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Indonesian Christian International Students in Australia: (Re)Constructing Religious Identities

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Indonesian Christians international students are experiencing new religio-cultural experiences during their study in Australia. Some of those experiences are contradictory with their Christian beliefs. This study seeks to understand the way Indonesian Christian international students in Australia negotiating their cultural and religious identity. In this qualitative study, I interviewed four Indonesian Christian international students in Australia including myself. The findings describe participants' tensions between their Christian beliefs and new religio-cultural experiences during participants' study in Australia, such as questions about sexuality, feminism, and various knowledges met in their university studies. Participants constructed their new ways of being a Christian by demonstrating different markers of evangelical Christianity, liberal Christianity, and spiritual seekers (Mathews, 2000).

Keywords: religious identity, Christian identity, Indonesian Christian students in Australia

Mahasiswa Kristen Indonesia di Australia menjumpai berbagai pengalaman budaya dan religius yang baru selama menempuh studinya. Beberapa pengalaman baru tersebut mengundang pertanyaan tentang iman Kristen mereka selama ini. Penelitian ini bertujuan memahami pengalaman mahasiswa-mahasiswa Kristen tersebut menegosiasikan identitas agama dan budaya mereka. Dalam penelitian kualitatif ini empat mahasiswa Indonesia diwawancarai, termasuk peneliti sendiri. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya ketegangan antara iman Kristen mereka dan pengalaman budaya dan religius baru selama studi mereka di Australia, seperti pertanyaan seputar seksualitas, kesetaraan gender, dan pengetahuan-pengetahuan baru di bidang studi mereka masing-masing. Partisipan menegosiasikan dan membangun kembali identitas Kristen mereka; misalnya dengan menjadi Kristen injili, liberal, atau pelancong spiritual (Mathews, 2000)

Kata kunci: identitas keagamaan, identitas Kristiani, mahasiswa Kristen Indonesia di Australia

The number of international students in Australia is increasing considerably. In 2004, the number of overseas students in Australia was the fifth largest in the world. From 1985 to 2005, the annual number of foreign visitors for education purposes in Australia increased from 30,000 to 375,000 (Linacre, 2007). In 2005, eight of the top ten countries of visitors to Australian for educational purposes were from South East Asia and North East Asia, representing 59% of all visitors. The largest number of these international students are from China (17%), followed by South

Korea (8%), the United States of America (8%), Japan (7%), and Malaysia (6%).

International students face a number of cultural and educational challenges in Australia. Even though research (see for example Rosenthal, Russell, and Thomson, 2008) has argued that very few international students studying in Australia have experienced serious health and wellbeing problems, other authors acknowledge that there are issues which need to be addressed regarding international students in Australia, e.g. cultural loneliness (Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2008), social and economic security (Forbes-Mewett & Nyland, 2008; Deumert, Marginson, Nyland, Ramia, & Sawir, 2005), and technological difficulties (Snyder, Marginson, & Lewis, 2007). Universities are aware of

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these issues and provide various support programs for international students, e.g. International Student Service, or Health, Wellbeing, and Development department.

As an international student from Indonesia studying my Masters at Monash University, Australia, one of the major challenges for me has been engaging with different ways of doing and knowing in my new environment, especially in the issue of religion and spirituality. In the country of my origin, Indonesia, the Ministry of Religious Affairs explicitly states which religions and faiths are supported and protected by the government; they are Islam, Christianity¹, Catholicism, Hinduism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. All other religions are not familiar in Indonesia, such as Shinto, Baha'i, Mormon, Scientology, and the latest is Ahmadiyah—which government has found difficulties in resolving the conflict with mainstream Islam (House pushes govt to issue Ahmadiyah decision, 2008). In Australia, I realized that there are many different religions and spiritualities – some of which are unknown in Indonesia.

In the Masters programs, I have come to engage with new bodies of knowledge such as feminism, post-modernism, and queer theory that have led me to ask some questions in relation to my religious beliefs and practices, including the trustworthiness of the Bible that was written, translated, interpreted, and preached generally by males, the church's attitudes toward homo-sexuality or premarital sexual relationship, and a single truth² to all believers. I have never questioned the truths that have been imposed by the government and religious authorities because it is not the culture in Indonesia. Vroom (2007, p. 230) called this a traditional culture – “a certain view of beliefs that is shared without dispute”. Now, as I pursue my master's degree in Australia, I am encouraged to question and be critical. I have started to challenge what I believed for years; about life, reality, social relations, God, who I am, and who I am going to be. Hall (1992, p. 274) named this a “crisis of identity” – when a fixed and stable way of being, knowing, and doing is challenged by experiences of doubts and uncertainties.

These questions together with my experiences in Indonesia and Australia have led me to this research project. I believe that there are negotiations among

international students regarding their cultural and religious identity, similar to my own experience. Levitt (2004) argues that, compared to transnational economic and political practices, transnational religious life has as yet not been well studied. I am interested in understanding the ways in which Indonesian Christian international students in Australia negotiate their cultural religious identity: “How do Indonesian Christian international students negotiate their cultural and religious identity during their study in Australia?”

Christianity in Australia

In this section I will briefly describe the history of religion and Christianity in Australia, and the current religiosity among Australian residences. I draw on the works of researchers from Edith Cowan University and the National Church Life Survey (NCLS) Research (Christian Research Association, 2000) and Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Before white settlement from Europe to Australia, the Aboriginal people of Australia had their own spirituality. They believed in spiritual beings, sacred places, and rituals. They also had their own stories about creation, their origin, identity, and nature. Then Europeans came to Australia. White settlement can be divided into two groups: immigration in the 19th century and immigration in the 20th century. In the 19th century, most immigrants came from Europe to Australia for several reasons: convicts, trying to find new opportunities to farm, the gold rush, and doing business. Their religions were Catholic, Church of England, Presbyterian, and Lutheran. In the 20th century, more immigrants came to Australia, especially after the World War II. They were from Italy, Poland, Greece, Serbia, Netherlands, UK, and Ireland, and they brought Orthodox, Anglican, and Reformed churches to Australia. Islam arrived in the late 1960s, with the arrival of immigrants from Lebanon, Turkey, Egypt, Indonesia, Fiji, Malaysia, and the former Yugoslavia. Buddhism came with immigrants from Vietnam and other East Asian countries in the mid 70s. Since then, more and more immigrants with specialist skills and business interest have come to Australia and have brought Hinduism, Oriental Christianity, and various other religions (Christian Research Association, 2000).

In the 2006 national census of religious identification (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007), 25.8% of the Australia population considered themselves as Catholic, followed by Anglican (18.7%), having no religion (18.7%), and Uniting Church (5.7%). In terms of religious practices, the Australia Community Survey 1998

¹ In Indonesia, Christian and Catholic are two different religions. Catholic refers to Roman Catholic, while Christian refers to all other denominations.

