



## Distinction of Societal Religiosity During Covid-19 Pandemic Era

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**Abstract** *This research is a historical reflection of the condition of the Indonesian people who were battered by the Covid-19 pandemic, not only in the economic, political, social, and even psychological sensations of the people in doing religious activities. The interests overlap with the dedication on behalf of the community, from the self-quarantine system, large-scale social restrictions (PSBB), and, no doubt, the public who are less aware of the existence of Covid-19, resulting in the increased statistical number of Covid-19 confirmed cases. It has been a year that the Indonesian people have been plagued by this never ending problem, and like a spotlight, Covid-19 always looms over people's lives. The people's attitudes vary, starting from the assumption that Covid-19 is God's army to finish off arrogant humans, to Covid-19 as a scientific reality proven through empirical research. The perspective dualism of the Indonesian people is interesting to discuss in the form of societal religiosity sensations, both of which have a deep distinction in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Even if the religious community really understands the religion (Islam) in a deep way, of course, it is very clear how to respond to Covid-19 in the style of Prophet Muhammad SAW and the history of the companions of the Prophet.*

**Keywords:** *Position of Religion, Integration of Science and Religion, Distinction of Religiosity, Covid-19*

### INTRODUCTION

Like a dream in broad daylight, the Covid-19 pandemic has ravaged Indonesia until this second – the midst of 2020. In chronology, the spread of Covid in Indonesia began with a Japanese foreigner who visited Indonesia and made physical contact with one of the dance teachers on 14 February 2020 (Merdeka, 2 April 2020). At that time, the spread of Covid-19 could not be curbed, until the first case was announced by the government that it had reached 1,677 confirmed cases, with 103 recovered and 157 died (Almuttaqi, 2020:1-7).

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In the end, the government formed a Covid-19 Task Force which is currently under the Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs with reference to Presidential Regulation No. 82/2020 concerning the Committee for Handling Corona Virus Disease 2019 (Covid-19) and National Economic Recovery (Winarti, Darmawan & Daughter, 2020). Since the Presidential Regulation was issued, Indonesia was showing seriousness in handling the Covid-19, and eventually, the Indonesian government considered it a national disaster.

The virus, that first originated from China, has had a significant impact on other countries, such as in Asia in particular, there were 10 countries exposed to Covid-19. The most significant case was in India, where as many as 879,888 were confirmed with 442 cases, 554,888 declared recovered and 23,200 died; Iran with 257,303 confirmed cases, 219,993 were declared recovered and 12,829 died; Pakistan with 251,625 cases, and 2,753 cases in a day, with 161,917 were declared recovered and 5,266 died. In addition, countries in Asia such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Bangladesh, Qatar, China, Iraq and Indonesia which is ranked 10th from the spread of Covid-19 in Asia (Yuniarti, 2020: 11-16).

In Indonesia, until now, Covid-19 is a frightening specter in the community because the impact of exposure to Covid-19 can cause death. Covid-19 in Indonesia has received many responses from various lines, such as the political elites, religious leaders, and down to the grass roots. It is no doubt that Covid-19 has become a trending topic in the tweeter when numerous people do not comply with the government regulations and recommendation, such as wearing masks, carrying out social/physical distancing, and resulting in the emergence of hashtag *#indonesiaterserah*.

It is not a form of submission to the inability of Indonesia's frontline, namely doctors and Covid-19 volunteers and their network. However, there are characteristics of "resentment" from various elements of society which, in this case, deal with religious issues. When Covid-19 heats up in Indonesia, the never-sloping numbers of cases have resulted in the emergence of orders to take steps to avoid and even prohibit the gathering of large numbers of people to break the chain of spread. The policies taken by the Ministry of Religion began to experience responses, from groups stating that the government's actions were not efficient enough in handling Covid-19 to groups that contravened on the pretext of the government blocking freedom in carrying out worship.

This phenomenon has experienced a rapid impact on the spread of Covid-19 and even given an emergence to new clusters displayed on television screens, newspapers, and online media. In East Java, for

example, the Indonesian Hajj Officer Training Cluster at the Sukolilo Hajj Dormitory Surabaya on 8-19 March 2020; the 2020 World Ijtima Asia Zone Cluster held 19 to 22 March 2020 (tirto.id, 26 April 2020); at Tambora Iron Bridge West Jakarta, RW 07 was exposed to Covid-19 due to direct contact with the imam during the tarawih congregational praying; in Solo, 2 toddlers from Joyontakan were exposed to Covid-19 after making contact with their grandfather who had finished tarawih praying at mosque (Kumparan, May 17 2020), and recently, no fewer than 12 residents of Kediri City were exposed to Covid-19 because they went for broke to bring a priest from Jakarta for the Clerical Blessing at church (Suarajatim.id, 11 August 2020).

