The Meaning of Collective Identity Amongst Muslim Women

The Case of Persaudaraan Muslimah (Salimah) in Makassar

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Abstract—**Democratization has opened a channel for Muslim women to speak out their needs as citizens. Since Muslim women are not one entity, a number of religious movement organizations increases along with the rising of Muslim consciousness in practicing Islamic values. Establishing these organizations are a response to religious needs of Muslim women which have not been fully fulfilled yet by the mainstream of Islamic movements. By joining the organizations, Muslim women find the path to increase their understanding of Islamic values and their political awareness as well as forming of their collective identity that as a connection of personal cognitive, moral and emotion with group or organization. In terms of process, collective identity shows how actors share meanings, understandings, and emotions during their participation in religious programs. Meanwhile as a product, identity collective is the recognition of outsider organizations to the actors. Collective identity internally leads to solidarity, proudness, and empowerment meanwhile the others perceive it as affiliation, exclusiveness, and contestation. This study shows that the different meanings of collective identity do not trigger a manifest conflict because Muslim women have remarkable abilities to accommodate and respect dissimilarities among them that support the harmony of Indonesian society.**

Keywords—democratization, collective identity, muslim women, religious movement organizations

I. INTRODUCTION

Democratization in Indonesia has triggered and emerged the various social movements including religious movements which are also as a logical consequence of citizen's collective consciousness of their political rights and obligations. These movements depict the plurality of Indonesian society in terms of race, ethnics, religions, gender and social class. Since democratization means freedom, equality and empowerment, these divergences demand representation in political sphere [1].

Social movement is a reflection of social, cultural and political environments where the movement is located and it is such a form of citizen participation in the life of nation and state [2, 3]. Indonesia is known as the most populous Muslim country in the world [4, 5], the religious social movement (Islam), therefore, is one of Muslims' efforts in representing their needs and interests. In Soeharto era, the Islamic movements experienced numerous restrictions in expressing its

interests. Nowadays Islam activisms are growing and influencing the social lives of Indonesian Muslims [5, 6].

Islam is becoming not only a symbolic orientation but also a structural orientation. Some religious habits and collective identities are common view in a public sphere such as wearing hijab, stopping by at the mosque for taking pray, publishing of Islamic books, the establishing of Islamic banks and modern Islamic schools. Fealy called it as Islamic commodification that turning of Islamic faith and symbol into commodity capable of being bought and sold for profit, [7] whereas Hasan [8] describes it as the making of public Islam piety. In addition, the increasing number of *majelis taklim* (study group of Muslim women) is also a remarkable phenomenon of religious movements which have spread out in every regions of Indonesia. There were 165.000 majelis taklim in 2013 (Kemendag, 2013) [9].

The presence of *majelis taklim* is hard to be separated from the Muslim women movements that have supervised it for years. In general, there are two kinds Muslim women movements; the first is the wings of the mainstream Islamic organizations and the second one is independent religious organizations. The largest organizations of Islamic movements such as Nahdhatul Ulama (NU), Muhammadiyah and Persis have founded wings organizations for women such as Muslimat NU and Fathayat NU, Muhammadiyah has Aisyiyah and Nasyiatul Aisyiyah, while Persis has formed Persistri. Programs of these movement organizations are aimed to improve the life quality of Muslim women in Indonesia [10, 11].

The independent religious movement organizations are not the part of the main organizations. They are included in the new social movements [13, 14] that grow due to factors such as dissatisfaction with the prominent Islamic organizations that relating to coaching function is just for its members, different personal religious experiences that are contrary to the main teachings of Islam, salvation awareness of the hereafter life, differences in matters of ways and strategy of movements, and differences of political interests [15]. Some movements are transnational that are strongly influenced by the global socio-political situations [16, 17].

These two forms of movement are basically a response to the demands of Muslim religiosity in Indonesia which Muslim

women involvement is high in Islamic movement organizations that aimed to enhance, maintain and support the daily Islamic teachings practices [18, 19]. The growth of new religious-based movement organizations such as Salimah, *majelis taklim,* and others indicates the heterogeneity of Muslim women movements in terms of different understandings, needs and interests. As a result, these differences are manifest in collective actions and identities which are, then, fought in public sphere.