² The philosophical term of “truth” refers to something which corresponds to the fact (Glanzberg, 2006). However, Hunt (2005) argues that in the social world, truth involves interpretation of the reality. What I mean by ‘single truth which is enforced by the church authority’ refers to the single way of interpreting the world which the church wants their congregation to adhere.

(of randomly-sampled 8500 adults) found that 29.7% of participants never prayed or meditated, 21.6 % prayed occasionally, 16.3% prayed most days, 14.6% hardly ever, 12.1% weekly or more, and 4.6% prayed several times a day. When the same population was asked how often they attended religious services, 51.9% said never, 20% once a year or more, 9.3% weekly, 8.1% less than yearly, 6.5% monthly or more, and 4.1% several times a week. These statistics show that although most Australian admit that they belong to a certain religion, not all of them really engage in religious activities such as attending religious services or praying, either personally or in groups (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007).

In the next section, I will describe the history and current situation of Christianity in Indonesia. By doing this, we can understand the differences and similarities of being a Christian in Indonesia and Australia.

Christianity in Indonesia

Christianity in Indonesia originated in the Dutch colonization period, starting from the 1600s (Frederick & Worden, 1993). Before that time, a small number of Portuguese Catholic missionaries worked around Maluku, South Sulawesi, and Timor. When the Dutch defeated Portuguese in 1605, Calvinist missionaries became the only Christian influence in Indonesia. However, at that time only small populations in Java, Maluku, North Sulawesi, and Nusa Tenggara were Christians. In 1799, the Dutch government allowed other churches to do missionary work in Indonesia. German Lutheranism gained influence among Batak ethnic in Sumatra, the Dutch Rhenish Mission in Central Kalimantan and Central Sulawesi, and the Catholic Jesuits in Flores, Timor, and Alor. In the 20th century, one significant historic occasion of Christianity in Indonesia was the coup d'état attempt by the Communist Party in 1965. The attempt failed. But since that time, all Indonesians must have a religion, because someone who has no religion would be perceived as an atheist, and atheists were associated with the Communist Party. Many Indonesians who felt uncomfortable with aspirations from the Islamic party chose to be Christians. Soeharto's government applied strict rules about religions through the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which still has a significant impact today (Frederick & Worden, 1993).

During the 1998 national riots in Indonesia, many churches experienced prosecution – churches were burnt, pastors were beaten, and congregations were shattered. There were also Muslim-Christian conflicts and violence in certain parts of Indonesia, for instance in Poso and Ambon. After Soeharto's government ended, Christi-

anity started to enjoy freedom from strife, especially when Abdurrahman Wahid was the president of Indonesia.

Currently, the number of Christians in Indonesia is 19,906,679 people or 9.5% of the total population of Indonesia (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2005). It is a small percentage compared to the number of Muslims, which is 182,083,594 people or 87% of Indonesia's population.

Indonesian Christian international students in Australia are located within multiple spaces of religiosity. In Indonesia, the government decides which churches are legal, and which teachings and practices are correct. Religious truth is determined by the government and religious authorities, such as the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Majelis Ulama Indonesia (Indonesian Committee of Islamic Leaders), and Persatuan Gereja Indonesia (Indonesian Communion of Churches). In Australia there are various churches (from orthodox to new age churches), different teachings and practices, including personal spiritualities, and even people with no religion. Truth belongs to individuals – and for some, truth is located within organised religions

Christians in Indonesia and Australia are also located differently in terms of numbers. The number of Christians is 9.5% in Indonesia, and 70.9% in Australia. However, in terms of religious practices, only 13.4% of Australians attend religious services weekly or more, and 33% pray/meditate personally weekly or more (Christian Research Association, 2000). In Indonesia, there is no accessible data about this. From my personal experience, the acceptable sign of being a Christian in Indonesia is attending Sunday service and belonging to a certain church, since personal spirituality without connection to a recognised religion is not allowed. Christian churches usually encourage their congregation to pray and read the Bible everyday.

Australia and Indonesia are also very different in terms of economy, politics, law supremacy, human rights, religious conflicts, and freedom of expressing religious practices and freedom of expression. I am interested in understanding the ways in which Indonesian Christian international students studying in Australia negotiate their sense of religious identity in the midst of their different educational, cultural and religious experiences.

Indonesian Christian Community in Australia

The number of Indonesian in Australia in the 2006 census was 50,970 people (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2006). New South Wales has the

largest proportion (42.9%), followed by Victoria (24.7%), Western Australia (15.5%), Queensland (10.4%), South Australia (3%), Australian Capital Territory (1.5%), Northern Territory (1.5%), and Tasmania (0.4%). In terms of age range, the largest proportions are the 25-44 years age group (39.6%) and the 15-24 years group (24.4%). Almost half of those Indonesian-born people hold Australian passports (47.5%). The ancestors of Indonesian-born people in Australia are Chinese (40.7%), Indonesian (39.8%), and Dutch (7.2%). In 2006, more than 15,000 Indonesian students were enrolled in education institutions in Australia (Department of Industry and Resources, 2008), while more than 26,000 Indonesians were employed. In terms of religion, 28.5% of Indonesian-born people in Australia admitted that they were Catholics, 17% were Muslims, and 10.9% were Buddhists.

Many Indonesian churches have been established in Australia. There are 34 Indonesian churches in New South Wales, 21 churches in Victoria, 15 churches in Western Australia, 4 churches in Queensland, and 1 church in the Northern Territory ("Indonesian Churches in Australia," 2008). These churches run their services in the Indonesian language, because usually all the members are Indonesians. Some of them have a special service which is held in English to accommodate those (usually international students) who are interested to go to their churches. Some Indonesian Churches have their main church in Indonesia or other countries (e.g. Gereja Bethany, Mimbar Reformed Injili Indonesia, International Full Gospel Fellowship, Assembly of God, etc.), and some do not. But the style of sermon and teachings are not much different from the government regulations of Christianity in Indonesia.

My study focuses on Indonesian-Christian international university students who are members of the Indonesian-Christian churches in Melbourne. I am interested in understanding the ways in which they negotiate their religious identity.

Religion as a Social Basis of Cultural Identity

Hall (1992, p. 274) uses the term "cultural identities" to assert the essential aspects of identity, i.e. ethnicity, race, language, religion, and nationality. Location is also an important part of our identities. In these global times, there is movement of people, ideology, cultures and information and this complicates our cultural identities.

