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Turning religion from cause to reducer of panic during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Muslim communities in the village facing the COVID-19 Pandemic attempts to find refuge from the plague and hope for survival. However, this led to more caution, which may lead to xenophobia. Via ethnography, this study unmasks the xenophobic attitude. This research discusses the root causes of panic in the community so that remedies can be implemented. The research attempts to explain, from a socio-anthropological viewpoint, how people and religious groups in the village perceive the pandemic of COVID-19 based on their belief in their faith and in the science. The research takes place in Cigagak village, an area of approximately 7000 m² on the outskirts of Bandung of West Java of Indonesia. This study examines the selected respondents (20 respondents as the samples) from about 190 inhabitants (as the population) who had close ties to managing places of worship (mosques) and public places. This study utilises a collaborative self-ethnographic method and qualitative analysis. The influence of COVID-19 has moved to new exclusive and disintegrating practices from the inclusion-cohesive religious tradition. Therefore, this study tries to find out ways on how to reduce exclusive perception and religious practices to a minimum level and how to disappear xenophobia. Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic, inclusive awareness and actions were re-established, and even social cohesiveness was fostered. This study concludes that in its deep conviction nature, theology can change exclusive behaviour to be inclusive if it is based on the religious principles that are raised in response to human events. In this case, the Muslim community in a village can change the fear of COVID-19 pandemic to be a reducer of the panic based on the support of the religious doctrines.

Contribution: This article used a collaborative self-ethnography with a religious socio-anthropological viewpoint. This study could help to solve social problems through theological convergence in Islamic milieu, especially that of the government's formal Islamic organisation and organic Islamic leaders of the society.

Keywords: COVID-19; rural life; religious perspective; social communication; xenophobia.

Introduction

A crucial measure to minimise the transmission of COVID-19 is social distancing on its different levels. The introduction of strict social distancing steps is difficult given their level of urbanism, social and religious norms and the hosting of international religious mass events annually in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). As soon as the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in the Kingdom, KSA introduced decisive social distancing steps. These included the suspension or annulment of religious activities, entertainment and sports events such as the Umrah; the immediate close-down of educational institutions and mosques; and the postponement of all non-essential events to impose a curfew (Yezli & Khan 2020). The resulting worry of the transmission of COVID-19 and its long-term individual and collective consequences are being discussed progressively (Peteet 2020). In Bandung, in the early days of the spread of COVID-19, 677 residents showed positive for COVID-19 in a rapid test. A total of 226 of them are members of the Bethel Church in Bandung (Marlinda Oktavia Erwanti 2020). To that end, the leaders of the Protestant churches in Bandung agreed to end the transmission of COVID-19 by diverting Saturday and Sunday services from the church building to their congregation's house (Simbolon 2020).

The existence of the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia has almost captured the full attention of all its citizens. As the province of West Java nationally entered the alert zone or 'yellow' status for the COVID-19 pandemic, the government has imposed large-scale social restrictions locally, including districts and cities (Darmawan et al. 2020; Muhyidin et al. 2020). West Java Province, including Bandung city, is divided by subdistrict based on the level of vigilance in the lockdown

(Roosa et al. 2020) to target up to the village level. It means that Bandung city is statistically a potential area to watch out for the coronavirus' massive spread. Vigilance applies to all Bandung residents to always enforce the COVID-19 health protocol initiated by the government. This is because Bandung is a large city in West Java, which since the beginning of the spread of COVID-19 has indeed been an area affected by the pandemic, whilst there are many residents with many categories of face-to-face activities, including religious activities. Especially when facing new habits (*New Normal*) using health protocols, namely wearing a mask when going out of the house, maintaining distance and always washing hands with soap, and applying social and physical distancing (Wilder-Smith & Freedman 2020).

The government policy on new habits was implemented for all Bandung residents from the subdistrict level to remote villages. It aimed to minimise the risk of coronavirus transmission in Bandung's entire city and its surroundings. This government policy is to protect its citizens from the threat of COVID-19, which is difficult to predict. However, government policy in a sociological context raises new problems. One of the impacts, which has almost faded in some Bandung residents, predominantly Muslim, is social cohesiveness. It can be seen from the different definitions of the coronavirus, defined by the government, media, and the Muslims in Bandung – the definition of what coronavirus is and what kind of threat it is. This diversity of meanings resulted in differences in some Muslims' perspectives in Bandung in understanding (*verstehen*) and how to anticipate the danger of COVID-19 in public places and in places of worship such as mosques. What appears here is that there was a lack of understanding on the part of the community elite, which caused socialisation to the community to become blurred. But there was an agreement that people must maintain social distance, must wash their hands and must wear a mask. These three things are considered right to be done so that it is also right to be disseminated to the community.

