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FACE VEIL AND LAWU-LAMBU: NEGOTIATING RELIGIOUS PRACTICES AMONG MUSLIMS AND CATHOLICS IN ENDE CITY

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of wearing a face veil in Ende City has received a rather negative response from Catholics. The Catholics think that the face veil worn by Muslim women has created a social and emotional distance that disrupts the kinship system of Muslims and Catholics of the same ethnic culture. This study explores and analyzes the motivation for Muslims wearing the face veil, the reasons behind the response of Muslims and Catholics, and the negotiation efforts made by Muslims in responding to and accommodating the local culture of dressing among the Ende people. This study is qualitative research through in-depth interviews with Muslim and Catholic sources as well participant observations. This field study was conducted from July 2019 to December 2021. The data analysis process used was descriptive and interpretive. The findings of this study show that; first, the choice to wear the face veil comes from personal motivation towards piety of the faith of Muslim women. A face veil is not an expression of a suspicious radical movement and will not disrupt the kinship system as perceived by the Catholics. Second, it turns out that the response of the Catholics is due to the assumption that Muslim women who wear the face veil have left the local dress culture because they are adopting Arab culture and causing social rifts in daily life even though they are ethnically still brothers and sisters. Third, Ende Muslims combine the face veil with local clothing, the lawu-lambu, on different occasions. This combination is a negotiation process between personal autonomy towards a true Muslimah and a strategy to accommodate the beauty of the local dress, the lawu-lambu, so as not to lose their identity as Ende people who are predominantly Catholics.

Keywords: Face veil, Lawu-lambu, Negotiating Religious Practices; Ende City

INTRODUCTION

Wearing a face veil is the latest social phenomenon in Ende City, Flores. This phenomenon has become one of the most striking forms of Islamic expression since 2015. Muslims who wear the face veil can be seen among several young and adult women, certain mothers, as well as several *santri* [boarding school students] and *ustazah* [female teachers] at the *An-Nur Pesantren*, a boarding school located in Ndao Hamlet, Kota Ratu Village, North Ende Sub-District. The presence of Muslim women with the face veil can be seen in several locations, not only those who live in several urban villages where the majority of the population is Muslim, but also those who live among the Catholic majority. Some of these women choose to be alone at home or only interact with their Muslim families. Some participate regularly and are involved in social interactions and activities outside the home, such as attending family and social events and selling stuff at Mbongawani Market.

The phenomenon of Muslim women wearing the face veil in Ende City has generated a response, both from Muslims and Catholics. The Muslims and Catholics in Ende are actually of the same ethnic culture. The unity and similarity of Muslim and Catholic cultures in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) are built based on blood relations and marriage, shared customs and traditions, and the right to land ownership (Tule, 2015). These three elements unite a kinship that lasts forever (Halawa & Ahen, 2008; Howell, 1990). These kinship ties have perpetuated the harmonious life of Muslims and Catholics who share the same ethnic culture. When the face veil phenomenon began to emerge in Ende City, it caused tension, negative reactions, and rejection from the Catholic community. This is triggered by the fact that wearing the face veil is considered to have left the local dress culture.

To date, several previous studies have explained the phenomenon of veiling that departs from the concept of Islam, both from a legal-historical perspective (Diab, 2016) and the debate about the controversy over the wearing of the face veil in the political Islam movement (Islamism). Hakim (2020) shows that there is no relationship between radical ideology and the tendency among Muslim women to wear the face veil. Another study by Dzuhayatin (2020) on the face veil phenomenon in two Muslim countries, Indonesia and Egypt, indicates that it is associated with the ideology of the caliphate, which is contrary to the concept of democracy in these two republics. This research shows that the spirit of nationalism is still stronger than the Islamist movement in the two countries. This is evidenced by the objection expressed by Muslim women who wear face cover about acts of violence in the name of religion for political goals and their reluctance to affiliate with terrorist groups.

Another study adopted a historical perspective to explain that the face veil is Arab women's clothing, both worn in pre-Islamic and post-Islamic times. The wearing of the face veil does not imply a particular order, its obligations, or its sunnah (Sudirman, 2019) but does not require, appeal or circumcise the niqab to women. Suppose the niqab is perceived as clothing that can maintain women's dignity and "wasilah" to maintain their survival as claimed by a number of parties, surely the Prophet Muhammad. will oblige it to his wives, where they (the wives of the Prophet).

Several other studies explain the phenomenon of wearing the face veil, which is on the rise now despite its negative stigma in the community. Muslim women with face covering try to remove the negative stigma in society by showing a more inclusive attitude, such as doing various activities outside the home. The face veil not only serves as a cover for genitalia but has also become a lifestyle and fashion trend that has answered the challenges of modern times (Habibah, 2020). In addition, there are other strategies for veiled Muslim women, namely wearing a mask as a first step before wearing a veil, building social interactions, and conducting self-presentation to produce a positive self-image in front of others, as well as building social support with other veiled women for physical and psychological comfort. (Karunia & Syafiq, 2019). A study by Nonaka (2021) revealed that wearing the face veil has become so widespread that it has become a controversial issue. This development occurred due to an analysis of da'is [Islamic preachers] and influencers' posts on social media that motivate Muslim women to cover their faces. In contrast to previous studies, this study examines and analyzes other realities of face covering by viewing it from the context of Ende City, which is predominantly Catholic, and the culture of the people still firmly attached to local clothing, the *lawo-lambu*.