Recommendations and even prohibitions were not only made by the Indonesian government. The Covid-19 cases are very seriously discussed in the national arena such as the World Health Organization (WHO) which confirmed that Covid-19 has demolished the world order and snatched many lives (Shah & Farrow, 2020:76,128), the United States Center for Outbreak Control and Prevention (CDC) also highlighted the impact of Covid-19 because it was felt directly by the said country, where the number of deaths occurred in people aged  $\geq 85$  ranging from 10% to 27%, followed by 3% to 11% among people aged 65-84 years, 1% to 3% among people aged 55-64 years,  $< 1\%$  among people aged 20-54 years, and no death confirmed among people aged  $\leq 19$  years (Covid, CDC, & Team, 2020: 343-346).

From the phenomenon having occurred in the international stage to Indonesia, basically, the spread of Covid-19 is based on human egoism based on many factors, one of which is knowledge, social, cultural and religious egoism. This study focuses on the practice of the religious community during the pandemic. As the cases described above, religious egoism has gradually become a practice of fanaticism under the guise of religion. People with high religiosity shall understand in a good manner how to respond to Covid-19, as in Islam, during the time of Rasullah SAW and Umar bin Khaththab era which had also experienced disease outbreak, and the way to deal in both of them was by restricting the entry to the country (which is experiencing the outbreak). Once someone infected with the outbreak, then to mix healthy people with sick people is not permissible (Kumaidi & Febriani, 2020:65-82).

Therefore, from some of these religious phenomena, it is interesting to discuss how society's actual understanding of religious teachings, between piety or just an expression of a lack of understanding of religious teachings, so the results of this study are able to provide views, attitudes,

or ways of how to be religious during the Covid-19 pandemic, to a new normal practice in worship.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Position of Religion during the Covid-19 Pandemic**

The distinction of societal religiosity in responding to the pandemic spreads to several fundamental questions, such as what is the position of religion during the pandemic era? This question basically gives a negation between religion, which is subjective in nature, and science, which is objectiveism. These two have different positions, basically, but with a point of contact which is basically intertwined between each other. Religion is basically a form of unification of humans on earth, similar to a currency of a large kingdom, both of which have ties to humans themselves (Leithart, 2015). This is where the efforts made by humans, who were originally homo sapiens turned into homo deus, from humans to become gods (Hariri, 2016). This issue has an impact on human arrogance, once forgetting the fact that he is an ordinary human who can only try. Therefore, humans understand religion as an institution adapted to function, which is communal as well as institutional and associated (Schuman, 2018:1-12).

In contrast to Hariri's views, (Fox, 2018) and Weber (2019:407) see religion as being constructive about social reality that creates social institutions, so religion produces adherence to values and norms agreed upon by religious teachings. The discourse on the position of religion, particularly Islam in this discussion, always has issues epistemologically, because in Islam itself, there is a variant of understanding of religion and religious teachings, which will affect the perspective of being religious during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Therefore, the community social context in viewing Islamic teachings has a dualism, namely both private and public, in that case, the teachings of Islam have a piety orientation that benefits other humans (El-Solh, C. F., & Mabro, J, 2020). In an effort to drive the religion in Islam, it has the concept of sufism which aims at humanity (Mayer, 2018), so the view of Islam in being religious is transformative (Elmahbub, 2019:305-335). This transformation can be said as an effort to find a religion to uphold social order, or what is called Transformative Islam. In fact, efforts to drive religion can also be seen from the role of sufism as part of the humanitarian missions, which is a part of Islamic teachings.

The bias that occurs in the position of religion can be seen clearly in the semipermeable "meaning" and "value", both of which diverge from one another. The arising conflict between religious and scientific

interpretations lies in the egoism of each scientific discipline which maintains proof and arguments without seeing dialogical point of agreement, so it is not surprising that a clash of theological and scientific dualism of knowledge occurs (the conflict between scientific and religious interpretations arises because the boundary between causality and meaning is semipermeable) (M. Volf, 2019). As a matter of fact, to avoid contradiction between religion and science, a strong adaptation and correction is required over the science to avoid its excess. If this happens, there will be extinction (Abdullah, 2020).

