

# From faith to attitude and concerns for animal and the natural environment

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## **5.5 Impact Paragraph: a reflection on the scientific and societal impact of this dissertation**

This dissertation contributes to the identification of religion as cultural factors which may promote and inhibit concerns for the natural environment. The motivation behind this topic is to provide evidence on how religion, and religious community play important parts in promoting concerns for the environment through carefully observing religious orientation, ethical ideologies, and religious narrative framing. In this impact chapter, we discuss the scientific and societal impact of the present dissertation and to what extent the findings may contribute to society.

### **5.5.1 A personal perspective on this dissertation**

As a person who was born and raised in Indonesia, religion is part and parcel of daily life for the majority of Indonesian. Since 2004 Aceh tsunami until now, Indonesia had gone through, approximately, a total of 733 major and minor natural disasters. Through my previous career in disaster management sector, I have seen how most disasters affected communities in Indonesia in struggling with the hurdles of rebuilding back their lives amidst the loss of their

loved ones. I personally see how religion helped most of the survivors to cope with the stress and hardship of reclaiming back whatever they have left in their lives. After disaster, it is very common to hear consolation sermons in mosques or churches motivating survivors to get back on their feet, suggesting that those who died are the ones without sin while the remaining survivors are those who were given enough time to cleanse their sin before they can rejoin their loved ones again. In extreme challenging times, religion often plays a significant role in helping people to cope with their stress. Similar findings are also often found in studies about coping with trauma, illness recovery, and poverty. However, religion may also encourage a darker aspect of human behaviors such as terrorism, extremism, identity politics, interreligious conflicts, and violence. For me, this dissertation serves as my scientific endeavor to search for evidence of how religion, which is embedded deeply in daily lives of Indonesian people, operates in a specific context. Aside from providing moral guidance, it is very clear that religion provides a way of interpreting what is considered truth to its followers. Such truth may or may not be backed by facts and evidence, but nonetheless, it inspires actual behaviors of those who believe it.

Therefore, in this research, I, together with my research team at Maastricht University, Universitas Indonesia, and Universitas Brawijaya, want to explore how religion resonates with concerns for the environment. On a special note, Indonesia puts religion in the highest regards by officially delegating its formal education curriculum to two ministries, namely, the ministry of education (for formal national public school) and ministry of religious affairs (for formal national public religious-based Islamic school). By examining how teachers and workers in both public secular and religious schools perceive religious beliefs and scripture in context of environmental concerns, we aim to gain some insights about religion's influence on

animal welfare and environmental concerns. We obtained abundant data regarding the relation of ethical ideologies and religious orientation with, and the influence of religious narratives framing towards animal welfare and general environmental apathy. Not only are the findings insightful for the academic communities, but also, they are beneficial for various actors in government and society to carry out decision-making and policy formulation.

### **5.5.2 Contribution and relevance to the scientific community**

Three important aspects of our research findings are the following. *First*, more often, research samples for academic studies acquired from college students' population from educated, rich and industrialized western countries which may lack generalizability. Despite only being limited to those population from education sector, the present study surveyed professionals rather than college students. Interestingly, the present study confirms some of the findings from those western countries population and even adds more clarity by showing how religion may both hinder and facilitate concerns for the environment depending on extrinsic social religious orientation and religious narrative content framing. Therefore, this thesis improves generalizability of previous studies, adds more insights and proposes applicable proposition in context of religion and environmental concerns.

*Second*, considering the sample characteristics, the effect size of the present study's predictors may be greater among the general population. Slightly different from most studies using samples from college students, this study surveys specific professionals from the education sector (e.g., teachers, school administrators, staffs, etc.) that have higher education level (bachelor's degree at the very least). Choosing this specific sample provides more possibilities of acquiring participants that are well versed in scientific endeavors, and

consequently, well-equipped in critical thinking and reasoning. These two qualities are more of a hampering condition for dogmatic belief to flourish. Participants in this study are more likely to convey critical thinking of their religiosity compared to common population. Lastly, in context of Indonesia, this study confirms a firm presence of religion in Indonesia's academic sector. While this study surveys specific samples of participants who have higher education, compared to the developed industrialized and modernized western countries which may have already discard religion in favor of scientific endeavors, Indonesian hold religion important in all aspect of their daily lives. Altogether, this brings the third important aspect of this dissertation, that, this study investigates the influence of religion where religion actually matters. This dissertation merits both communities that value religion and non-religious communities to fathom how religious orientation and narratives are important to their religious fellows.

### **5.5.3 Contribution and relevance to the community and influential actors**

As we briefly mentioned above, Indonesia puts religion in the highest regards. The government of Indonesia officially established formal national religious-based (Islamic) public schools (Madrasah) handled by the Ministry of Religious Affairs side by side with formal national public school handled by the Ministry of Cultural and Education. Based on the formal systemic role of religion on education, we strongly think that this dissertation strongly fits within the Indonesian context.

Government and policymakers in Indonesia can involve all stakeholders to take part in protecting the environment and animals in general. In reference to our findings, to enhance policy coherence for sustainable development as one of the indicators for strategic partnership,

policymakers can consider to create a national agenda incorporating specific environmental-imbued religious narratives released by relevant national ministry (in this case, the Ministry of Religious Affairs) to encourage and promote effective public awareness, which in the future will flourish sustainability-conscious generation necessary for a fruitful atmosphere of public-private and civil society partnerships. Aside from the educational sector, policymakers can invite and encourage some of the biggest religious organizations across the archipelago, if not all, to discuss environmental concerns. This can be done from the neighborhood community or smallest form of government level, i.e., neighborhood communities known as *Rukun Warga* (RW), up to the national level.

In a more practical sense, this study investigates the important role of religion as religious identity which shapes the way people perceive and behave towards environmental concerns. The study, therefore, is important for practitioners who are actively engaged in sustainability topics. Although environmental sustainability in practice is mostly discussed from the lens of more efficient and cost-effective energy-saving engineering and technology, pushing the message for adopting sustainability to all people inhabiting our earth is the work of all parties.

Before knowing that religious orientation and narratives play a significant role among people living in countries where religious identity is acknowledged as an important identity, e.g., Indonesia (Hadiz, 2018), the effort to involve religious communities and institutions has always been and will always be critical and urgent should sustainable development goals still admit that strategic partnership is one of its goals. Learning from the present study's finding that religious narratives play a vital role in shaping the individuals' attitudes towards environmental issues, we suggest that practitioners start to actively strengthen the bond of

partnership and to collaborate with religious community leaders to encourage the inclusion of environmental issues in religious activities. All this provides practitioners with a comprehensive view of micro-macro function of religion to advocate environmental sustainability agenda.

Specifically on environmental sustainability's pillar of the sustainable development goals, this study highlights the importance of religious communities to be considered as strategic stakeholders. While most of the 17<sup>th</sup> goal of strategic partnership revolves around economic, financial, science and technology sharing, this study may bring forth a new avenue on how to understand the significance of cultures, religions, and religious institutions. At the very least, on the aim to enhance availability of reliable data, aside from income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, and geographic location, we propose to include religiosity and religious institutions as relevant determinants for data representation in the national context.