This study aims to explore and analyze the phenomenon of wearing face-covering among the people of Ende City. In line with that, three research questions were formulated to elaborate on this theme: first, what motivates Muslim women to wear the face veil amid a predominantly Catholic environment and an ethnic culture that shares the same local clothing? Second, how do Muslims and Catholics respond to the phenomenon of the face veil? Third, what is the negotiation strategy for Muslim women who wear the face veil in responding to the reaction of the Catholic community and local culture? The answers to these three questions will provide a profound, holistic understanding and the right solution to addressing the face-covering social phenomenon in Ende City. This study was conducted using a qualitative method. The data were collected using in-depth interview techniques involving 14 respondents, eight Muslims and six Catholics, all living in Ende City. In

addition to in-depth interviews, participant observations were carried out to understand the phenomenon of face covering. This field study was carried out from July 2019 to December 2021.

This study was prepared with the assumption that the discourse on the face veil that displays religious symbols with negative stereotypes and as an expression of the movement of radical groups still needs to be reviewed and examined further. (Dzuhayatin, 2020). The face veil is not necessarily synonymous with fundamentalism and fanaticism. The current face covering is even more widespread amid various negative societal stigmas. This study explains the motivation for wearing the face veil among Muslim women in Ende City to understand the context of the change in Muslim clothing from the perspective of understanding Muslim religiosity. An objective understanding helps Catholics get out of their biased and suspicious arguments. A face veil is a new form of distinction in the context of Muslim clothing that is not to be feared, suspected, or discontinued among Muslims. Moreover, the negotiation effort that Muslims are making is a strategic step to adapt to the context of local wisdom that accommodates local culture, such as clothing (Hermansyah, 2016; Misno, 2013) to remove the negative stigma in society.

PHENOMENON OF THE FACE VEIL IN ENDE CITY

Ende City is the capital of Ende Regency, located in the middle of Flores Island. It is a historic city that is one of the oldest of the early spread of Catholics and Muslims in Flores. According to van Suchtelen's chronicles, in 1560, Father Antonio de Taveira sailed with Portuguese traders and converted the infidels in Ende and Timor. Meanwhile, Islam began to come here in 1570 through contacts between the indigenous people of Ende Island and Muslims from Java and Makassar (van Suchtelen, 1921). As the oldest Catholic and Muslim city, religious dynamics have been going on for a long time, and Muslim and Catholic social interactions have fostered the unity of the two religions.

The Ende people have local clothing worn by women, namely *lawo* and *lambu*. *Lawo*, in the Ende language, means a woven sarong for women. *Lawo* has a motif with religious-magic values. The motifs in the *lawo* weaving are natural motifs of living things, such as humans, animals, and plants. According to the mindset, beliefs, and customs since the ancestors' time, these motifs have spiritual values that contain sacred powers. There is a religious-magic value with high protective power, which has a foretelling for an event, leading to happiness or functioning to prevent disaster. So, the *lawo* motif of purity and magic create a fantastic impression (Bao, 1992). At the same time, *lambu* in the Ende language means clothes. *Lambu* is a traditional women's dress that

has a simple shape, which is rectangular with four holes for the body, head, and arms. *Lambu* is always worn together with *lawo*. When an Ende woman wears the *lawo-lambu*, the manifestation of her local identity as an Ende woman is extreme, and her spiritual value and beauty can be seen. This *Lawo-lambu* dress is a local dress that is integrated with Ende women. When *hijab* began to develop in Ende City since the era of the 2000s, local clothing, the *lawo-lambu*, was not ignored by Ende Muslim women. They even combine *hijab* with *lawo-lambu* (13. Ende/22/7/2019). This regional style combination strengthens Muslim women's self-confidence as Ende people.

After the reform, the Islamic movement became more prominent, and it encouraged many young women activists who were committed to Islam and wanted to uphold women's rights and show more piety to women per Islam, (Rinaldo, 2013). One of which is expressed by wearing the face veil. The wearing of the face veil among Muslim women in East Nusa Tenggara is a phenomenon on the rise (Suksin et al., 2020). In Ende City, some Muslim women have begun covering their faces since 2015. These women come from different backgrounds and groups. The wearing of the face veil was initiated by several students who returned to Ende after completing their education at various Islamic boarding schools outside Flores Island and by female workers who returned from Middle Eastern countries, as well as by adult women and certain mothers. (13. Ende/13/8/2019). Face covering is quite familiar at the An-Nur Islamic Boarding School in Ndao. Muslims consider An-Nur Islamic Boarding School as one of the Islamic boarding schools based on the *Ahlus Sunnah wal Jama'ah* Islamic model with a determination to promote quality Islamic *da'wah* and education. At this Islamic boarding school, several students and *ustazah* were seen wearing face veils (3. Ende/11/6/2019).