I am interested in one dimension of identity – religious identity. Ammerman (2003, p. 217) provides a rigorous analysis on the notion of religious identity

and institutions. She argues that religious institutions establish sets of roles, myths, rituals, and behavioural prescriptions, including language, music, gestures, and eating which are perceived as "the sacred dimension of experience" (p. 218). These narratives are the "grammar" for the congregation to construct their religious identity. Therefore, she claims that questions of power and domination are central in the study of religious identity. However, Ammerman (2003) also demonstrates that the construction of religious identity is a multilayered exercise. It could take place in a specialized religious setting like a religious institution, but also in any other settings where episodes of transcendence occur. She concludes that religious identity is constantly negotiated and re-negotiated.

Religion as a social basis of identity has often been studied in its relation with ethnicity among immigrants (Yang & Ebaugh, 2001a; Yang & Ebaugh, 2001b; Hammond, 1988). Peek (2005) argues that religion plays an important role in maintaining group identity and solidarity among immigrants. While Chen (2002) has demonstrated how religious organizations are not only meeting spiritual needs of the immigrants, but also providing social networks, psychological supports, and economic opportunities. Those religious ethnic organizations also eliminate cultural and linguistic difficulties, which make a significant difference compared to local religious organizations.

On the subject of religious identity development, Peek (2005) studied the stages of religious identity formation among second-generation American Muslims. She concluded three stages of religious identity formation. The first is religion as ascribed identity. At this stage, religion is taken for granted, with very little critical reflection on their religious beliefs and doctrines. Most of the participants were born as a Muslim. They complied with the rituals that had been taught to them since early childhood and never questioned them, usually until entering college. The second stage is religion as chosen identity. When the participants were entering college, they became highly independent. They usually left their parent's home. At campus, most of the participants joined the Muslim students clubs. In those clubs, they questioned, challenged, discussed, and chose to identify themselves with Islam. The last stage is religion as declared identity.

After the 9/11 attack, Muslim students were asked more often about their faith by friends and strangers. They studied Islam more, prayed more, and they admitted that their spirituality become stronger. Even though this stage seems specifically applicable on Islam in that specific year, Peek (2005) claims that religion

as declared identity could happen if there is crisis which enforces individuals to strengthen their religious identity. There are two concerns I point out in her findings. First, I believe that religious identity does not develop in a linear pattern from childhood to adulthood. Second, the term “crisis” can have various understandings and forms, and also various impacts. Therefore, crisis does not always enforce individuals to strengthen their religious identity. It can also erode religious identity, or alter religious identity.

Religion and Modernity/Postmodernity

Modernity has had different impacts on religion. Its ‘search for rational certainty’ has created questions for religious claims which sometimes seem irrational – for instance the concept of heaven and hell. Science and rationalism have offered an alternative worldview and explanations of the meaning of human life and the nature of the universe (Hunt, 2005). Some authors have found that modernity reduces attendance and religious affiliation. Voas and Crockett’s study (2005) in Britain found that the saying ‘believing without belonging’ – which means religious beliefs are still robust even though church attendance is declining – is no longer relevant. They conclude that in Britain, the attitude toward religion is neither believing nor belonging, particularly across generations. In this regard, Timmerman (2000) found that modern education also plays an important role. Timmerman found that, among Turkish women in Belgium, education was a factor in their choosing secular nationalism (Kemalism) rather than religious nationalism (Islam).

Education provided Turkish women in Belgium with emancipation and social mobility, and eventually offered women recognition in the broader social domain. One of her participants said: “If I were not studying, I would still be sitting at home and waiting for whatever my family should decide for me” (p. 343). The women argued that education liberated them from their family’s Islamic worldview which is dominated by patrilineality and the segregation of the sexes. However, in this study, I found that education does not easily secularize religious identity, but it influences the way my participants construct their Christian identity in different ways, as we will see in the next sections.

On the other hand, there are several studies which provide different perspectives. Hervieu-Leger (1990) argues that in the French context, modernity does not secularize the community; rather, it renews religion, especially in respect to different individual characteristics and organizational fluidity. He claims that

“modernity generates its own forms of religion by creating and filling the gaps between rational certainties” (p. S15). In the American context, Yang and Ebaugh (2001b) also argue that internal and external religious pluralism has not led to the decline of religion. Instead, it encourages institutional and theological transformations which energize and revitalize religion. However, the impacts of modernity on religion have mostly been studied among Western societies, while there is dearth of literature on this issue among third world countries.

Besides modernity, postmodernity also challenges religion for its claims on a single truth and authority. Religious claims on single truth contradict the notions of pluralism, individualism, and fluidity that postmodernists argue for. One consequence postmodernity has brought to the notion of identity is that identity is no longer given by circumstances (race, gender, religion, class), but it “has to be created and re-created on a more active basis than before” by individuals (Giddens, 2002, p. 47). Hall (1992) named this phenomenon as “de-centering”, i.e. identities are being fragmented (p. 285).

A study from Pollack and Pickel (2007) provides a closer look at religious identity and individualism. In their review of the literature they stated the thesis of religious individualization. This thesis asserts that the “processes of modernization will not lead to a decline in the social significance of religion, but rather to a change in its social forms” (p. 604). One of the noticeable changes is the distinction between the church and religion. This means that everyone can choose their own interpretation about God, life, and reality; and not necessarily adhere to certain religious institutions or authority. Accordingly, Aldridge (2000, p. 91) argues that in the modern world “choice is valued positively: people ought to arrive at their own beliefs for themselves.” This implies a strong sense of individualism. Pollack and Pickel (2007) then examined the empirical application of that thesis in East and West Germany. They concluded that it is still a long way to religious individualization, since non-church religiosity is still marginal and interwoven with traditional Christian religiosity. As we can see in this study, not all societies fully embrace postmodernity, because there is always an interplay between structure and agency.

What about Indonesia? The social phenomenon of religious individualization (Pollack & Pickel, 2007; Warner, 2002) seems to be still far away, since the government controls religion strictly. The divorce of church and Christianity cannot happen because of regulation by the Department of Religious Affairs.

Therefore, there is an interesting process of negotiation when Indonesians leave Indonesia and engage with multiple cultures and ways of being, for instance when studying abroad.

Globalization and Identity

Another framework that can be used to understand the processes of negotiating religious identity comes from the notion of globalization. Global flows create complicated ways of negotiating identity. As Hall (1992) argues: “*Globalization does have a pluralizing impact on identities, producing a variety of possibilities and new positions of identification, and making identities more positional, more political, more plural and diverse; less fixed, unified, and trans-historical*” (p.309).

Giddens (2002) explains the relationship between globalization and identity using the notion of tradition. Tradition is a term created by modernity to refer to the “frameworks for action that go largely unquestioned” (p. 41). Even though Giddens acknowledges that humankind cannot live completely without traditions, he argues that globalization has untied the hold of the hidden power of traditions. Globalization brings people to meet other people who think differently from them. Lowe (1997) said of pluralism that it is “placing so many people of such diverse beliefs in immediate proximity” (p. 16). In this condition, traditions, which used to be unquestioned, start to be questioned. Among those traditions are ethnic traditions, religious traditions, and even intellectual traditions. In more traditional communities, the source of identity is stable social positions, which individuals adhere to. When “traditions lapse, the lifestyle choice prevails” (p. 47), and the sense of identity needs to be reconstructed.

