tin.org)).

The forms of cultural Islam movement can be seen in various activities of social organizations such as Nahdatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, Persis, Hizbut Tahrir, Front Pembela Islam; and non-social organizations such as Jama'ah Tabligh, a group of Islamic studies, etc. It seems that these movements do not want to be left behind in contributing to the practice of Islam in Indonesia.

The *ulama* of cultural Islam maintains a principle: "Islamic government is materialized if Muslims carry out their religious duties and do not violate Islamic law." The Islamists encourage the realization



of Islamic society. To be a true believer, a Muslim must change the society through political steps; and if the Islamic state is already established, justice will follow.

Social relations are reduced to the horizontal relationships among people; the state only intervenes in the event of a violation. The state has only an educational role in making people more cautious. People's cautious attitudes create harmony between individuals. The state is not a mediator between individuals and between citizens; nor the creator of civil society. The more cautious a society, the weaker the state. Society is independent, and it is the result of the interaction between individuals. In this interaction, sharia is not only as a set of commands and prohibitions, but also the view of traditional jurists. Sharia becomes a diverse expression of this totality, the creature of God acting with fear of God as his primary consideration. Since there is no concept of original sin in Islam, the human can thus create the kingdom of God on this earth (Roy, 1996: 82).

The above principle leads cultural Islam scholars to believe that the most important thing in the implementation of the Islamic mission is to begin from the individual community of a country. Without considering the individuals, the mission of Islam in a certain country will not be succeeded. Thus, a country will be able to implement Islam by involving people who are considered Islamic. When the *da'wa* has been able to change the individuals in society culturally, then, the next movement is how to establish a law that regulates all aspects of the community life. This is deemed necessary because the existence of Islamic regulations in a country will make it easier for Muslims to implement sharia, and make them perfect Muslims.

Muslims attempts to realize the notion of *Izzul Islam wal Muslimin* with two approaches, namely the formal structural approach through the power and cultural approach. The structural approach (politics) still needs a long journey because sharia has not been fully implemented, especially in Islamic criminal law. There is still a need to consistently and officially apply Islamic law.

The more educated people in society, the easier Islam can be socialized and adopted through a cultural approach. This is because the value and substance of Islam contain universal and human truth,

which is also in accordance with human nature. Therefore, Islamic organizations and all related parties, such as pesantren (Islamic boarding schools), madrasah (Islamic schools), majelis taklim, and da'wa institutions are expected to be consistent in socializing Islam using the cultural approach. In this context, the richness of Islamic culture, such as Islamic New Year (Hijri), is crucial to be celebrated with various activities that support the socialization, internalization, and adoption of Islamic values and norms ([www.pikiran-rakyat.com](http://www.pikiran-rakyat.com)).

### **Structural Islam Movement in Indonesia**

The Islamic paradigm, as a social movement, is not a new idea in the terminology of religious movements in Indonesia. Ahmad Dahlan, an early Islamic reformer, has warned that:

“Most leaders have not paid much attention to the good and the welfare of humanity, but have noticed their own people and groups and even their own bodies. If their bodies have gained pleasure, they feel rewarded, and as if they have arrived at their purpose and purpose (Mulkhan, 1990: 20).”

This thought grew amid a stream of colonialism and rampant poverty. Dahlan's criticism stung the heart of religious awareness of the Islamic community at that time. Social concerns that are at the root of social solidarity had vanished in the spirit of individualism and regional fanaticism (Haq, [www.at-tin.org](http://www.at-tin.org)). Historically, Muslim had experienced a period of glory when the Daulah Khilafah Islamiyyah implemented Islamic legal system in all aspects of life in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. This history appears in some statements of scholars who lived under the aegis of the Caliph. The following is the statements of those scholars:

First, Al Ghazali says:

“Power is essential to the upholding of world and religion rules. The rules of religion are essential to attain the happiness of the afterlife, which is surely the aim of the Prophets. Therefore, the obligation of a leader is a critical case in the Islamic Sharia, which has no way to leave it (Ghazali, tth: 199).”

Second, Ibn Taimiyah said that “When power is separated from religion, or if religion is separated from power, the man's words will be corrupted (Taimiyah, tth: 394).” Third, Muhammad 'Abduh mentioned that:

“The lesson of law enforcement will not be perfect unless there is a force to uphold Islamic law and apply the judge's judgments correctly. The

maintenance of the order of society and power cannot exist in the hands of many people so it can cause chaos, but it must be in the hands of only one person, the ruler or leader (Abduh, tth: 65).”

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that power in structural Islam is necessary. With power, all rules can be applied as expected. Therefore, the seculars’ argument, stating that religions must be separated from the life of the state, is inappropriate. This thought will destroy thousands of Quranic verses and *Sunna* related to economic, social, political, educational, military and other laws. This thought also equalizes Islam with other religions, thus eliminates the image of Islam as perfect teaching. Besides, with the power in the hands of Muslims, it will enable the unification of Muslims in Islam.