The wearing of the face veil among Muslim women in Ende City is a fact that cannot be denied anymore:

“The face veil is currently worn by many Muslim women here. Therefore, if other Muslims say that the face veil is not suitable for us here, that is not true. In fact, many Muslim women have worn the face veil” (13. Ende/13/8/2019).

Wearing face coverings goes through a motivational stage that develops according to the understanding and appreciation of veiled Muslim women. A respondent explained her initial motivation when she decided to wear a face covering. In her statement, she said:

“Initially, during my time at the *Pondok* [Islamic Boarding School], I thought it was too extreme for those wearing face coverings. It was too self-isolated. However, I thought I judged others too harshly without knowing the point, how it feels when you wear the face veil. Finally, I tried to put myself in their position. I wore the face veil to know what it was like to be in their position without judging. Finally, since I entered my first semester of college, I tried wearing it, and it turned out to be very comfortable” (2. Ende/4/5/2021).

The first motivation to wear the face veil was to find out how it felt. Sometime later, face covering turned out she found comfort, so she decided to remain face-veiled. The comfort is specifically focused on appropriate patterns of association with the opposite sex, as described below:

“With a face veil, I can take care of myself and not get unfair treatment from male friends. I feel more comfortable and more able to take care of myself. Usually, when (if) we are face-veiled, our friends, especially males, can keep their distance, and be more respectful, then we start to have boundaries in terms of friendship and going out. From my point of view, it is comfortable like this. From that sense of comfort, it eventually forms an identity, such as personality or friendship. Because if you wear a face veil, there are consequences that need to be taken care of” (2. Ende/4/5/2021).

Wearing the face veil makes you feel comfortable. It wants to live the Sunnah of the Prophet more intensively, avoid sexual desires of the opposite sex and can regulate behavior toward goodness in the way of Allah. (Hanafiah et al., 2019). This comfort in oneself must also deal with a social environment that has not been able to accept the face veil. There is a face-veiled student who decides to adapt to the existing social conditions:

“During my holiday in Ende, I took off my face veil. After returning to college, I put it back on. So, I wear a face veil only in college. In Ende, I wear a regular hijab, which is 150 x 150” (2. Ende/4/5/2021).

The reaction to the rejection of the social environment has caused this face-veiled student to be in a dilemma between wearing the face veil and the risk of not being accepted by her family and not wearing a face veil which is contrary to her commitment. In this dilemma, the final decision was to make a choice that made her comfortable in two different environments: wearing a face veil on campus and a regular hijab in Ende.

The motivation for wearing the face veil was also born of a commitment to return to the true path of Allah. Commitment to return to Allah's path through a process that takes time as described below:

“Wearing the face veil takes time. The process is too extraordinary regarding this veil. I usually tell stories with tears in my eyes. Why did I sin so much? What sin? I said, especially when I was young, I wore tights, with body curves, excuse me, I wore tank tops, that's a sin. We are the ones who wear it are sinful; those who see us are also sinful. So, the sin is double, making people commit adultery in their eyes. Going to the market wearing a one-shoulder dress; each time I went to work, I wore shorts. I went to the party, dressing up, even though it was a sin, attracting the attention of the opposite sex. After knowing this, oh, that was what I did anyway” (1. Ende/29/8/2019).

This face-veiled Muslim woman's expression shows the struggle at the transitional stage from a sinful past and the present when committing herself to wear the face veil. (Nisa, 2012). The woman who wears the face veil expresses herself to achieve the desire to become a true Muslim woman. By wearing the face veil, women show their obedience to actual physical practices (Nisa, 2012). Even though we must go through a crisis, it is part of the sacrifice in the quest to become a devout Muslim woman (Nisa, 2012).

Based on the various opinions and testimonies above, the motivation for wearing the face veil among Ende Muslim women is motivated by religious motivation. The wearing of the face veil is a consequence of the increasing awareness of Muslims to maintain self-purity and be committed to returning to the true path of Allah. Such motivation is part of the re-empowerment of pious faith that arises from a new awareness of her identity as a Muslim woman and her reflection on that identity (Ismail, 2004). A process of self-reflection to redefine her Islamic identity in the domain of social life through various signs and symbols related to Islamic traditions and culture. (Ismail, 2004; Yamin, 2013) includes the face veil.