Vroom (2007) noted a phenomenon of negotiation of religious identity when people move from a traditional to a pluralistic culture. He researched the Muslims in Europe, who mainly come from religiously homogenous homelands (India, Pakistan, Turkey, Morocco, Surinam, Iraq, Iran, and other North African and Arabic countries). Using the analogy of reformed churches at the end of the twentieth century, he argued that traditional Muslims in Europe reinterpret their religious identity and are transformed into different groups: moderate-orthodoxy, fundamentalism, radicalism, and religious liberalism. This finding from Vroom (2007) might be similar to the experiences of Indonesian Christian international students in Australia, because they also have moved from a traditional to a more pluralistic culture; even though the possibility of different

explanations is also widely open, regarding the nature of experience which is multiple and shifting – not fixed.

While Vroom’s (2007) study was among Muslims, Mathews (2000) provides a comparable study among Christians. On the topic of globalization and Christian identity, Mathews (2000) studied how Christians in the United States negotiated the tension between American identity as “America – one nation under God” and “America – place of freedom to choose your own spirituality from the global spiritual supermarket”. He interviewed 18 Christians and categorized them into three groups, i.e. evangelical Christian, liberal Christian, and spiritual seeker. Evangelical Christian refers to Christians who “believe that salvation could come only through faith in Christ and the Christian God” (p. 83). They usually actively evangelise to non-believers and invite people to church. Liberal Christian refers to Christians who chose to be a Christian, but also recognize truth in other religious traditions. They do not believe in religious relativism, because if they did they would not confess that they are Christians. They do not necessarily invite people to church, because although they believe that Christianity is the truth for them, maybe it is not for other people. Spiritual seekers are people who “seek wisdom through their choices as consumers from the ‘global spiritual supermarket’” (p. 119). For them, religion is like hair colouring, they can change it every time they want, depending on what is suitable for them. Religion is a matter of taste. Mathews (2000) found that each group perceived their identity as an American in different ways. He also argues that those three groups are not a clear-cut categorization. There are people who seem to be in between.

Understanding the experiences of Indonesian Christian international students within the context of modernity, postmodernity, and globalization provides a more nuanced understanding of the processes of negotiations and contestations in (re)constructing their religious identities.

Methods

I interviewed four participants, including myself. As Patton (1990) argues, “there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry” (p. 184), the number of participant depends on the research question, purpose of inquiry, what will be usefulness, and the time and resource available. The criteria of being a participant were (1) a university student in Australia, (2) was/is a Christian, and (3) holding Indonesian passport.

Each participant was interviewed in a 45-minute interview session in a public place. These semi-structured inter-

views were audio taped. The questions were around participants' understanding of Christianity, what were the differences between being a Christian in Indonesia and Australia, and their cultural experiences during their study here.

In this research, I also draw on my experiences as an Indonesian Christian international student as data for this project. As Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) argue, self-understanding is legitimate knowledge, and therefore self-study is counted as research. I ask myself the questions in the interview guideline in order to articulate my taken-for-granted assumptions about my own religious identity. Some of the answers are also based on my personal journal.

The issue of trustworthiness and quality in self study has been discussed in the literatures. Feldman (2003) argues that there are several ways to improve the quality of a self-study (a) by providing a clear and detailed explanation about the data collection process and what counts as data, (b) by clearly explaining the process of constructing representation of the data, and (c) by providing multiple representations of the data as a tool for triangulation. In this study I present my findings with the quotations from my participants' interview transcripts and my own personal journals in order to show the logical validity of my conclusion. In the next section I explain the detail of the data collection process as Feldman (2003) suggests.

I looked for differences and similarities in my research participants' interview narratives in understanding the dynamics of religious identity negotiation of Indonesian Christians international students in Australian universities. In order to protect participants' anonymity, pseudonyms are used for all their names in this study.

Results and Discussion

In this part I discuss the findings of this study. In the first section, I provide a brief profile of each research participant. I draw on my research participants' narratives in discussing the markers of a "good" Christian in the second section. In the third section, I describe my research participants' negotiations with the notion of "good" Christian. The last section will discuss new ways of being Christians as Indonesian international students in Australia.

Participants' Profiles

There are four participants in this study, including myself. All of them are Indonesian Christian international students in universities in Melbourne. Three of

them are studying at master's level, and one at undergraduate level. All of them had a Christian background before come to Australia.

Stephen. Stephen is currently studying a Master of Banking and Finance. He is 23 years old. He arrived in Melbourne on April 2007. He went to an Indonesian church at first, then his church merged with an Australian church. Since then, he has attended the international service in that church, although there is also an Indonesian service. Since early 2008, he has led a Christian club at his university.

Gloria. Gloria is studying a Master of Human Resources. She goes to an Advent church, which is the same denomination as her church in Indonesia. Her church here is not an Indonesian church, because there is no Indonesian Advent church here in Melbourne. The Advent church can be easily distinguished from other churches because they hold their services on Saturday (the Sabbath), they do not work on the Sabbath, and they promote a vegetarian lifestyle.

Linda. Linda is an undergrade student studying media and communication studies and also commerce. She arrived in Australia at 8 years old, and spent most of her schooling years in Perth and Melbourne. She went to an Indonesian church. She used to be a singer and a dancer there. After she studied different philosophies at university, she started to question her Christian beliefs. One month before the interview was conducted, she decided not to go to church any more. She reads various spiritual books and has joined a spiritual club, but still considers herself to be a Christian.

Myself. I grew up in a Christian family. I was a 'good' Sunday School student, involved in youth ministries, and was one of the youth leaders in my church. I studied the Bible thoroughly. I arrived in Melbourne in May 2007 for my master's degree. Before that, I worked for two years as a lecturer in the Faculty of Psychology, University of Surabaya, Indonesia. I go to an Indonesian church in Melbourne and being involved in various ministries. I enjoy the social life in my church. However, the teachings do not satisfy me. I have started to question what I believe about Christianity since I have learned different philosophies during my study here.