The searching of an identity includes in one of characteristics of new social movements. Both Touraine and Melucci suggest that class is no longer anymore as the basis of identity and resistance of movements [20]. Melucci argues that the new social movement is a form of collective fighting for individual existence that is based on the biological, psychological and interpersonal senses. Hence movement defines the meaning of "us" through 3 organized general orientations; a relationship between the actors with the purpose of his actions, it's relation to the means of action that are used by the actors, and a relationship between the actions of actor with his milieu. Here Melucci refers collective identity as a process that occurs internally when the actors work together with the other members in attempting to accomplish the goals of movements and as a product which outsider responds to actors in building network relation [21]. In other words, collective identity describes the ability of actor in recognizing and being recognized by the others. Melucci has offered a comprehensive view on collective identity that is fought by new social movements generally.

The presence of Salimah at first was focused on teaching of Islamic values for Muslim women, but in 2015 its vision and mission covered problems related to women, children and family. Salimah (Muslimah Sisterhood) founded in 2000 in Jakarta. This movement organization was initiated by a group of Muslim women who have long been engaged in *da'wah* (Islamic preaching) and have experienced under repressive condition during New Order administration. Salimah is trying to offer problem solving in order to improve the life quality of women, families and children in Indonesia. Nowadays, Salimah spreads in 30 provinces, 281 cities / districts and 694 sub-districts in entire Indonesia [22, 23].

Salimah is also active in supervising *majelis taklim* that leads to extended conditions such as emerging the new elite of women, providing a bundle of mass, and growing the household entrepreneurs. Salimah in Makassar that established in 2001, participates in maintaining local religious values of Buginess Makassares which Islam has become a social identity for the Buginess and Makassar [24].

Several collective actions of Salimah such as joining a demonstration to support the legal draft against pornography and porn actions, declaring political support to Prabowo for president 2014, collecting money for Palestinians, and establishing a branch in Korea, showed that Salimah indirectly is running its collective identity not only as the religious movement but also as the political movement [25]. This paper, therefore, will describe and analysis the meaning of Salimah's collective identity that is constructed internally, and what outsiders perceive it. Describing collective identity leads us to

understand the phenomenon of new social movements that a part of civil society development in democratization era.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

A. *Type of Research*

This research aims to explore the meaning of collective identity of Salimah. Qualitative method is applied since this method is able to depict a social phenomenon comprehensively. As Creswell argues that "Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" [26].

B. *Setting, Research Focus and Unit of Analysis*

The research conducted effectively on December 2016 – February 2017 in Makassar. A preliminary survey had been run due to gain information and open relation with the subjects since they had already had several scheduled activities. Research focused on forming of Salimah collective identity that seen from internal and external point of view. Therefore the unit of analysis is Salimah and other organizations which have ever cooperated with Salimah. The subjects of research were the boards of Salimah, members and two actors from *majelis taklim* and other Muslim women organizations.

C. *Data Collecting*

In order to describe the process of collective identity works in Salimah, an in-depth interview was used as the instrument to gathering information from the subjects; Salimah Boards of South Sulawesi and Makassar, and also two actors from other Muslim women organizations. Interviewing used a listed question to help interviewing kept on the track then it was developed when the answers need more explanations. In addition, observation participation and documentary study applied in order to gain a comprehensive process of collective identity of Salimah.

D. *Data Analysis*

Data are analyzed which includes data reduction, categorization, synthesis and conclusion or verification. Data reduction refers to the identification of data. This data are coded and grouped such as the actions of actors included in the process of internalization, identification and negotiation. The synthesis here is to link between several categories by giving a name or label again so that it can explain and conclude as final verification of the research, then presenting in narrative form.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

After collecting information, the study shows that collective identity covers both as process and a product of social movements. As a process, the participants who involve in several programs of Salimah have established a good social relation [27]. This is an interactive process when the subject socializes each other in every single occasion. Here, the meaning of collective identity is in subjective point of view that refers to the ability of actor in translating organization

goals, emotion involvement and taking an action in the frame of organization.

The genealogy of Salimah is from *tarbiyah* movement that emerged since 1980an, the era which the spirit of Islamic revival spread from Iran, Egypt and Saudi of Arabia to Muslim countries [27]. This movement developed in Soeharto era which made regulation that hinder Muslim from Islam politic. Many Muslim students joined this movement that was considered as the best alternative for intellectual exercises, religious practicing and building Muslim networks. Most of Salimah actors have ever joined and participated in this movement. Their background in *tarbiyah* movement are becoming social capital in *dakwah* activities at higher level namely society that including her families, friends and neighbors [28].