The indication of non-adaptable contradictions will have an impact on extraordinary social changes, such as changes in mindset and views of religion both in the Islamic environment and in the religious community (Deneulin & Zampini, 2017:110-121). This change will be very massive when religious elites, such as ustadz, pastors, priests, and monks, the ones entrusted for their contradictory remarks against the government. For example, the implementation of large-scale social restriction (PSBB), wearing masks, and social/physical distancing. This is what needs to be paid attention to, as well as the cooperation of the religious elites in order to support every government policy while keeping in mind the essence of religion.

As in religious anthropology research, religious phenomena includes elements that are doctrine (believe certain things), rituals (perform story activities), leadership (interest authority in certain personalities), texts or scriptural texts (hallow certain texts), history (tell various), morality (legitimate merality) and tools (Robert & Yamane, 2015). These elements are the basis of society in religion, so the phenomenon of religion and the phenomenon of religiosity can be seen from the above seven elements.

Religious doctrine has a very strong influence on how the actions of the religious community because doctrine is part of the transformation of knowledge on religion which is internalized through its own understanding, so it is not surprising that weak understanding and strong indoctrination will produce actions in accordance with what is taught by certain religious teachings. Therefore, the horizons of knowledge outside certain teachings will be strongly blocked by thick walls deliberately made to differentiate one group from another, which will later have an impact on the distinction of societal religiosity in a pandemic era.

### **Forms of Communication Integration of Science and Religion in Responding to Societal Religiosity Issues during the Covid-19 Pandemic**

In responding to the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia, people need to use *fihiyyah-ubudiyyah* and *falsafiyah-ilmiyyah* ways of thinking. As a reference that a person really has a religion, why is this necessary? Because the impact of a non-basic way of thinking will have an impact on the benefit of the *ummah*, one of which is the birth of new clusters, inflation of data on the spread of Covid, and the immovable mortality rate.

Covid-19 was able to paralyze one country in all fields, such as the economic sector, the political sector, and the social and cultural sectors. Country stability is shaken and tends to be fluctuated when a pandemic first appeared, such as in Indonesia. Unpreparedness or which can even be called the inability to handle the spread, so Covid-19 does not only occur in the heart of Indonesia, which is Jakarta, but having entered and spread in various regions and villages.

Different lines respond naturally to pandemics in different ways. The government, for example, implemented a regulation that, initially, turned social distancing into physical distancing, as an initial step to break the distribution chain. The economic sector involving many people has been closed temporarily, resulting in many terminations of employment and other social problems, even in sensitive areas such as houses of worship which are closed temporarily and religious studies temporarily eliminated for the red zone areas, such as Friday prayers, Sunday services at church, and other religious rituals, therefore, not a few who have a traditional thinking style, extremism, responding to government policy as a castration in implementing religious law.

The community episteme conflict in responding to Covid-19 is due to negating religion and science, without seeing a point of agreement between the two epistemes. Even though the Covid-19 virus is not only a scientific issue that stands alone in its resolution, full support from various elements and various scientific fields is needed. The capital required in scientific prevention lies in the method of treatment as well as health procedures or protocols that have been determined by the World Health Organization (WHO), in Indonesia, for example, how to prevent Covid starts from behaving in a healthy way, washing hands, maintaining cleanliness, and consuming nutritious foods as well as complying with government protocols by wearing masks.

However, the biggest problem that occurred in Indonesia in overcoming Covid-19, that there are at least 3 factors concerning the number of virus exposures in Indonesia.

The second capital in coping with the Covid-19, for example, is by disseminating the spread of Covid-19 to the public, which is very important to do because the common people, in particular, need to be enlightened about what Covid-19 is, how it spreads, and how to handle it earlier. Synergy between the community and elements of both central and local government is necessary to support the creation of cultural capital. Similarly to religious capital, religious adherents pray for each other for the recovery of patients exposed to Covid-19, as well as for treatment at the hospital to receive objective treatment with laboratory examinations (Sutaryo, 2020).

Quite contrary, the problem lies in religious capital. As stated above, the paradigm of understanding religious teachings in responding to Covid-19 will affect social practices in the field. It takes, of course, religious elites such as ulama, ustadz, musti, kiai, and lecturers to synergize their perspective in order to have an impact on a complete understanding of being religious during a pandemic. This means that there are dialogues needed on many things between religion and science in the issue of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Similar to the realm of *ushulul al-fiqh*, the way of thinking of *al-Tsawabit* (things believed to be fixed and unchanging), *wa al-mutagahayyirat* (things believed to be changing, not fixed) or "al-Tsabit" wa "al-Mutahawwil" (Abdullah, 2015). This religion approach needs to be synergized in a scientific way, because in science, there are also views to conform this, such as the phenomenological approach of religion called as the General Pattern and the Particular Pattern (Khozin & Umiarso, 2019:135-162). Two different epistemes meet in the similar point of view, resulting in a flexible perspective, and we may think religiously while still keeping in mind that the Covid-19 issue also relates to scientific issues.