New Religio-Cultural Experiences

In Chong's (1998) study there were some participants who were dissatisfied with the "superficial" and "hypocritical" aspects of the conservative/fundamentalist belief system that their church adhered to. One of them said that "You listen to sermons and in little groups, you

paraphrase what is said in the Bible, and agree and write down everything the group leader said. It appeared that you didn't question (p. 274)." My experience as a Christian in Indonesia is quite similar to Chong's description. Critical questions are not asked in the Bible classes. Vroom (2007, p. 230) called this a traditional culture – "a certain view of beliefs that is shared without dispute", which operates at two levels: practical explanation of texts and explicit view of the scriptures and rules. In her church in Melbourne, Linda was also experiencing a similar situation:

I think in the church people tend to, people who actually really have different values are indoctrinated with one type of value which is usually pushed top-down by the pastor and pastor's family or the bible class teachers, who then shape the congregation values to be the same as theirs... Now, yes I did stop my self from saying my opinions directly and honestly, because I know what kind of reaction I'm gonna get, because I know if I say this, they're gonna say no that's wrong, or they gonna try to convince me in some other way, which I've already know. (Linda)

Vroom (2007, p. 232) argues that transition from a traditional culture to a pluralistic culture involves questions toward the "old interpretation schema". I will use the notion of "tradition" from Giddens (2002) to illustrate the situations of my participants in relation to their religio-cultural experiences in Australia. According to Giddens (2002, p. 41), tradition refers to the "frameworks for action that go largely unquestioned." As Indonesian Christians studying in Australia, the participants in this study have met people who think and act differently from them. Some of those experiences have captured their interest and made them think. These experiences can be seen as 'new' cultural experiences. Some cultural experiences have been really appealing to them, contradicting their beliefs, and eventually challenging their taken-for-granted assumptions. Thus, Indonesian Christian international students in negotiating these new experiences have started examining traditions in their Christianity, and asking questions to resolve the contradictions between their current beliefs about what a good Christian is and new religio-cultural experiences in Australia.

My research participants were experiencing new religio-cultural experiences in their new educational and cultural environments in Australia. Some important themes that have emerged from their interview narratives in relation to the negotiations of

their religious identities in this new context, include: questions around sexuality, feminism, and different philosophies in their studies.

Sexuality

The topic of sexuality has been largely discussed in relation to religion and spirituality. It has been studied from the perspective of African spiritual tradition (Conner, 2003), Native American (Cordero & Currans, 2003), Daoism (Yao, 2003), Hinduism (Lidke, 2003), Jewish (Alpert, 2003), and Islam (Hidayatullah, 2003). This topic is also familiar in recent Christian literatures; for instance, the writings from Sands (2000), Countryman (2007), and Deutchman (2008). They demonstrate various tensions between sexuality and Christian values in Western countries. Specifically, Chong (1998) have found that a conservative attitude toward sexuality was one of the important markers of being a "good" Christian among her second generation Korean American participants. In my study, sexuality was also an important theme that emerged from my research participants' experiences in negotiating the religious identity of Indonesian Christians in Australia. For example, some of them were questioning issues around the belief that a good Christian should not commit sex outside marriage.

Gloria used to believe that virginity is a sacred matter. I believed that too in Indonesia. I believed that "God's initial intention when creating sexual relationship is for the holy marriage." But here in Australia, as Gloria said, having sex is an ordinary matter.

For people here, having sex is an ordinary matter. While for us Eastern people, it's a taboo. And even for Christians. We don't do that... yea.. even though it wasn't written clearly – I never found the verse that we should not have sex before marriage. (Gloria)

I remember what my teacher in pre-departure training prior to my study in Australia said about sexuality. She was from New Zealand. I perceived her as a noble woman – a Christian, with very nice way of teaching, a doctorate in linguistics, and working as a researcher. She said that it is silly to ask young people to stay sexually abstinent. This was different to my Christian beliefs. I was quite shocked when heard that, and I started to question what I believed about sexuality and Christian morality. "Good Christians must be sexually abstinent" was a tradition (Giddens, 2002) for me – a taken-for-granted assumption which

was realized as a taken-for-granted assumption when meeting people who thought, believed, and acted differently, as did that teacher. Gloria also started to re-check the scriptures which discussed virginity. She concluded that “the scriptures do not clearly mention it”. She said she still protects her virginity because she wants to marry at church and her church condemns sexual activities outside marriage. But personally she is not really sure.

So far, for me, what matters is the concept of virginity. For me it’s important ... well actually it’s important-not-important. But because I want to marry at church and for my church it’s sin, so I won’t do that (sex outside marriage). (Gloria)

Religiosity and conservative sexual ethics have been closely related since the very beginning of religion. Max Weber argued that one of the essential features of religion is hostility toward sexuality (Aldridge, 2000). He claimed that sexuality is the strongest irrational force in human life; therefore, religions try to strictly control it. They do it by “[tying] the sexual expressions to reproduction” (p. 198). The experiences of Gloria and myself demonstrate the tension between traditionalist-modernizers (Aldridge, 2000) in the area of sexuality. We questioned which sexual ethics are cultural-dependant and which are still relevant. However, in the Western modern world, Christianity is less and less significant in controlling sexual conduct. Mohrmann (2006) argues that currently in American life, the Bible is no longer the leading criterion for moral decisions. Drawing on survey results from Barna Research Group in 2004 in the United States, he showed that only 13% of American adults choose the Bible for the basis of their moral decisions. “Whatever feels right or comfortable” and “guidelines taught by parents” are more popular, gaining 30% and 15% of the poll.

Also in relation to sexuality, another topic which confronted me was homosexuality. This topic has also been largely discussed in the literatures on Christianity and Christian identity (Thumma, 1991; Mahaffy, 1996; Gross, 2008; Farley, 2008). Is that true that a good Christian must condemn homosexuality because it is sin, and therefore condemn the legality gay marriage? My New Zealander teacher also surprised my class when she said there were homosexual priests in churches in her home town. My church in Indonesia teaches that homosexuality is a sin, and therefore homosexuals need to repent and return to the “normal” heterosexuality. But my church in Melbourne, al-

though it is an Indonesian church, has slightly different understanding.

In a discussion with my pastor here, he said he believes that there is genetic contribution to homosexuality and therefore being a homosexual is not sin. But practicing homosexual relationship is sin. Therefore, never married is the way out. That is “the cross” he/she has to take. (Teguh)

My pastor in Melbourne believes that genetics play an important role in one’s sexuality. He believes that genetic factor that causes homosexuality, therefore he argues that “celibacy is expected” (Holben, 1999) because one cannot change one’s homosexuality. Where-as my church in Indonesia believes that homosexuality can be changed and therefore “change is expected” (Holben, 1999).

Those different perspectives between my church in Indonesia and Melbourne made me think, “Is that true that the Bible is the one and the only source of truth as I believed before? Or should a good Christian also consider research findings when interpreting the Bible scriptures?”

In this section I have addressed the issue of sexuality and Christianity; including the nature of sexual relationships, the sacredness of virginity, attitudes toward homosexuality, and the authority of Bible as the only source of truth. The next section will discuss another issue which provoked many questions in my participants’ Christian beliefs – it was feminism.