Some muslims in Bandung get information on the case of COVID-19 from television and various social media; however in certain villages where no people exposed to the coronavirus, they only know about the case from limited media they can access. They think that the coronavirus outbreak is a real 'as if' threat, even though the experience they get is only informative – the spread of this information in mid-February 2020 through various media. The intensity of information was getting more robust when the government officially formed the COVID-19 Task Force in March 2020 by issuing health protocol rules. Some muslims' responses, even those in smaller villages, understand COVID-19 information with maximum caution, even though they do not know and experience its proper form. Next, these Muslims form a medium 'imagination' to answer who was illustrated as COVID-19 in the way of 'the other'. This had resulted in the formation of a social construction about COVID-19 personified with 'foreigners or immigrants' outside the community.

The case of COVID-19, which is suspected to be brought by foreigners, strangers, outsiders, or newcomers, has caused the the installation of portals at several village gates and roads in Bandung. The local residents put written notices on the gates prohibiting strangers or outsiders to enter the area. There are strict rules for foreigners or immigrants who want to join their site or worship at the mosque in particular villages. For foreigners or newcomers who want to enter the town must follow health protocols by being checked for body temperature, sprayed with disinfectant and required to wash their hands with soap provided by the residents. It was a kind of xenophobia that happened here. That is, a pathological fear and hatred of anyone 'different' from oneself (Kogan 2017) once again happened in the society. In this case, this suspicion of foreigners (xenophobia) was an expression of ignorance and the lack of practical experience with COVID-19 (Vrsanka, Kovicky & Jangl 2017; Yucel 2014). This xenophobia is a form of collective panic amongst some Muslims in Bandung in understanding the coronavirus in the way of foreigners who were considered threatening their safety.

This article aims to explain some Muslims' diversity in responding to the existence of COVID-19 from a socio-anthropological perspective of religion. This perspective was intended to describe a person's religious thoughts, attitudes and behaviour in the empirical reality associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, an analysis of findings in the field is carried out based on the interpretative method, which explains social facts about real facts (Elkad-Lehman & Greensfeld 2011; Geertz 1973; Tibi 2012).

In this study, a person's diversity was positioned as cultural values associated with and through a particular cultural internalisation process (Bisin, Carvalho & Verdier 2020). Thus, it is local in nature or at least according to or adapted to the environment's general understanding. Here, knowledge and beliefs were based on cultural values that were generally agreed upon and accepted amongst members of the existing religious community and not religion as doctrines manifested as sacred texts, which are universal. Therefore, religion was seen as a belief and knowledge that exists and lives in society. It was interpreted as a world view in treating a religious phenomenon of concern by using culture from the symptoms studied to see, treat and research it (Schilbrack 2020). Meanwhile, religion in this research was interpreted as knowledge and belief that is sacred, which functionally becomes or is used to guide human actions as social beings to fulfil biological, social and integrative needs. That way, to understand and explain the community's religious phenomena, the research target is a cultural approach (Arifina & Agussanib 2020).

Geertz's explanation of religion can be as follows: firstly, faith is described as a system of symbols that exist and form cultural patterns, developing models. In another sense, religion is a model for reality, which, for this reason, can only be properly and precisely obtained through means of

interpretation. Therefore, an expert immediately classified Clifford Geertz as a follower of anthropology-interpretive (Tibi 2012). The interpretive method presents and explains social facts about real reality– social facts in a Durkheimian sense – and not the relevant text. That is, the truth is measured here by a model documented in the book. Social facts include ways of acting, thinking, and feeling, external to the individual and which endowed with a power of coercion because of which they control the individual (Durkheim 2014).