WITHIN THE MUSLIMS: NEGOTIABLE RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

The face veil has also generated a different response from the internal Muslim community. These responses were classified into three categories. First, the opinion of Muslims who show a less sympathetic attitude towards the face veil. This first category of opinion explains that “The face veil is the Sunnah of the Prophet, a strict shari'a. Wearing the face veil is a problem if you live in a plural society” (3. Ende/11/6/2019). Another informant said, “The face veil is

burdensome; what I know is that women are obliged to cover their intimate parts, except for the palms and face” (4. Ende/3/5/2021). This unsympathetic attitude is triggered by the very conspicuous attribute of the face veil that seems excessive and fanatical and can interfere with kinship relations.

Some women who wear the face veil also experience and feel this rejection. One of the respondents reported as follows:

“This society has antipathy towards me because I wear the face veil. Initially, my experience of wearing this face veil was not only among non-Muslims but also among Muslims, namely my close relatives, those who rejected it, “What do you want to cover?” The Catholics have also ridiculed me, but not in front of me. Then, some people are indifferent to me. I said that’s okay. For those who don’t like it, they don’t talk directly; they used to greet me, now not anymore; they hardly ever do” (1. Ende/29/8/2019).

The expression of this face-veiled Muslim woman showed her struggles when she decided to change her appearance from wearing a hijab to a full-face veil. In the transition process, there is a struggle when getting adverse reactions from the social environment. There are expressions of dislike and sympathy from the surrounding community, including their own families.

Another incident happened to a face-veiled student. There are reactions of rejection and disapproval of the face veil from her family and social environment. She reported as follows:

“When I came home from holiday to Ende, when I arrived at Ende airport, I was told to take it off by the airport staff; I started to doubt whether or not I should wear it. When I got home, my parents and family disagreed. Because I was wearing the face veil without my parents’ permission, they forbade me and told me to take it off. They said I’m still unstable; the face veil doesn’t suit our environment here. Moreover, I am a student teacher of the Islamic Religion. If I do da’wah later, there will be people who will not accept it” (2. Ende/4/5/2021).

The concerns of others shackle the rights and freedoms of these face-veiled students. The request to remove the face veil caused doubt within. In addition, the family also expressed disapproval of the use of the face veil. Families assume that wearing the face veil can hinder future assignments and that, at a young age is still unstable to practice religious teachings.

Second is the opinion of Muslims who critically evaluate the phenomenon of the face veil but still respect the person who wears it. “The face veil is too fanatical, especially when we are Easterners here. I don’t like things like that. It doesn’t fit our norm in Ende; it feels awkward, but I still appreciate those who wear it” (5. Ende/23/7/2019). The critical note of this opinion is that the face veil is not required because it is considered incompatible with the local cultural context.

Third, Muslim opinion shows a favorable acceptance. This opinion begins with an explanation of the reasons for wearing the face veil:

“Wearing the face veil is Sunnah. It’s not required. What’s mandatory is the hijab. After all, a woman’s intimate parts that can be seen are only the face and the palms of the hands. So, if the face veil is not mandatory, anyone who wants to wear it, go ahead; anyone who doesn’t, no problem! That’s the law; if we do, we get a reward; if we don’t, it’s also okay; it’s not sinful.” (13. Ende/13/8/2019).

The reason for wearing the face veil is based on the Sunnah of the Prophet. This provision of the Sunnah is highly dependent on one’s free choice. On the one hand, wearing the face veil is not mandatory. On the other hand, wearing it is a person’s right and freedom. Therefore, Muslims refuse if wearing the face veil is identified with radicalism or terrorism. One of the respondents explained:

“As far as I know, the Messenger of Allah taught that women should cover their intimate parts and only see their eyes and palms. Then fashion developed. Some Muslim women wear the face veil. I don’t think it’s wrong because it’s the Sunnah of the Prophet. Then comes the opinion of the community where some people are scared of bomb attacks, that was last year, and a woman in a face veil carried it out. It brings fear, and it’s also sad for us Muslims when people’s understanding has started to deviate: oh, then the face veils are scary. Don’t let them be terrorists” (12. Ende/13/8/2019).

The above opinion acknowledges the development of Muslim clothing. It explains that it is natural and legal for Muslim women to wear the face veil because it is by the Sunnah of the Prophet. The adverse reaction arises because there is a negative opinion in society that associates face-veiled women with terrorists. The face veil’s image is worse when social media labels women with face veils as the wives of terrorists or terrorist members (Dzuhayatin, 2020). Muslims themselves deny this terrorist label:

“It’s not [like that]! It’s only because certain people have such a mission. Yes, others [who wear it] do not cause any problem, but they raise suggestions from people who see that there is fear, a sense of vigilance, don’t get close, don’t let them be a danger to us. But in my opinion, there is no problem as long as the face-veiled woman wears it as the Sunnah of the Prophet, yes, just like that.” (12. Ende/13/8/2019).

Although some Muslims show a less sympathetic attitude towards the face veil, this phenomenon is an inevitable reality in Ende City. Wearing the face veil is a religious commitment to live the Sunnah of the Prophet. This religious commitment is spiritually oriented without being trapped in anxiety and suspicious fanaticism or radicalism—the various explanations described above aim to provide a more objective understanding of the face veil phenomenon. The explanation model is not an apology but a description of the argument that comes from the experience and appreciation of Muslims themselves.