Feminism

King (2004) claims that the body of literature in gender and religion has experienced “double blindness”: gender studies are “religion-blind”, while religion studies are “gender-blind” (pp. 1-2). She asserts the importance of gender-religion studies because the issues of gender and religion are not independent, but mutually embedded within each other. However, currently the issue of feminism is no longer a stranger in Christian literatures. McDougall (2006) argues that there are many Christian feminist theologians who struggle to identify patriarchy as the original sin, in order to liberate men and women from “the bondage of patriarchal social order” in Christian tradition. Among those theologians are Rosemary Radford Ruether, Letty Russell, Sallie McFague, Catherine Keller, Rita Nakashima Brock, Marjorie Suchocki, Wendy Farley, Kathleen Sands, Mary Potter Engel, Linda Mercadante, and Carol Hess (pp. 217-218).

The tension participants experienced in this study was: Should a good Christian promote equal relationships between men and women? Or should a good Christian follow what the Bible literally says about men-women relationships, which seems patriarchal? Linda feels that Christian doctrine is very patriarchal:

One of the biggest issues for me is seemingly, well not seemingly, but very patriarchal nature of the Christian doctrine, just the fact that all the writers in the Bible are male. And how like I told you, in Corinthians Paul was saying that women shouldn't talk publicly without covering their face, because that will make their husband ashamed. Well it's very very patriarchal and I understand that it was the society back then. And is it really true that God wants women to, wives to submit to their husbands like they were Jesus. That, I mean, Jesus is like our Lord, and just a deity whereas for me husband and wife should be based on equality and love. Equal love, not like the wife should stay at home and cook and well the husband works. And it seems like the Indonesian churches, Christian churches in Melbourne at least teach that. (Linda)

After studying feminism at university, Linda realized that patriarchy is a tradition (Giddens, 2002) for her. She has lived in it and never realized it. In the interview narrative above, she pointed out some aspects of negotiating feminism and her Christian beliefs, i.e. husband-wife relationship ("is it really true that God wants women to, wives to submit to their husbands like they were Jesus?"), women's public/ social manner ("women shouldn't talk publicly"), and women's domestic role ("the wife should stay at home and cook and well the husband works").

Gloria also engages in the issue of feminism, but it does not really affect her. She brought another aspect of feminism into this study, i.e. the spiritual aspect. She remembered in a philosophy class a question about the gender of the twelve apostles – who were male – was raised. Someone asked, "Does that mean that if we are female we would never be the special followers of Jesus?" Gloria's response was this, "If we follow that philosophical way of thinking, we can be an apostate. Maybe God has His own reason which I don't know what it is." Gloria is not concerned if she does not know what God's reasoning is behind the scriptures. She said that she really trusts God deep in her heart, so she would not be bothered by some unresolved questions in her head. She will keep those questions to be asked when she meets God some day.

I'm a type of person who once I've believed, I will never question my beliefs anymore. Maybe God has His own reason which I don't know what it is. But someday I'm sure... I will keep those questions when I meet God. (Gloria)

The negotiation of feminism and Christian identity is one of the major topics in studying religious identity in the modern world (Aldridge, 2000). Aldridge examined scriptures, rituals, and traditional practices of the world's great religions to find evidence of women's subordination to men: from the exclusion of women in the priesthood in Catholic and Orthodox Christianity, the veiling of women in Islam, to the strong preference for sons over daughters in Hinduism. The waves of the feminist movement throughout the 20th century were certainly confronted by the thousand-years-established religions which mainly have patriarchal natures. Those conflicting powers lead to complicated negotiations of religious identity at the individual level, as Linda and Gloria experienced.

Engaging with Different Knowledges in the Studies

My research participants and myself are engaging with different bodies of literature in our university studies here in Australia. For example, I have been engaging with literature in relation to postmodernism, critical approaches to research, feminism, and postcolonialism. Postmodernism challenged the myth of Reason – the universal and rational nature of human-kind, and therefore rejecting claims on single truth (Menard, 2000). As I read the readings in the unit I took in my master's degree, I started to question that there is no single interpretation in the social reality. To some extent, there is relativism. I also questioned my Christian belief, which claims the authority of the Bible as the only truth³. Some questions that came to my mind were:

How is it that we Christians claim that the only way to heaven is through Jesus? Is it just because 'the Bible tells me so'? What about people who have never heard of or have a very little exposure to Christianity? Is that fair that they go to hell because they are not Christians? Shouldn't our God be fair and just? (Teguh)

³ As I argue before, what I mean with 'single truth' is the single way of interpreting the world.

Linda also had similar questions:

I have a lot of Muslim friends and then I started worrying about them, I pray for them every day like Oh God, please change their heart so they all will become Christians. But then, my Muslim friend, my really close Muslim friend in Malaysia, she was telling me that their religion is also believe that only Muslims go to heaven. So, everyone else go the hell. So, how would that work? I was like, who's right. Is it really as simple as, somebody has got the answer and everyone else is wrong, or is it more complex than that? (Linda)

Linda also questioned the notion of evangelism and linked that to colonial practices. She quoted one of her readings in her university study: "one of the marks of colonialism on the subjugated nations, like Indonesia, is the rise of Christianity". She reminded me that Christianity was brought to Indonesia by the Dutch, so Christian evangelism is a continuation of colonialism:

Are we just expanding what the Westerners are doing, like, are we just trying to recruit everyone into Christianity so that everything else is lost, like all the other beautiful religions, we make them into enemies? (Linda)

An Indonesian Monash lecturer who was also a pastor in an Indonesian church in Melbourne (Sen Sendjaya, personal communication, September 2008) said that, generally speaking, there are hardly any intellectual debates or discussions on Christian faith in Indonesian churches. Rather it is a case of keeping the laws and practices advocated by the religious institutions and clerics. Furthermore, he indicates that Christianity and its churches in Indonesia also largely focus on the spiritual-emotional aspects of religion, e.g. God's love, forgiveness, blessings, miracle, etc. Accordingly, Smith (2007) argues that the main factor which has made Christianity survive through anti-Christianity waves (including influential thoughts from Voltaire, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud), and even flourish in Asian and former communist countries, is because Christianity meets many human emotional needs and desires, such as experiencing unconditional love, a sense of significance, moral bearing, and community belonging. Therefore, philosophical questions about Christianity and contemporary issues, as some of my participants and I asked, were never been seriously discussed before we came to Australia.

To sum up, in this section I have elaborated the process of exploring and questioning traditions as Indonesian Christian students engaged in religio-cultural experiences in Australia, including questions around sexuality, feminism, and various knowledges in university studies. In the next section, I will explain the new ways of being Indonesian Christians in Australia after engagement with those questions.

New Ways of Being Christians

Dealing with new religio-cultural experiences and questioning the notion of a good Christian lead my participants to the reconstruction of their Christian identity. There were processes of negotiation among my participants, from reconstructing what they believed about appropriate way inviting people to church to taken-for-granted assumptions about the nature of God. In this section, I draw on the works of Mathews (2000) to discuss my research participants' new ways of being Christians.