This study used a qualitative analysis with ethnographic methods. This type of research is the forerunner to anthropology's birth – because ethnographic characters authentically examine individuals and communities living in certain cultural situations (Hine 2015). As the main rule, researching a particular society, including its culture, means studying to be understood and interpreted by the various realities of the existing cultural dynamics. The cultural terminology referred to does not only describe the reality on the surface (superstructure) but also dives into it until it has found the hidden facts (the backstage), such as the reality of meanings, ideas and values (Simonson 2020). Thus, it is necessary to describe reality in detail or what is known as a thick description (Geertz 1973). Here, finding the real structure is combined and encountered gradually with emic and ethical approaches (Beck et al. 2020). The key answers were based on the references. It is a combination of constitutive, cognitive, evaluative and expressive truths. Seeking, observing, discovering and presenting in this particular way are the essences and processes of what we mean by ideational ethnography (Burchardt & Westendorp 2018).

Based on the collaborative self-ethnographic methodology (Kerwin & Hoeber 2015) and the socio-anthropological perspective of religion, this study explains the relationship between Muslims' religious behaviour in the Cigagak village, Bandung, and the existence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, this study finds the attitudes and behaviour of Muslims who suspect 'foreigners or newcomers' who will enter their village as the coronavirus' embodiment. This finding is unique because there is a change in the tradition of being open and always maintaining social cohesiveness. Still, because of the media's information about the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a change in the attitude, that is, exclusive and closes oneself to foreigners' presence. So, the question was how do the religious faithful answer the pandemic around them in COVID-19? Likewise, had there been a shift in understanding during the COVID-19 pandemic that hit their villages over time?

Research methods and design

This study examines the religious perception of a Muslim community regarding the COVID-19 outbreak in a village in Indonesia. This reflects people's perceptions of a social issue. However, people's perceptions can change in line with changes that occur in social reality. Every religious

assumption, including its changes, can be traced to the thoughts of religious leaders as a reference for people's thinking. Therefore, questions about religious beliefs are also addressed to religious leaders. The given mind map leads us to a qualitative study. This is because the data disclosed were about opinions and interpretations that may be unique to a person or group in a particular context or area. This study was in-depth and simple so that the people studied can speak for themselves about the things being asked, namely how did they perceive the COVID-19 outbreak based on their religious views.

The study did not question all of the village's population of 190 people, but asked the representations of religious adherents and their leaders; thus, it was a snowball sampling. Structured questions in this study were aimed at 13 people from the congregation who attended the mosque during Friday services and 7 religious leaders, including from the government side (Indonesian Ulema Council), the mosque administrators and the religious teachers. The data collected from those 20 people were then interpreted qualitatively based on the themes that emerge from the respondents' answers.

Results
Pandemic COVID-19, media and Muslim villagers

Islam is seen as a perfect religion by its adherents. It can provide answers to various problems, including social problems. Therefore, Islam, as a theological system, must provide an answer to the problem of the COVID-19 pandemic. This was because adherents were waiting for theological answers to the problems that also involve religious attitudes and practices; including methods of worship in congregation, visiting the sick and burying corpses. If they got definite answers from the religious leaders, Muslims can live comfortably, because it seems as if there is a guarantee of truth in the decisions about their life problems. That guarantee can also lead to a guarantee of safety in the afterlife. This is where the elites of the Islamic community play an important role in formulating answers to the reality of COVID-19. This is also because in Muslims there is an assumption that their whole life is worship (*hayatuna kulluha 'ibadah*). So the theological considerations based on the sources of Islamic teachings, namely the al-Qur'an and Hadith (Tradition of Prophet Muhammad) must be clearly formulated.

This research used a collaborative self-ethnographic method, namely researching in our village, that is, Cigagak of Bandung. The lockdown rules were 'interpreted' as restrictions on entering other people's territory – even for research. This restriction was interpreted as always at home and reducing gatherings with other people to avoid coronavirus spread. Also, collaborative self-ethnography makes it easier for the researchers to collect data (observation and interviews) because the intensity of direct involvement in the field was the main requirement of the ethnographic

method. This research activity was carried out in early March 2020 when there was constant information about COVID-19 through television and social media. At that time, the media always announced an increase in the number of people affected by COVID-19 and people who died from it, nationally and internationally. The horror was exacerbated by various unsolicited news on social media such as WhatsApp and Facebook. This research was concluded at the end of June 2020.

Demographically, the research location was in the Cigagak village, located on the outskirts of Bandung city with approximately 7000 square meters. The population is around 190 people and was led by one head of the neighbourhood. On average, they work as informal workers and have lower middle income. The education level of its citizens is mostly high school graduates. The majority of the population is Muslim, with one place of worship (Mosque) and *madrasas* (religious schools), led by religious leaders (*ustadz* – Islamic teachers and religious activists) consisting of 5 men and 2 women. The existence of community leaders and religious leaders in Cigagak village has a vital role in social change in various circumstances (Horikoshi 1976). Therefore, all residents fully entrust these figures to tackling COVID-19 with their multiple suggestions.