FOR THE CATHOLICS: A SHIFT IN RELIGIOUS ATTITUDES IN PUBLIC SPACE

The face veil phenomenon in Ende City received responses from the Catholic community. Such reactions are based on experience and the perceived social impact. The responses were grouped into four categories. First, the face veil causes a shock among Catholics, “How come there is a woman who wears the face veil in this Mbongawani Market?” (6. Ende/15/7/2019). Ende City can also offer a spontaneous commentary on a new, unexpected phenomenon. This surprise sparked suspicions about the face veil phenomenon: “Could it be that there is a certain scenario behind this phenomenon” (6. Ende/15/7/2019)?

Second, there is a change in the behavior and habits of a face-veiled woman. A respondent who is a neighbor of a face-veiled Muslim woman said:

“They’re renting the house. I rarely see the woman out of the house. Once in a while, maybe [she’s] going shopping and to the market. When she’s walking, she lowers her head. [She’s] always inside the house, and I have never seen her go out to chat or greet others; when I pass in front of her house, we rarely talk and greet each other” (7. Ende/2/7/2019).

Wearing the face veil has an impact on an exclusive pattern of behavior. In addition, there is also a change in the habits of face-veiled Muslim women as they no longer stay in touch to say Christmas greetings. It is allegedly forbidden to convey Christmas greetings to non-Muslims. This habit change makes Catholics reluctant to visit and greet Muslims on their religious

holidays. Catholics think that their presence would not be accepted or could be rejected (8. Ende/12/9/2019).

Third, the creation of social distance further widens the space for personal communication. The face veil has limited the space for talking to each other. “After wearing the face veil, how do we feel? It’s like we don’t talk anymore. I would like to greet them, but we don’t know them anymore because everything is covered” (9. Ende/22/4/2021). The atmosphere of communication has become awkward and less intimate than before. The face veil began to limit interaction with Catholics. Another respondent confirmed this fact:

“At first, I felt like it was really weird, right? I came to think like this, what is this all about, really? Those who are fully covered, even her face, we cannot see. Sometimes when we sit down for a family event, we see someone covering herself, her face, [we] look at her eyes a little. So, I was like, how is this even possible? In the past, it was more relaxed for us to talk and tell stories, but now here we are, well, that’s what I see. It feels like we want to sit down, but we see their eyes. We don’t know how we feel anymore” (10. Ende/30/7/2021).

Face-veiled Muslim women began to show behavioral patterns through their exclusiveness by limiting themselves in interacting with Catholics. This exclusive character begins to impact relationships and communication patterns that are not as intensive and relaxed as before. The face veil phenomenon is thought to have disrupted the kinship between the face veiled women and Catholics. Feelings of interfering with kinship ties are not in the context of separation or severance but rather emotional connections. A respondent acknowledged this situation:

“Among those who are Muslims, they may already feel normal because they already know it better. But we don’t know why? So, [we] begin to feel suspicious, [it’s complicated to describe] how we feel; [We] begin to feel reluctant and can no longer hang out in a relaxed manner as before” (10. Ende/15/9/2021).

The face veil is considered to have created an emotional distance, even physically, despite their kinship relations.

Fourth, there is a shift from local clothing to Arabic-style clothing. Face-veiled Muslim women show a change in the way they dress:

“A member of my family also wears the face veil. But she wears it only when she leaves the house, goes to the market, or works in a shop. At home, she wears a large hijab and a robe, and now she no longer wears the *lawo-lambu*” (9. Ende/22/4/2021).

One of the significant changes revealed was that they no longer wear traditional clothing, *lawo-lambu*. In fact, for women in Ende, *lawo-lambu* is a local clothing that has been part of them. The Ende people still produce women’s sarongs manually using traditional weaving equipment. The Ende’s *lawo* sarong has natural motifs and geometric decorations and contains religious-magic aspects (Bao, 1992). The meanings and symbols in the *lawo* sarongs have made Ende women strongly attached to wearing *lawo-lambu*, both at home and out of the house, for various activities.

Catholics believe there has been a change in clothing, namely a shift that is considered displacing the beauty of the local Ende people’s clothing. They assume that traditional beauty in the form of local clothing, *lawo-lambu*, which is highly admired and passed down from generation to generation, is drifting away from face-veiled Muslim women. Local dress is considered not religious clothing, as emphasized by this respondent, “They will no longer consider [wearing] the *lawo-lambu*. They assume it is not Islamic dress. And there must be a shift. If they see that [face veil] as being Islamic, but not necessarily, that one is Arab style, right?” (11. Ende/30/6/2021). Wearing the face veil, which is considered an Arab-style dress, is something new and strange, which raises many questions among Catholics:

“What’s that for? Initially, people lived side by side between Muslims and Catholics. Therefore, we should adjust to the existing cultural conditions so as not to arouse suspicion. When there is something else, there will be a question: Where else? Why are they like this? While those who are there are ordinary people, right? So, if there are trends like that, if people understand, they don’t have to wear them. Just go with what we have now. They take this from the outside but don’t understand it, do they?” (11. Ende/1/12/2021)

Catholics think that Muslims themselves do not understand why they must wear the face veil:

“Whether they understand the Arabization, I also don’t know. But when Catholics see something out of the ordinary, there must be questions. Because Catholics think this is a bit strange, right? Then Catholics began

to suspect that this should not be an Islamization process. The majority are bothered because of the Arabization phenomenon, right?" (11. Ende/1/12/ 2021)

In light of the various opinions above, Catholics consider that the face veil phenomenon has begun to cause changes in behavior and a shift in interpreting the beauty of local clothing. As the testimony of the informants above showed, from the beginning, they talked a lot, shook hands, and kept in touch as usual, but after the face veil emerged, they were more reluctant to speak and no longer shook hands; communication was not as relaxed as before; they were unwilling to consume food offered [by Catholics] and no longer wear the *lawo-lambu*. This impression began to cause negative perceptions among Catholics. The face veil has caused discomfort in the coexistence (Saiya & Manchanda, 2020). Fanatical behavior and habits began to appear in face-veiled Muslim women. The face veil involves outward things in the form of a black cloth covering the face and the nuances of religious fanaticism amid the diversity of social life. (Dzuhayatin, 2020).

The transition from the traditional environment and kinship culture attached to the *lawo-lambu* to the Arabized fashion shows this nuance of fanaticism. The phenomenon of Arabization is an attempt to form an identity and behavior that follows the way of life that was common in the Arab world in the Middle Ages during the early introduction of Islam. One of the external manifestations is the wearing of Middle Eastern fashion (Ghoshal, 2010). The face veil is considered an Arab attribute that is shifting local cultural clothing. Catholics deplore the shift that has reduced the beauty of local traditions and culture and disrupted the kinship between the two. The impact experienced and felt by Catholics caused a reaction of dissatisfaction, so Catholics could not accept the face veil. The face veil phenomenon striking in the Catholic majority environment is assumed to be an expression of identity politics used to convey messages in public spaces. A statement that is not only about religion itself but also about differences and claims of public recognition (Ismail, 2004; Yamin et al., 2019).

THE FACE VEIL: RELIGIOUS PRACTICE NEGOTIATION STRATEGY

The face veil phenomenon that appears in public spaces has generated various responses. These multiple responses were made because the face veil is not only a manifestation of the faith but also implies certain ideological doctrines in the form of the discourse of the Islamic Caliphate (Dzuhayatin, 2020). In European countries, there is widespread controversy over the face

veil. France was the first European country to ban the wearing of the face veil on a national scale, followed by other European countries, such as Belgium, Bulgaria, Austria, the Netherlands, Denmark, Italy, Spain, and Switzerland. This prohibition is solely based on national security threats that link The wearing of the face veil with radical Islamic movements and terrorism (Saiya & Manchanda, 2020). In Indonesia, there has been a rapid increase in women wearing the face veil, giving rise to various discussions and opinions. In Ende city, as described above, the face veil raises pros and cons between Muslims and Catholics.

The triggering factor behind face-veiled Muslim women starts from religious motivation. The face veil is a personal freedom for faithful Muslim women without having to be trapped in radical ideas as suspected by Catholics. Now, face-veiled Muslim women are trying to socialize the face veil image among their family and relatives, and surrounding communities, as reported by the following face-veiled informant:

“If there is a traditional family event, a funeral, or other family events I attend, I am close to them. I wear *Lawo-lambu* and a face veil. There are times when the women sit down; I take it off, and eat the betel, as usual, with them. I often take it off to show my nephews and other families that I am their mother. If they come, I will take off the face veil; it depends on me personally” (1. Ende/29/8/2019).

Such practice is a process of self-socialization into the cultural context and living habits of the majority of the local community. This step is taken to fight the negative opinion among the public that associates the face veil with “fanaticism amid diversity” (Dzuhayatin, 2020) as well as an effort to correct the “misunderstanding of Muslim women who wear the face veil” (Izharuddin, 2015). This self-socialization process is one of the ways of adapting to restore the image of the face veil among non-Muslims.

The differences displayed by face-veiled circles are not a form of Arabized religious fanaticism that shifts local wisdom and kinship culture, both among Muslims themselves and with Catholics. Muslims expressed their disapproval of the face veil which Catholics consider Arabization. According to Muslims, “Actually wearing the face veil is not Arabization. It is recommended in Islam” (14. Ende/1/12/2021). Other Muslims also express disapproval of the use of the term Arabization:

“There is no such thought. For example, we have never had contact

with Arabs. Sometimes what makes people think like that? Lack of understanding. I am afraid I have to disagree with the term Arabization. We never felt that way. Some say we are not the people of the Prophet because we are not Arabs. It is wrong! Because among us, there is nothing like that” (13. Ende/10/12/2021).