In achieving its vision and missions, the boards of Salimah both at level of province and district, offer programs that are colored by Islamic values. Therefore a sense of devout to Allah brings them to collective identity of Salimah. Several collective actions have conducted that related to organizational activities; such as meetings, trainings and discussions that are conducted in Islamic manners. Before and after gathering activities, the actors ask other members to pray by saying *basmallah* (in the name of Allah, the most gracious the most merciful), then closing activities by asking forgiveness and thanks to Allah. All activities are part of worships that are expected to gain reward from Allah in hereafter. This is a kind of pious habits of Muslim women in Salimah that included in mission of Salimah in creating a religious person, then she will establish a Muslim household, and finally develop Muslim society.

Other Salimah activities are oriented both for members and Muslim women. For example, Salimah organized a training on parenting skill in several branches of Salimah boards that cover 13 districts in South Sulawesi. Training goals are to increase parenting awareness due to sustain and protecting Muslim families [29]. The training materials of course refer to Islamic teachings that have been stated both in Holy *Qur'an* and *hadist* (prophet behaviours and statements). Several Salimah Boards at level of South Sulawesi are skilled actors whose experiences in mass communication and training [30]. Salimah has high concern on children rearing because the actors view that kids are the best treasure for their future both in the world and hereafter. During the training, reciprocal relation occurred among the committees, boards and participants. They translated the vision and mission of Salimah in their actions; supporting its program and cooperating to make this program succeed. Their emotion involved since they have already established mutual understanding as an effect of their commitment and loyalty to Salimah. As the head of Salimah described that "our activities have lead us to a tied emotion, different interpretations on Salimah missions among us are not becoming an obstacle to us because we are sisters in Islam forever" [31].

Similarly the programs of women empowerment in economic field result in forming Salimah as a problem solver. Salimah has program namely *"GEN"* that abbreviation of *Gerakan Ekonomi Nasional* (National Economic Movements). There are five ways Salimah in conducting this program that

are productive (having a *halal* business locally, optimizing back yard with productive plantation), saving (all members are suggested to allocate fund about IDR 10.000 and save it at the main cooperation (Kossuma), efficiency in using electricity, and water, buying just the Salimah products, and investment by buying Salimah's stocks.

Internally, the interaction between the members of Salimah always runs in the frame of worship to God. During this interaction they share experience of being a good Muslim not only in terms of cognition but also emotion. Collective identity of Salimah has some important meanings; a religious consciousness of the actors to contribute in Islamic preaching optimally, a sense of togetherness that motivates the actors to adapt their personal interests with collective interests, and an opportunity to be more participate in several religious programs of Salimah and others. A strong collective identity makes the member proud that brings them to exclusiveness indirectly [32].

In terms of product, collective identity of Salimah is read by other religious movements such *majelis taklim*, and Aisyiyah during they work in a project by inviting each other to attend a program. Sometimes, Salimah invites these organizations to join seminar and training, and they do vice versa. Collective identity here refers to objective view of other organization to Salimah that is influenced by different personal cognition, interests and political affiliation. A board of majelis taklim which has experienced work with Salimah, perceived that Salimah has the potent human resources. Because Salimah's member are mostly 25-40 years old [33].

Salimah, *majelis taklim* and Aisyiyah are included in Islamic movement organizations, they have already had own programs that are purposed to gaining the better life of Muslim women. However, these organizations have different strategies and priorities in running programs which lead to coexistence. This means that each organization in several conditions just organize itself without any cross-section at all with others, however at the same time they have also similar programs for similar target. For example, the program of Islamic study that is proposed to one target at one location, this situation brings them to a contestation latently. They have to convince the targeted group to choose which one is the best.

A latent conflict amongst Muslim women organizations is not result in violence situation because Muslim women perceive that they have a similar main agenda to increasing women's live, particularly Muslim women. They accept differences in terms of strategies and priorities because each organization actually has own market that has been coached for years. [34]They try to avoid an open contradiction, therefore, they develop a sense of tolerance each other. They respect each other by giving invitation, attending a ceremonial program and discussing a similar program without asking to conduct it together. They sometimes meet at the meeting of national program that conducted by government.

IV. CONCLUSION

Referring to previous description, the actors of Salimah have produced the meaning of collective identity as Muslim women who obligate to Islamic teaching to society. Internal

relation for years leads to a tie connection amongst the members. They show their solidarity and proudness to society. Collective identity in terms of process is the way of actors in translating togetherness subjectively. Meanwhile, other movements read collective identity Salimah as a product that relates to political aspiration, and exclusiveness.

Competition amongst organizations of Muslim women movements takes a latent conflict since women always avoid violence in nature, each organization works separately, building tolerant behaviours in responding differences. Collective identities of movements will exist when at the level organization, its collectivity is not strong. Otherwise more stronger attachment to movement organization, more exclusive collective identity.

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