In early March 2020, information about COVID-19 was getting more intense through television and social media. At the same time, WHO also designated COVID-19 as a pandemic outbreak that needs serious attention from all countries (Cucinotta & Vanelli 2020; Spinelli & Pellino 2020). The government officially formed the COVID-19 Task Force to tackle the spread of the coronavirus. Health protocols were strictly enforced in Bandung and its surroundings, including places of worship. Even though none of the residents of Cigagak village had been infected with the coronavirus, the residents simultaneously enforce government recommendations with strict health protocols, followed by closing the village gate with a portal. The purpose of installing the outlet is to limit foreigners or immigrants in the Cigagak village. Some residents agree that 'foreigners or newcomers' were potential carriers of the coronavirus outbreak in their town. Therefore, there need to be maximum restrictions and vigilance against the presence of foreigners. Likewise, village mosques are limited to the residents if they wish to worship. Even then, they must wear masks and bring their prayer mats. The mosques also provided hand sanitisers at the entrance to clean hands before residents carry out religious activities. This reality had never before imposed strict health protocols in mosques, except when information on the COVID-19 outbreak.

Since the continuous information on COVID-19 entered the Bandung area, all socio-religious activities in Cigagak village have experienced a drastic decline. Routine social movements have also stopped because of the circulation of information on the coronavirus outbreak, which was easily transmitted between people. Religious activities in mosques had also been significantly reduced. Performance of congregational

five-time daily prayers decrease drastically in number of the participants, gathering activities is strictly limited according to lockdown standards and health protocols, and wearing masks and maintaining physical distancing are obligations. As a tradition, when residents meet, they shake hands, and there is no distance limit, but since the information on the COVID-19 outbreak, they have changed the tradition by limiting distance and not shaking hands (Darmawan et al. 2020). The residents' economic activities have also experienced a significant decline (Sumaryana et al. 2020). It was indicated that several residents were dismissed from their jobs as factory workers (Ubaidillah & Riyanto n.d.). The children's learning activities at school are also closed indefinitely (Mansyur 2020).

It further gave the impression that the Cigagak village had fully responded to various media information about the COVID-19 outbreak. Their experience of this outbreak was only informative and not empirical because no one had yet been infected. Information about COVID-19 is strengthened by the intensity of discussions between residents when they gather or conversations via Whatsapp (WA) group of the village, even though no one had ever been infected. Various interpretations of residents about the coronavirus were based on information from multiple media with multiple variants. In essence, residents have joint issues that COVID-19 is considered a form that endangers their lives. Therefore, they need to be aware of its existence. They agree that the state of COVID-19 is personified interpretation with 'foreigners or newcomers' as the medium for the outbreak. This attitude is a form of expression of the zero-knowledge and empirical experience of Cigagak residents about the coronavirus, which creates a mood of 'collective panic' by being aware of foreigners or newcomers (xenophobia).

The xenophobic attitude of the Cigagak residents has changed the patterns of their religious activities. So far – before the COVID-19 outbreak – they readily accepted the presence of 'foreigners' as a form of obedience to spiritual teachings. But since the COVID-19 information spread, religious propositions to avoid disease outbreaks are mandatory for every Muslim. As a result, suspicion of strangers is legally 'mandatory' because it is an emergency to prevent destruction (disease). This is also considered as an expression of adherence to religious teachings (Islam). Moreover, it is supported by the fatwa of the *Majlis Ulama Indonesia* [*MUI*; Indonesian Islamic Scholars Organization] and the government (Ministry of Religious Affairs) to always maintain distance (physical and social distancing) from each other. Accordingly, changes in a religious person's dynamics because of emergency momentum are associated with survival.

Islamic theological answers to the COVID-19 problem may vary depending on the accentuation of the religious leaders themselves. Belief in the religion itself is based on the respective schools adhered to by Muslims. In Indonesia, there are two major schools of thought, namely the

Muhammadiyah School, which is more modernist, and the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) School, which is more traditionalist. Both have different people. In Cigagak village, the more traditionalist parties were more relaxed about social distancing restrictions. This was because they believe that death and illness were a problem that has been determined by God. So, they trusted fate more than human endeavours. In terms of the COVID-19 pandemic, the NU group was more tolerant, including to the foreigners.