Anthropologically, two hues of thinking (subjective) "fiqhiyyah" and (objective) "falsafiyah" include three layers of entities; first, "Mentifact" which includes beliefs, thoughts, values, and point of view in general; second, "Socifact" which is related to ideas, thoughts obtained through the process of identification, externalization, and objectification in the social world; and third, "Artifact" the symbolic relationship of the physical world such as buildings in worship, ritual institutions inseparable from the link between Mentifact and Sociofact (Abdullah, 2015). The meeting of these two hues needs to be discussed, simply by

various elements, particularly religious stakeholders, so there is no binary opposition in answering questions of religion and science during the pandemic, which therefore, giving birth to a distinction of societal religiosity between piety and the sensation of religious fanaticism.

### **Religiosity Distinction; Between piety and religious sensations during the Covid-19 pandemic**

The need for religious understanding for the people during the Covid-19 pandemic is very necessary, which is not only for owned knowledge but for the benefit of the ummah. Even though there is no religious teaching about badness, why today's religion (in the sense of the religious community) still has a conservative attitude towards Covid-19. The Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia has received mixed responses in religious circles, at least, there are three episteme positions for the Indonesian people to see Covid-19. First, the Covid-19 was intentionally created as a punishment from Allah for humans who feel arrogant, impetuous, and feel superpower.

Undoubtedly, this type of opinion has led to China which afflicted Uighur Muslims (Walton, K.2020). Second, the Covid-19 can be scientifically proven as an infectious disease originating from a virus called SARS-CoC-2 (Kong, WH, Li, Y., Peng, MW, Kong, DG, Yang, XB, Wang, L., & Liu, MQ 2020). Third, Covid-19 must be considered as a warning oras a test to humans, so these humans will always remember that humans have limitations (Maliki, 2020).

This distinction of religiosity is very visible, exemplified by the case in the United States, the existence of a religious-nationalist republican group, religious conservatism that does not believe in science, in Virginia a pastor gives a provocation for his convict saying, "... unless I'm in jail or the hospital because people are healed "(in his church) in April 2020, and a priest at the Tampa Bay church, Florida who asked his people to shake hands while those who did not to be called 'effeminate'. For its members, the church is the safest place. A more specific case of the distinction of religious is found in India, in the name of a sacred tradition passed down from generation to generation, Hindu-nationalists who support the political party of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi have gathered to practice drinking cow urine in the prevention of the Covid-19. Another case that occurred in March 2020 in South Korea actually arose from devout conservative churches, such as the Shincheonji Church of Jesus religious sect which claims to be the Messiah, as well as a form of societal religiosity distinction.



Another case which ultimately contributed to new clusters in Indonesia, such as, was Ijtima Jamaah Tabligh at the Sri Petaling mosque, Malaysia (28 February-1 March 2020). This event was attended by approximately 16,000 people, including 1,500 foreigners. This event became the largest source of the spread of Covid-19 in Southeast Asia at that time, arguing that God's (Allah) affair in Malaysia was very important. Not finished in Malaysia, a similar event was held in Gowa, South Sulawesi (19-22 March 2020), resulting in a new cluster for the spread of Covid-19 in East Java. Catholic religious events continued to be held on 19 March 2020. The Ordination Mass in East Nusa Tenggara was still held under the pretext of being reduced from seven thousand to one thousand people and facilitated with detection tools such as thermogun and hand sanitizer as well as close supervision by the authority. For these reasons, they continued to organize these events in wisdom and public enjoyed it. Another case of the Hindu's Day of Silence ritual, (March 24, 2020) at Prambanan Temple, Klaten was still scheduled even though, in the end, it was only limited to about two hundred people. (Maliki, 2020). The phenomenon that occurs is wearing religious reasonings as the basis that nothing is more important the religion, and thereby, forgetting the essence of humanism during the Covid-19 pandemic era.

In line with the above problems, Covid-19 is used as a symbol of God's intercession to destroy human beings who do not believe in God, sinful humans, and this perspective is what is wrong in understanding Covid-19, even though it has been scientifically proven that Covid-19 is a contagious to anyone and proven through laboratory testings. Misunderstanding by some of these groups is able to obscure Covid-19 as a form of curse for a handful of humans. Therefore, this is the fulcrum of the role of religious scholars to answer the distinction of societal religiosity.