In his study, Mathews (2000) categorized Christians into three groups: evangelical Christians, liberal Christians, and spiritual seekers. Evangelical Christians are Christians who believe that Jesus is the only way to salvation. Consequently, they actively spread the good news of salvation in Christ. Liberal Christians refers to Christians who believe that Christianity is the way for them, but there are also other ways to God in other religions. There are truths in other belief systems. In addition, Warner (2002) argues that one of the markers of liberal Christians is the incorporation of feminist and lesbi-gay perspectives. Spiritual seekers are people who consume various spiritual teachings in order to seek wisdom. However, Mathews (2000) acknowledges that these groups are not clearly separated. There are people who seem to be in between. In this study, I do not categorize my participants into these groups, but I present certain beliefs and acts from different participants which correspond to these different ways of being Christian. I concur with Hall's (1992) and Ammerman's (2003) argument that religious identity is not a fixed and stable concept, it "can not be reduced into a single determining structural essence (211)," therefore I do not group my participants into single categories.

Evangelical Christian

According to my analysis, participants embodied some markers of evangelical Christianity before they came to Australia. They believed that Jesus was the only way to salvation and therefore they were involved

in evangelical activities like praying for unbelievers, inviting people to the church, joining mission trips, and sharing the word of God on every occasion:

I was believed that Jesus is the only way to salvation, therefore I did evangelical activities in my church in Indonesia. I invited my friends to church, I encouraged my friends at church to evangelise, and I challenge people to receive Jesus in evangelism meetings. (Teguh)

At first I was convinced that it (- Jesus is the only way) was true, so I have a lot of Muslim friends and then I started worrying about them, I pray for them everyday like Oh God, please change their heart so they all will become Christians. (Linda)

Stephen also believes that Jesus is the only way to heaven. When I asked him about what will happen to his parents – who are not Christians – in the life-after-death, he clearly said that “if they do not receive Jesus as they saviour they can not go to heaven”. He believes that Jesus is the only way to salvation. This belief makes him willing to take the responsibility of leading an evangelical club at his university: “I feel like God put a call to reach non-Indonesian lost souls.”

Gloria demonstrates a slightly different understanding about salvation. Like Stephen, Gloria also believes that Jesus is the only way to heaven, but only for those who have heard about Jesus, no matter how little the information is:

If they never know who Jesus is, we can't say they don't go to heaven because they don't know Jesus, right? No one tell them. But if they have been told about Jesus, it's up to them to receive Jesus or not. They can choose, because they have heard about Jesus. (Gloria)

The concept of evangelical Christianity in Mathews' (2000) category is similar to the concept of fundamentalist Christianity. While evangelical Christianity focuses on the belief that Jesus is the only way to salvation (Mathews, 2000), fundamentalism focuses on scriptural literalism (Hunt, 2005) – which means the Bible is the only source of truth and is unquestionable. In terms of beliefs and lifestyle ethics, both fundamentalists and evangelical Christians share many similar attributes (Dutton, 2007). In his study among two evangelical university student groups, Dutton (2007) found that they believed in hell for

non-believers, and devil as an actual force in the world. They were encouraged to evangelise to non-Christians. They believed that drinking alcohol was acceptable, but getting drunk was not acceptable. Drugs were strictly prohibited. Almost all of them believed that smoking was forbidden, as well as dating a non-believer. Pre-marital sexual conduct was absolutely unacceptable. However, although not popular, Dutton (2007) claimed that in the American context these groups were attractive for the members because they held some sense of superiority over outsiders: only they would go to heaven, only they understand the real meaning of life, and so forth.

Comparing Dutton's (2007) finding with my participants, the lifestyle ethics in his findings are not applicable in my study, because the context is different; for instance, the context of sexual conduct among Indonesian students, as I have explained in the previous section. In terms of doctrines, Stephen believes that Jesus is the only way to salvation and he evangelises through the Christian club. Gloria believes that Jesus is the only way, but only for those who have heard the Gospel. Linda and I are not practising evangelism anymore. Johnson (1997) argued that encouraging Christians to evangelise is one of the biggest challenges for pastors in the modern world. He blames the notion of pluralization in causing the (single) Truth – that Jesus is the only way to salvation – to be hard to maintain and hard to live.

In this section I have presented evidence that my participants were evangelical Christians before they came to Australia. I also have explained that some of them still believe that Jesus is the only way to salvation. In the next section I will discuss the ways in which liberal Christians – deal differently with truth(s).

Liberal Christian

Another way of being a Christian in Mathews' (2000) category is to be a liberal Christian. The basic idea of liberal Christianity is that Jesus is not the only way to salvation. Liberal Christians believe that there are truths in other belief systems, but Christianity is the one which is suitable for them. These Christians usually refuse to be involved in evangelical activities.

Although Gloria said that she believes that “Jesus is the only way to heaven for them who have heard about Jesus”, she also does not agree with the aggressive way of evangelism. She refused to join an evangelism activity at her church:

They (her friends at church) spent time to walk out and say, “We have worship inside. Do you have time to join us?” If they say they were busy, “Would you mind if we get your contact number?” For me, it’s a little bit pushy. The church should advertise in different way, rather than one-on-one pushy style like that. I never invited people to my church. But on the contrary, most of my friends were wanted to try my church, because they said I’m unique. (Gloria)

Her friends and colleagues usually ask about her religion because she goes to church on Saturday and she does not eat pork. Those things are not usual for them. Gloria also acknowledges different levels of truth in other religions and Christian denominations. She chose the Adventist Church, because it is “the right one for me (her)”, but she does not say that “they (other belief systems) are wrong.”

The difference between other Christians and Advent are just a few matters. Basically we worship God. Muslims also worship Allah, right? Catholics also know Jesus. I am not interested in Buddhism, because they do not recognize God. Christianity is different according to different people. Other Christians also based on the Bible, but they see it from different sides. I don’t say that they are wrong. We do same in believing Jesus, but how we live our lives is very different. I want the one which really based on the Bible. And so far, for me Advent is the one. And in my view, this is the right one for me I’m quite satisfied, and I believe. (Gloria)

I also perceived myself as closer to the characteristics of evangelical Christianity in the past. However, after engaging in various cultural experiences in Australia and questioning what a good Christian is, now this is what I believe about salvation:

I acknowledge that social reality is very complex and contradictory. A single truth is not sufficient, but relativism is also not applicable. Sophisticated dynamics between those two extremes is what makes learning and research interesting. Practically, I’m okay with your own interpretations about God and I can respect that, although I have my own interpretation. Please respect mine as well. (Teguh)

I refused to join evangelical activity in my current church. I am not worrying about the salvation of my Muslim friends any more. It is because now I believe

that Jesus is not the only way to heaven. Since I believe in other truths, the role of Christianity is now different in my life.