A young face-veiled Muslim woman also disagrees with the term Arabization. In her statement, she said:

“Arabization is probably from the perspective of those who think it is too much. Oh, why do you wear the face veil? Then they interpret it as the Arab culture. It is not like that, though. Maybe they see a face veiled person practicing her religion excessively, limiting friendships with other Muslim women whose headscarves are not as big as theirs. They could not accept it and judged a face veiled person to be Arabized, too excessive in practicing religion; they saw Islam as a strict religion, and the rules should not be violated. Even though it’s actually not that hard, it also depends on the personality” (2. Ende/10/12/2021).

The face veil should not be considered Arabization, which is then identified with excessive fanaticism. This notion is a prejudice that stems from the ignorance and lack of understanding among Catholics about the meaning of wearing the face veil among Muslims (Valentine et al., 2021). Wearing the face veil is a choice of faith and should not necessarily be identified with Arab culture. Muslim women who wear the face veil are a form of personal appreciation to make themselves more comfortable towards the formation of identity without having to limit themselves excessively in associating with Muslims or other non-Muslims. (Hermansyah, 2016).

Based on the statements above, Muslims express disapproval of using the term Arabization. Catholics have interpreted the term in responding to changes in Muslim clothing, especially regarding the face veil. The face veil is categorized as Arab cultural clothing, which has caused a cultural shift and undermined local wisdom. In her description of Muslims, Eck explained that non-Muslims often identify Islam with the Middle East. Islam should not be confused with a particular culture and its ways and customs. Islam is a faith and a universal vocation. Islam is not an Arab religion or a Middle Eastern cult (Eck, 2002). Therefore, Muslims believe the face veil identified with the Arabic character cannot be considered correct. This is because the reality among face-veiled Muslim women is different from what Catholics assume. According to an informant, “In fact, those who have worn the face veil also always wear a robe. But they still wear the *Lawo Lambu* dress in the face veil when attending family

events” (14. Ende/1/12/2021). Other opinions also confirm the same fact:

“Underneath, some wear the *lawo-lambu* combined with the face veil during family events, such as weddings, funerals, or other traditional events. I saw that someone was wearing that; underneath it was not a robe but a *lawo*. It’s all right. It is a mix of religion and culture. This is something positive, she is wearing a face veil, but she still wears *lawo-lambu*” (13. Ende/10/12/2021).

Some of the statements above reveal the reality of the face veil, which is still worn along with the *lawo-lambu*. The face veil combined with *lawo-lambu* is usually worn at traditional and cultural events, such as the *belis* event, customary marriage, or funeral. While for religious events, such as attending recitations in mosques or prayer rooms or internal events among Muslims, the face veil is worn with a robe (13. Ende/10/12/2021; 12. Ende/13/8/2010; 5 Ende/23/7/2019). The combination of the face veil and *lawo-lambu* is seen as something positive that does not ignore local culture but instead still accommodates it.

Catholics perceive that the face veil has impacted these two things. First, there is a change in behavior among face-veiled Muslim women. This behavior change is considered to be exclusive and excessively fanatical. Such a model of change is seen as a gap that disrupts the long-standing establishment of Muslim and Catholic kinship. The face veil phenomenon is a ‘new gap’ currently appearing in the public space of Ende City. Diana L. Eck’s theory of pluralism, explains that pluralism uses the reality of differences as its starting point. Pluralist culture will not equalize differences but respect and reconcile them. Differences are not to be feared. Prejudice stems from ignorance, and that knowledge and understanding will be the basis for creating a positive plural society.

Without understanding, differences only create fear. With understanding, differences enrich life (Eck, 2002). The inevitable face veil phenomenon is a new form of difference amid the internal pluralism of a pluralist society. The new difference is not to be feared or suspected and should be eliminated or prohibited from being practiced by Muslims. The choice to wear the face veil is based on personal motivation towards piety of faith and not for political purposes, especially concerning radical movements. When Muslims explain the motivation behind wearing this veil, it is one way to give Catholics a new, objective understanding. Prejudice and suspicion against the face veil stem from ignorance and lack of understanding among Catholics. The wearing of the face veil for the sake of self-purity and piety of faith is a process of change

based on the context of the development of faith and religious awareness among Muslims. Therefore, differences in dress due to religious motivation for the sake of piety of faith are not up for debate (Valentine et al., 2021). Efforts to respond to this face veil phenomenon require a new commitment to respect and acknowledge the differences expressed through the face veil.

