

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

The author extends a special thanks to Dr. Cynthia Joseph of Monash University, Australia for supervising this study.

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