I used to believe that Christianity should be everything in my life. But now, Christianity is just one aspect of my life, but it’s still an important one. Because there are science, humanity, rationality, common sense, philosophy, etc. Christianity plays a more significant role in the moral and spiritual side. My homework is to integrate all of them into my own way of life. Fulfilling God’s plan in my life is still the ultimate goal, but God’s plan is so complicated and mysterious. (Teguh)

By believing in some attributes of liberal Christianity, I can – to some extent – integrate Christianity and post-modernism. I still can employ a certain relativism in approaching God by acknowledging other religions as truth, without changing the whole foundation of my beliefs in a Christian God and the Bible – just shifting some of its interpretations. I still go to church every Sunday, attend prayer meetings, am involved in ministries (other than evangelical) and read the Bible every day. And I call myself “a good Christian, or at least on the right path to be a good Christian.”

Hunt (2005) describes this type of Christianity as the “pick ‘n’ mix Christianity” (p. 99). In his observation on contemporary European Christians, he argues that liberal Christians are marked by “selective adherence to Christian beliefs and ... supplemented by non-Christian ones in a kind of pick ‘n’ mix way” which results in “autonomous and diffused religiosity” (p. 100). These Christians accommodate various social issues such as poverty, unemployment, education, environment, women and gay’s rights, racism, globalization, and so forth into their Christianity in order to keep it relevant with the contemporary world (Hunt, 2005).

In this section I have demonstrated how my participants and myself adhered to certain liberal Christianity beliefs and how they perceived evangelism activities differently. However, although liberal Christians acknowledge truths in other religions, they still state that they are Christians. The next section will explain the notion of spiritual seekers – the concept which Hunt (2005) calls “mix ‘n’ match spirituality” (p. 35).

Spiritual Seeker

Different from a liberal Christian, a spiritual seeker is someone who enjoys learning and practicing various spiritual teachings in order to obtain a peaceful

life (Mathews, 2000). Spiritual seekers do not adhere to a particular religion, rather, they change their spiritual beliefs easily. These spiritual seekers usually start their journey with dissatisfaction towards their current religious life and want to taste different flavours of spirituality.

Linda presents some elements of a spiritual seeker. She says that she is a Christian, but she does not commit to any Christian churches, her daily devotion is not using the Bible any more, and her understanding about God and life is not supported by the Bible scriptures.

My sister was kind of worry when everyday we used to do journaling together, but when she was doing her journaling I swapped to reading my other books, and she was like “are you starting a new religion, have you lost faith in God ...” (Linda)

I do believe that Jesus is God, but I believe God is in everyone and everything. So, if you ask me whether God was within Buddha, I believe that too. If God was within Muhammad, yes, there was God in him. Because God is just this spirit that is in everything, even in the trees. It’s the spirit that makes the whole universe circulates and moves... most Christians think that Jesus is God, Jesus equal God. And most Muslims think Muhammad is the last prophet of God. It means God is an entity. What I was saying to you before is that I think God is fluid, God is everywhere. God is in everyone, because we are made by God, of course we have God in us. But not everyone gets into the stage of actually experiencing what a Godly life can be. Like only, you know, certain people who able to live without suffering anymore. (Linda)

Mathews (2000, p. 99) illustrates spiritual seekers as someone who changes their faith as easy as hair colouring, because they perceive spirituality as a matter of taste, not truth. I do not know whether or not Linda will change her spiritual beliefs as easy as that because she has just started her journey. And yet, she still admits that she is a Christian. However, the opportunity to be a spiritual seeker is wide open, since the book she is reading at the moment claims that it is not a new religion. It has no church – but book clubs, it is not a set of legal rules – but a set of inspirations about life. There is no long term commitment needed. The readers can switch to other books whenever they want.

In the spiritual marketplace, Hunt (2005) argues that “mix ‘n’ match spirituality” – similar to what Linda did

in some ways – is encouraged by the global flow of people and information. People can easily pick and choose until they find a religious identity best suited to their individual needs. By being this type of “Christian”, Linda integrates her engagement with various philosophies and her spiritual beliefs. She does not have to continue with religious practices vis-a-vis Western colonialism by converting people to Christianity. Conversely, she can learn about “all the other beautiful religions” and spiritualities, while still calling herself a Christian. After all the feelings of “fear, shock, overwhelming sadness, disbelieve, and denial”, she feels relieved: “It’s actually much much make more sense now ... I don’t be unhappy about anything. Just live life in alignment with my purpose.” Linda’s new way of being a “Christian” allows her to incorporate various beliefs into her faith and provides opportunity to reach a sense of peacefulness.

Concluding Remarks

This study seeks to understand the negotiation of cultural and religious identity among Indonesian Christian international students in Australia. I employ the concept of tradition from Giddens (2002) and Christian identity from Mathews (2000) to illustrate the process of negotiating religious and cultural identity among my participants and myself. I have provided the detailed explanation of my data collection process to justify the trustworthiness of this study as suggested by Feldman (2003). The findings report participants’ tensions between their Christian beliefs and new religio-cultural experiences during participants’ study in Australia, such as questions about sexuality, feminism, and various knowledges met in their university studies. Participants constructed their new ways of being a Christian by demonstrating different markers of evangelical Christianity, liberal Christianity, and spiritual seekers (Mathews, 2000).

Further Suggestions

This study adds new insights to the literatures on religious identity of international students in Australia. Further research can enlarge the body of knowledge in this area by studying the experiences of Australian international students of other religions, other countries, and other cultural backgrounds. The experiences of international students who change their religion while studying in Australia will also be interesting to be studied, both converting from one religion to another, from atheism or agnosticism to a particular religion, as

well as from a particular religion to atheism or agnosticism.

There are also several contributions and practical suggestions of this study for the wider community. For individuals who are in the process of negotiating their religious and cultural identity, I wish that some of the experiences which have been shared in this study can enrich their understanding. In my own journey, knowing that there are people who are experiencing the same problems has already been a relief – at least I am not feeling alone. For universities that wish to accommodate their international students' adaptation processes, raising the issue of religious and cultural identity negotiation during the orientation period can help students envision the new experiences and challenges they might encounter and know where to find help if they need in making sense of these experiences. This study can also be a reference for campus chaplains in counselling students in similar situations. For parents who worry about their children's religiosity while studying in Australia, this study wishes to provide insights and challenge them to consider different perspectives on religiosity and Christianity. For Indonesian Christian churches in Australia, providing an open and non-judgemental intellectual discussion on Christianity seems to be a good strategy in helping Indonesian international students along their journey of understanding God, to balance their intellectual development in their study in university.

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