Meanwhile, the Muhammadiyah group and the like which were modern have more faith in science. Therefore, they believed more that the cause of death and transmission of the disease were based on a virus called COVID-19. It was based on the rule 'everything has a cause' (*kullu shai'in sabab*). Both beliefs were based on Islamic theological beliefs. Although there were few adherents, the Muhammadiyah people in Cigagak village were quite influential, because they were from an intellectual group and also took care of neighbourhood issues. They were the ones who were less tolerant of the arrival of foreigners. They seemed too afraid to connect with other people socially.

Seeing the trending of these two attitudes, the government representative ulama, namely the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) felt the need to reconcile the two by stating that even though fate has been determined by God, humans do not know it. Therefore, efforts that comply with health protocols were better because Muslims were encouraged to try to avoid damage (*dar'u al-mafasid*). Likewise, the MUI added that Muslims must protect themselves and their families from hell (*quu anfusakum wa ahlikum nara*), which was interpreted to avoid dangerous things. With the fatwas issued by this government cleric, the Cigagak people eventually became more tolerant of foreigners, whilst still trying to maintain the health protocols.

'The others' as the definition of medium COVID-19

With the enactment of the lockdown in Bandung, Cigagak village residents have imposed restrictions on foreigners or migrants in their area. The limitation by closing the portal at the village entrance is an independent initiative of the residents. Every foreigner who wants to enter the Cigagak village was first asked where his or her destination was and how long. Every foreigner who wants to join the town must follow health protocols, wear a mask, be sprayed with disinfectant and wash his or her hands using soap provided by the residents. The Cigagak village residents' actions were an expression of foreigners' vigilance as 'The Others' who were imagined as carriers of the COVID-19 outbreak. The villagers' inability to understand the coronavirus has resulted in forming an imaginative social medium in a foreigner personification figure. So far, the existence of the coronavirus outbreak for residents of Cigagak village has only been an informative experience from television and social media – not a real understanding of being infected. Until the end of

June 2020, not a single Cigagak resident had ever been infected with the coronavirus.

The independent initiative of the residents of Cigagak village to shut themselves off from 'The Others' is a product of interpretation of government regulations (*lockdown*) regarding COVID-19 that applies throughout Indonesia, including in Bandung and its surroundings. Therefore, citizens' stringent vigilance over foreigners or newcomers' presence is the only alternative way of survival. Mr. Rodih, the head of the neighbourhood of Cigagak village, appealed to all residents to guard themselves against the spread of the coronavirus by always paying attention to health protocols according to the appeal of the central government. These suggestions were supported by community leaders and religious leaders in every meeting between them. From this appeal, all residents agreed to close the entrance gates with portals to prevent from the spreading of the COVID-19 outbreak, brought by the 'the others' presence; whereas, during the meetings to discuss anticipation for the COVID-19 epidemic, some residents neither wear masks nor maintain social distance. The lax health protocol rules for some residents are that no one had been infected with the coronavirus. This reality reinforces the assumption that the existence of the COVID-19 outbreak only applies to foreigners or immigrants who were most likely claimed to be carriers of the virus.

The knowledge of residents about COVID-19 so far has only come from informative experiences, namely from TV and social media. As a result of the limited knowledge and experience, it forms an imaginative medium. It was accompanied by a moral panic attitude towards the residents suspecting strangers' presence, which they have never done before. There was information that people from neighbouring villages were infected with COVID-19. Social panic also increases residents' vigilance to tighten the presence of foreigners by locking the village entrance. There is a public terror in facing this unseen coronavirus figure, but, in turn, they create a 'concrete' model, namely stranger or outsider as a medium. This reality is a social drama in which it must be clear who the 'opponent' is, namely the unknown stranger.