Arif Rahman explicitly said that the history of de facto Muslims has never been united, except in the time of the Prophet. After the death of the Prophet, some Muslims have no longer shown the peaceful face. They tend to make Islam a shield or mask to legitimate power, position, and partial interests. They do not hesitate to the claim that their action is “in the name of Islam”. In fact, there have been hidden hypocritical intentions and heteronomous. These are people who have sentiments of *bahamiyah* (animal) (Raid, www24.brinkster.com).

With the above explanation, it is appropriate for Muslims to improve their community by holding on the Quran and Sunna, under the flag of “*La ilaha illallah Muhammad Rasulullah.*”

### **The Claim of Political Identity in Structural and Cultural Islam Movement**

Both structural and cultural Islam movement seem to contradict to each other in the theoretical level. In the practical level, both synergize each other and strengthen the notion of Islam as the perfect religion. Current development sees the movements as politics of identity that could undermine the diversity within the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia.

The case of accusation of religious blasphemy committed by the former Jakarta Governor, Basuki Cahaya Purnama, led to several “actions to defend Islam” (Aksi Bela Islam). These actions seized attention from all over the world. Referring to Ibrahim’s opinion, the

behavior shown in the several actions, called 411 and 212 “actions to defend Islam” implies that the expression of politics of identity can damage the national identity as a pluralistic nation. Ibrahim states:

“Identity politics is defined as the process of unifying various identities into self-concept and self-image. Identity politics is a politics built from within as a picture of environmental stereotypes. Identity politics has two important things, first, that democracy and reform will result in the development of pluralism values up to the minority level and as a result, the minorities that have been marginalized are then treated equally. Second, recognition of the various identities is no longer seen as a tool in the framework of nation-building but will undermine national identity (Ibrahim, 2013: 2).”

The statement is a one-sided fear lacking ground. Indeed, Muslims since the beginning of independence are the main actors who contribute to the greatest independence of this country. It is impossible to consider Muslims as a destroyer of national identity if Indonesian independence was the result of the Muslims’ struggle in the past.

Indeed, in situations of disengagement of identities and distinct entities, the politics of difference are particularly fertile, especially in the multicultural and multi-ethnic state or society. Within this framework, interactive relationships between different groups, especially different ethnic groups, must establish an ethical framework, in this case, tolerance. Political tolerance is possible only in the political atmosphere of a democratic country because political tolerance is strongly influenced by the prevailing system, structure, and political atmosphere.

According to Bukhari, the politics of identity tend to lead to efforts to seize power by using the slogan togetherness of a particular group (Bukhari, 2014: 20). It is as follows:

“Identity politics is a tool of the political struggle of an ethnic to achieve a certain goal, where its emergence is more due to the existence of certain factors that are viewed by an ethnic as a pressure of political injustice felt by them. Based on the feeling of the same fate, then they rise to show their identity or ethnic identity in a political struggle, to seize power by manipulating identity similarities, or characteristics of certain ethnicities that grow in the social life of the culture.”

Identity politics, as is explained above, tends to be a political stream that involves a person or group of people who share similar

characteristics, such as ethnicity, religion, ethnicity, gender, gender, and orientation. Referring to the explanation above, some of the actions to defend Islam by Muslims are basically not identity politics. They are only a form of protest to uphold and affirm the position of law protecting the official religions in Indonesia, which is the Law No. 1 of 1965 on PNPS. So, the movements were more directed towards the effort to save the official religion from blasphemy. Cultural and structural Islam (political) movement in the actions to defend Islam is quite strong, which is focused on fighting for the rights of the tarnished Muslims, and on protecting religion (*hifz al-diin*) from other irresponsible parties.

The implications of this movement have never lead to the intolerance towards minorities, even tend to respect and tolerate other religious beliefs. Claims of identity politics that will destroy the order of the life of nation and state are only unilateral fears that have no clear grounds for argumentation. Evidently, during this time, Muslims are very appreciative and respect the adherents of other religions, to create a sense of togetherness and unity among followers of the religion in the diversity of Indonesia.

## **Conclusion**

The function and position of the structural and cultural Islam movements are crucial in upholding the missions of Islam. These movements can transform Indonesia into an Islamic Ummah with the noble spirit of the Quran and *Sunna*. Despite the differences in their approach, it turns out that structural and cultural Islam still alive and thrives with their contributions. It should be noted that the cultural Islam is on its next journey. With the positive result of this movement, then, there is a need to consider the structural path in the framework of political struggle. The existence of ICMI is one of the proofs of cultural Islam in Indonesia, which then it has started to consider the structural path.

Both movements deserve appreciation as a form of struggle of Indonesian Muslims so that the majority can play more significant roles. If the structural Islam group incorporates “Islam” as its flag and jacket, cultural Islam considers the substance and does not question the logo. Islam, in the view of the second group, is expected to be salt than a lipstick that can provide flavour without having to reveal its colour to the naked eyes. In essence, it is natural that a religious Muslim has the ambition to establish an Islamic state. However, due to the

improbability of conditions, the ideals have been shifted to the idea of the application of Islamic law in Indonesia.

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