Even though the understanding of religion is always objective-cum-subjective and/or objective-cum-subjective, the location of objectivity can coincide with the interpretation of religion which is closely related to the subjectivity of the interpreters, meaning that religion is always attached to the element of subjectivity (fideistic subjectivism) (Abdullah, 2020:63-10). However, this will lose direction when the subjectivity of the interpretation of religion is used for the interests of groups, mazhab, sect, diluted by the interests of these groups, and there will be various religious obscurations in addressing Covid-19.

Coupled with the jabaria and qodariyah perspectives, basically, the characteristics of the Islamic perspective in facing Covid-19 cannot be separated from the episteme of religious teachings. The concept of

jabariasees that Covid-19 is positioned as God's power which we need to realize as a creature who has no power over him, but another understanding is needed when Covid-19 is positioned at this point of view, the comparison between Covid-19 and Allah is a comparison which can be used as a basis for responding to a pandemic, because the position of Allah as a dzat who has power and will over humans is called destiny (Tahir, 2020).

Quite differently, the qodariyah concept sees Covid-19 as a virus that can be exploited by humans as a way of healing with a scientific approach, because this group sees human efforts that need to be taken, such as social distancing, maintaining cleanliness by washing hands and wearing masks, with such a procedure in principle, humans have the will and freedom to determine their life path (Mahmuddin, 2020:209-222). These two perspectives aforesaid need to be carried out and understood as guidelines for religious communities during the pandemic, so there will be no sensation of religiosity which results in the benefit of many people, only because they want to be seen as obedient to religion.

One common thread to be drawn is that basically the Indonesian people in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic need to be viewed from a religious understanding perspective, which is why it is necessary. Because instead of willing to show their piety, people are trapped in a space of sensation of religiosity without a basis. Initially, this characteristic appeared as a form of ideologization from various schools, but gradually, it coagulated and became religious fanaticism, giving birth to a social practice in the form of sensations that could not be justified in religious teachings.

Isn't it clear, in the hadith of the prophet:

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ الطَّاعُونَ آيَةُ الرَّجْزِ ابْتَلَى اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ بِهِ نَاسًا مِنْ عِبَادِهِ فَإِذَا سَمِعْتُمْ بِهِ فَلَا تَدْخُلُوا عَلَيْهِ وَإِذَا وَقَعَ بِأَرْضِ وَأَنْتُمْ بِهَا فَلَا تَفِرُوا مِنْهُ

Meaning: The Messenger of Allah shallallahu 'alaihi wasallam said: "Tha'un (epidemic of infectious diseases) is a warning from Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala to test His servants from among humans. So, when you hear that a disease is spreading in a country, do not enter that country. And if the plague breaks out in the land where you are, don't run away from it either. " (Narrated by Bukhari and Muslim from Usamah bin Zaid).

Basically, it is clear what the Hadith describes above, so people need to understand the concept of religion correctly once again. Because the

Islam religion is a religion that contains syari'ah which is not rigid and flexible in practice, the rule of law can be adapted to any conditions and its practice is adjusted to the applicable rules by the considerations to the situation and conditions (*sholihu li kulli zaman wa makan*). The teachings of Islam are basically not only flexible but also able to answer the problems that occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic by referring to the true teachings of the Islamic religion (Kumaidi & Febriani. 2020: 65-82).

## **CONCLUSION**

Basically, the distinction of societal religiosity during the Covid-19 pandemic is viewed in the form of dualism of knowledge; first, the community has full of awareness that a pandemic is a disaster sent down by God as a lesson for humans; and second, a pandemic as a pure reality born from the scientific womb, which is referred to as a virus. This view shall be first realized from the religious community, in particular, for people with different religious characteristics or schools.

However, the common thread of understanding religion also affects the social practice of the community in responding to it, viewed in the form of sensation of societal religiosity who wants to show that they are "the most" religiously correct, without the need of obeying the rules by the government. If, whereas, the people were really aware of the history of the prophet Muhammad and his companions when responding to the pandemic, of course, they would obey what was regulated by the government.

However, on the other hand, in Indonesia, the complexity of the pandemic is not only viewed in the form of a sensation of societal religiosity, but a pandemic represents a mega project that benefits from various parties, both at the elite level to the grassroots level. This complexity is the input to see the pandemic from another perspective, such as cultural, social or political perspectives, for example. This research is far from perfect, therefore, it suggests a need for further research on the distinction of religiosity from another point of view, to enrich the scientific treasures and learning for the Indonesian society.

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