The coronavirus' personification in the form of 'The Others' signifies residents' inability to define COVID-19 in its original way. We need a social medium in the form of another person to facilitate the definition of COVID-19 as their real enemy. It had resulted in the emergence of the residents' suspicion of the presence of foreigners or newcomers. The residents realised this attitude of anti-presence of foreigners since the emergence of COVID-19 information. So far, before the COVID-19 information was available – the residents were very tolerant of all foreigners' presence. It is also by Islamic teachings regarding respect for guests, which is part of faith (*Hadith*). However, since the spread of information on the COVID-19 outbreak, which is considered easily contagious, there has been a change in Cigagak Muslims' attitude towards foreign guests' presence, namely limiting and

avoiding. Interestingly, preventing and restricting encounters with foreign guests to become infected with disease outbreaks is also part of Islamic teachings. It was explained that the Prophet Muhammad appealed to his people always to stay away from behaviour that results in self-destruction. So, most Muslims here try not to leave the house much, because the protection of damage takes precedence over the implementation of goodness (*dar'u al-mafasid muqaddam 'ala jalbi al-masalih*), as an Islamic doctrine says.

Discussion

Limiting the presence of foreigners or newcomers in the Cigagak village, not only in social spaces but also in worship places (such as mosques), has enforced the same. The administrators of the *Dewan Kemakmuran Masjid* (DKM; Mosque Welfare Council) and the Islamic teachers responded to the COVID-19 outbreak according to the Fatwa of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) Number: 14 of 2020 concerning health protocols and the elimination of congregational activities that must be enforced in mosques, religious congregation and the like. Mr. Ghofar (Chairman of the Mosque) in every religious event urges the community who wants to go to the Mosque to always follow the standard rules of health protocol by using the hand sanitiser that has been provided at the entrance to the Mosque and must wear a mask. He also imposed a limit on the number of congregational prayers for the Cigagak village residents and urged congregations to bring their prayer mats from their homes. The appeal of the Ulama Council was also interpreted by mosque administrators and Islamic teachers as limiting the presence of foreigners who wish to worship at the Mosque. Village mosques were prioritised only for their residents. When some foreigners or newcomers wanted to perform prayers at a village mosque, it was recommended that they inform the mosque management or the neighbourhood representatives. It was nothing but to anticipate the spread of the COVID-19 outbreak in the local village mosque areas.

The Muslim residents of Cigagak agree that the mosque in their village was prioritised by residents who have a known medical history. In anticipation to not spread the coronavirus, the Cigagak Mosque congregants agreed to bring prayer mats from their homes. In March 2020, the village mosque was sprayed with disinfectant every day in every room used as a religious activity. However, rushing disinfectants' routine began to be limited to once a week, given the limited mosques' limited budget for purchasing disinfectants and hand sanitisers. During Ramadan (May 2020 – June 2020), the best prayers and Eid prayers in congregation at village mosques were eliminated. The village Islamic teachers urged residents to pray the best and Eid al-Fitri prayers at their homes utilising social distancing to avoid the spread of COVID-19. At the same time, Mr. Ghofar, the head of the mosque, urged the Muslim community to pray at home, which had never happened before in the history of a mosque being established in Cigagak village. Most Muslim community leaders and the village's Islamic teachers agreed to obey the Council and Government fatwa regarding the COVID-19 emergency condition, which requires Muslim residents to pray and worship in their respective homes. Supporting this latest MUI's appeal gives the impression of being a manifestation of new fiqh concerning the COVID-19 emergency context. The product is a new *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) based on the interpretation of the Prophet's tradition about avoiding destruction (COVID-19) as part of Islamic obedience (Nuryana & Fauzi 2020).

In this context, the authority to determine Muslims' diversity during the COVID-19 period was determined by the local power regime (Yezli & Khan 2020). The policy of the religious power regime (local) is also a product of interpreting the Islamic teaching text it adhered. For example, mosques during the pandemic are only for residents and were not recommended by foreigners or migrants. Including religious leaders' power to determine the moral space – there is a change regarding prayer that can be carried out again at the Mosque, even with strict health protocol requirements. The principle is to prioritise the safety of COVID-19 to become a metamorphosis of xenophobia and moral panic. With a relationship of power centered on worship places, these two issues resulted in policies of the rulers of the village mosque, which undermined religious unity and the previous social cohesiveness (Arif 2019; Haynes 2020). It is because the intersection of the epidemic relations with religious and social relations has led to religious exclusivity, from Islam as a global religion (*rahmatan lil alamin*) to Islam as a local religion (*rahmatan alaihim*).

This study recommends mitigating limited and unique perception of an individual or group's diversity, leading to excessively anti-foreign behaviour (Els 2014). Furthermore, this study restores the understanding and includes religious conduct amid the danger of COVID-19, promoting social knowledge and cohesion (Alimi et al. 2020). In this crisis, experts suggest that we build regular rhythms; stay conscious, sympathetic and involved; communicate with others; find motivation and joy; and do what we can to help (Peteet 2020; Sjoraida, Anwar & Rahman 2019). Therefore, this study intends to restore religious messages in communication between human beings.