This new commitment requires active involvement and a more open attitude to understanding the face veil by building communication through theological dialogue. (Madigan, 2010). This dialogue aims to understand the religious motivation behind wearing the face veil to prevent misunderstanding and biased assumptions and correct wrong prejudice against wearing the face veil. Because the face veil phenomenon is still triggering adverse reactions from the surrounding community (Dzuhayatin, 2020). Catholics have not been able to accept the face veil as one of the “real expressions of the spirit of obedience to be a true Muslim woman” (Nisa, 2012). Therefore, at this time, it takes openness from each party in theological dialogue in order to build a shared understanding. The wearing of the face veil among Muslims in Ende City is part of the expression of the piety of faith with spiritual tendency and not for political-Islamist goals with its radicalism and terrorism. This theological dialogue is an essential form of enlightenment, especially for Catholics, which must have begun at the grassroots level because there has always been a tendency to direct the thinking about Muslim principles into social and political categories without acknowledging the centrality of Muslim religious commitments (Madigan, 2010).

According to the Catholic response, the second impact is a shift in the meaning of local traditions, namely the transition from the *lawo-lambu* to the face veil, considered an Arab dress style. The Muslims of Ende City does not agree with the term Arabization because, according to Muslims themselves, face-veiled Muslim women still wear the *lawo-lambu* on different events and occasions, as stated by the informants above. When attending traditional family events, such as births, weddings, funerals, or other social events, Muslim women combine the face veil with local clothing, the *lawo-lambu*. While in religious events in mosques, prayer rooms, or internal events among Muslims, Muslim women wear the face veil combined with a robe. Even though they are faced-veiled, these Muslim women are still involved in kinship traditions, both with fellow Muslims and non-Muslims. The identity negotiation theory of Stella Ting-Toomey explains that identity is structured according to a person’s self-image, which is formed through individual negotiation by stating, modifying, or opposing identification with oneself or others. There is a process of adaptation by learning the value system and opening oneself to new ways to reconstruct

the identity (Hermansyah, 2016; Ting-Toomey, 1999). Wearing the face veil combined with *lawo-lambu* is a new way of reconstructing identity through negotiation efforts between Islamic identity and its sociocultural identity as Ende people. Muslim women of Ende are adaptive by adhering to the principles of maintaining a balance between two different demands. On the one hand, there are demands for religious clothing to show their Islamic identity. On the other hand, there are also demands for culturally patterned clothing so as not to lose their identity as the people of Ende (Diab, 2016).

Muslim women wearing the face veil are usually synonymous with a “new piety that rejects and challenges traditional ways of life and old identities.” (Turner, 2008). This means that piety creates a special and typical identity that is different from others and shows its superiority regarding religious appreciation. The face veil is one of the characteristics of physical identity and a symbol of piety that avoids contamination with local traditions, which are considered a source of deviation in the Islam (Diab, 2016; Wahib, 2017). However, what happened in Ende is different from the concept understood by Muslims who wear the face veil. The face-veiled Muslims in Ende have made a breakthrough by combining the face veil. This means that the face veil, which Catholics in Ende consider synonymous with Arab icons, has undergone an adaptation process by accommodating the *lawo-lambu*. This combination ensures the comfort of face-veiled Muslim women in pursuing personal purity and piety of faith without making them feel alienated or fanatical from their socio-cultural environment as the people of Ende. Such a Muslim attitude is a form of Muslim appreciation and respect for local traditions, customs, and fellow Catholics (Tule, 2004; Yamin et al., 2019). Thus, wearing the face veil combined with local clothing is a new form of acculturation that is currently happening among veiled Muslim women in Ende City. (Ernas et al., 2021; Prasajo, 2017). This shows that religion is constantly in dialogue and adapting to local culture and traditions for the survival of the followers of that religion (Erawati, 2018; Pabbajah, 2020; Prasajo, 2017).

CONCLUSION

The wearing of the face veil, which is assumed by Catholics to be synonymous with fanaticism and radicalism and is considered Arabization, turns out to be different from the response from the Muslims of Ende City. The face veil in the Ende Muslim context is worn based on personal motivation towards piety. Such motivation has a spiritual tendency and is not political-Islamist with a radical pattern. The face veil phenomenon, which has a spiritual tendency, does not at all ignore the *lawo-lambu* as assumed by Catholics. Face-veiled

Muslim women still wear the lawo-lambu at different events and occasions. When attending tradition, family, or other social events other than religious events at the mosque or prayer room, Muslim women in Ende wear a face veil combined with the lawo-lambu. The combination of the face veil and *lawo-lambu* is a negotiation process between personal autonomy towards faithful Muslim women and a strategy to accommodate the lawo-lambu, a legacy of Ende's local tradition. On the one hand, this negotiation process is intended to make face-veiled Muslim women comfortable with their intentions and commitments toward personal piety. On the other hand, Muslim women also have not lost their identity as people of people and feel alienated from Catholics.

Wearing the face veil in Ende City is a new challenge for Catholics. This new challenge demands an active involvement and a more open attitude in understanding the face veil. In order to achieve this goal, the discussion in this article has explained the importance of holding theological dialogue to build mutual understanding between Muslims and Catholics regarding wearing the face veil. Therefore, this study recommends that further research be done on the extent to which this theological dialogue has been built and its impact on Muslim and Catholic relations in Ende City.

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