In the Koran, there is a term called '*khuluq*', which is in Surah Al-Qalam: 4 and Surah Asy-Syu'ara Verse 137 describing morals or character (Mustari & Rahman 2011). Apart from the morality of the Prophet, which must be followed (the first verse), it also explains religion, character, ideology and doctrine. Furthermore, it relates to Islamic communication's prescribed ethics as outlined in the Al-Quran and the Sunnah (speech, deeds and consent) of the Prophet Muhammad (no need p.b.u.h.). Islamic emphasis on ethical communication principles is truth, justice, decency and practicing what is preached (Rahman & Mimbar 2018).

Because for the community, Islam provides a complete way of life, serves all areas of human life and provides guidance for all walks of life of the individual, social, material, moral, economic and political, national, and international law and culture (Anwar, Komariah & Rahman 2017). Islam has also put its derivative factors through specific rules and

regulations to guide all kinds of communication and interpersonal relationships. Islam, through the Al-Quran and Hadith, has provided principles and methods of interpersonal communication, human interaction, and relations between Muslims and non-Muslims to achieve peace, equality, prosperity in the world and the safety and pleasure of Allah in the hereafter (Mohseni & Bighash 2020; Septiwiharti, Maharani & Mustansyir 2019). Before the COVID-19 outbreak, these doctrines were practiced in the society. So, again, it could also be practiced in the same society.

Such interactions between Muslims are based on goodwill, sympathy and compassion, whilst interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims are relations of acquaintance, cooperation and justice. In this case, Allah said:

> O people, verily We created you from a man and a woman and made you nations and tribes so that you could know each other. Surely the noblest among you in the sight of Allah is the most devout among you. Allah is All-Knowing, The Omniscience. (Surah Al-Hujurat: 13)

Furthermore, Allah said about the attitude that Muslims must take towards the adherents of other religions. That is:

> Allah does not forbid you to do good and be fair to people who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your country. Indeed, Allah likes those who act justly. (Surah Al-Mumtahanah: 8)

In Islam, the ummah must understand that interactions between humans are not limited to attractive or beneficial things, but rather maintain universal human dignity as a whole and lay down rules that will protect the essence of humanity. This is reflected in the following: (1) mutual respect, (2) spread love, (3) justice and balance, (4) equality behaviour, (5) hold fast to virtue, (6) freedom, (7) tolerance, (8) help each other and (9) keep promises (Askari & Mirakhor 2020).

Finally, this study also shows that psychological attitude such as xenophobia is not inherited from religion but from a narrow human mentality. Here faith can revive its function as a saviour of mankind, not even destroy it. Therefore, we need religious communication efforts amongst religious followers and between local residents and immigrants or foreigners.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected Muslims' religious patterns in villages, from being inclusive to being exclusive in social interactions. It results in a xenophobic attitude or anti-presence of strangers (the others) in public spaces (villages) and worship places. The Muslim community's behaviour was transformed because of media information (TV and social media). The impact caused moral panic. The unclear form of the coronavirus, which has only been circulating from the press, has made the 'opponent' entity personified by foreigners who were considered to potentially spread the coronavirus. In this context, too, Muslims' religious authority during the COVID-19 period was determined by a handful of religious power regimes. The

government of religious power's policies and decisions are also the product of interpretations of the Islamic teachings it adheres to. Another impact during the COVID-19 period was that Muslim residents increased their hygiene and health disciplines with the existence of health protocols from the government and council as a form of religious authority. In short, all of this is because of the intersection of epidemic social relations with religious, social ties, which have metamorphosed from being inclusive to being exclusive and forming new patterns of social relations.

This study recommends a person or group's diversity to minimise narrow and exclusive understanding, resulting in excessive anti-foreigner attitudes (xenophobia). This attitude is of course not uniquely Islamic, but Islam had become the basis for adherents to be xenophobic, namely the principle of preventing damage. However, this study shows that in the end, the doctrine was defeated when the people who were considered foreigners were relatives to a family or neighbour. So, not only actions to protect each other but also mutual respect emerged. This study also restores performance and inclusive religious behaviour that can foster social awareness and cohesiveness even amid the COVID-19 pandemic threat.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article, as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

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