CHAPTER I

PREFACE

I.1. Background

Written across the symbol of the nation's national emblem, *"Bhinneka Tunggal Ika,"* on the *Garuda Pancasila* serves as the motto of the Republic of Indonesia (*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, 2017). The motto, which is translated and understood as "Unity in Diversity" and/or "We are of Many Kinds but We are One," can be traced back to the 14th century during the time of the Majapahit Empire. The depiction that though the archipelago consisted of many ethnic groups and various cultural differences yet could be a united nation, was first introduced by the poet, Mpu Tantular in his poem *Sutasoma* (*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, 2017).

According to the national portal of the Republic of Indonesia, the archipelago that comprises more than 17, 500 islands signifies that the culture of Indonesia varies from Sabang to Merauke, for different parts of the world influenced different parts of the archipelago. The colonization by the Europeans, along with the powerful and thriving trade routes in Sumatra allowed Islam to enter Indonesia in the 13th century brought in by India. The introduction of Buddhism and Hinduism brought in by other traders further influenced the nation's culture and way of life (Ministry of Tourism, 2017), where following the Dutch colonization in early 17th century, the Indonesians could finally declare independence in 1945, after the Japanese entered and inhabited the islands for three years from 1942 to 1945. Today, Indonesia occupies the fourth place as the

1

most populous democracy, as well as being the world's largest Muslim-population and world's largest archipelagic state. Due to Indonesia's strategic location along the ancient trading routes (Pre-Colonial History of Indonesia, n.d.), the religions and customs of the Middle East, South Asia and the Far East that were brought in by traders and merchants, influenced the nation's cultural makeup.

This richness in Indonesia's cultural diversity can be referred back to its cultural roots that had been influenced and shaped by the countries aforementioned and how they played a part in the writing of its history, where the nation's cultural diversity is further intensified with the latest statistics in 2016 indicating 43,816 foreign workers in Indonesia. These expatriates are not only exposed to the cultural diversity embraced by the various ethnicities, but they also bring with them, their own beliefs, values and ideas, which in turn influence Indonesia's current culture.

Although the diversity of Indonesia and its inhabitants can be found in a multitude of contexts and settings, one way of discovering it is in the local churches, where one can witness the *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* in its fullness and richness. The prevailing church culture portrays that in spite of the various Christian denominations, people could still come together to a place of worship regardless of their cultural backgrounds. These churches are asserting and embracing the unity in diversity, where as Indonesia was faced with some turbulence in early 2017, churches have begun to invite their congregants to be reminded of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* and how each of them plays a role among the people (Lia, 2017). Local churches are inviting their congregations to take part in

tangible actions, as they build interfaith brother- or sisterhood, to accept and appreciate the fact that Indonesia is built on numerous cultural varieties, religions and tribes, that are ought to be preserved (Lia, 2017).

At its core, culture can be understood as an accumulated pattern of values, beliefs, and behaviors that are shared by an identifiable group of people with a common history, verbal and nonverbal symbol systems (Neuliep, 2015). Therefore, one's assumptions based on one culture are not the assumptions of others from another culture, given that they all have different ideas about what is accepted and familiar (Riccardi, 2014). This is due to the fact that culture comprises webs of shared meanings and values, which are shared among those coming from one culture (Geertz, 2010). Hence, being a part of a diverse cultural community often leads to culture wars or cultural struggles over meaning, identity and influence (Murdock, 1989).

However, a community's composition of diverse cultural backgrounds and ethnicity indicates the eventual disintegration of the distinction or barriers that are in a way separating two cultures. A key distinction of culture is that it arguably always involves individuals as a collective, where as a group of people they are seeking to shape or create something together. An example of where this concept can be captured is in the church, where through the religious community, its own church culture is formed through the people, their rituals, and events. A church's culture varies from one church to another, for it is resulted from the composition of its members, the values, beliefs and behaviors that are upheld by the lead pastors, and the extent of partnership and involvement of the congregants. Due to

their various cultural backgrounds, pastors, congregants, employees and even visitors bring their own distinct identities, values, beliefs and norms that could be interpreted differently by those of different cultures. The interactions among individuals may then serve as the determinant to the forming and adopting of an identity that can be shaped, understood, and embraced collectively by the community.

Touching on the history of the Church, the early Christians' fellowship conducted in homes gave the Christian community a family character, for "homes of its members provided the most conducive atmosphere in which they could give expression to the bond they had in common," (Banks, 1994) which signifies that the meeting of Christians at a place of worship develops a sense of community. The researcher is a member and active volunteer of "The Collective Church" that is located in Pondok Indah, South Jakarta, the non-denominational church that is often referred as "TC," is a local English-speaking church that is led by American-Venezuelan couple who serve as the lead pastors and whom have lived in Indonesia for 17 years and counting. The staff members of the church consist of mostly Americans and Indonesians, while the overall members of the congregation come from different parts of the world, including Canada, the Philippines, Switzerland and many more. This diverse cultural composition of the church is expected to influence the congregation's identity, as they participate in the religious services conducted every Sunday, other events, and/or the weekly devotional session. It then raises the question how a church consisting of a culturally diverse body of members, people with different characteristics, can

share common values, common fantasies, that in turn lead to a symbolic convergence at a religious setting.

I.2. Problem Identification

The significance of unveiling the discovery of identity in a religious community rests on the variety of culturally different individuals, which says something about they way these individuals behave and interact. The prevalent issue about collective identity in such community is that radical social activists, notably the radical Muslims in Indonesia, form a collective identity of one's internal identity out of their extreme undertakings (Hiariej, 2010). Although the birth of Islamic radicalism could be traced back all the way to the year 2000 across Southeast Asia, the most prominent ones in Indonesia are Front Pembela Islam (FPI), Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI), and Jamaah Islamiyah (JI), with the latter engaging in acts of terror, which caused a large number of casualties (Hiariej, p. 132). This concept of collective identity, then sits on one end of the negative extreme, arguing that religion was the determining role behind the adopted collective identity of the radical social movement. The focus of Hiariej's writing is on how social action movement is no longer understood as a means to an end, rather it is the end goal of the process of forming a collectivity out of a movement (Hiariej, p. 134). Moreover, his research underscores that the way collective action is understood has ignored the importance of cultural aspects that is present in social movements.

Other than due to the radicalism of a religion, the concept of collective identity in Indonesia also refers to the strengthening of political bonds and/or

relationships between nations, as mentioned in the following researches. ASEAN conveys collective identity as a problem among the ASEAN community, implying that there is a collective identity dilemma due to the absence of collective identity within ASEAN (Umar, 2014). This is due to the nature of existing political powers, the intricate and rambling internal debates, as well as the norms that are essentially driven from external influences (Umar, p. 2). Umar argued that social integration between the ASEAN nations must be considered as an alternative to tackle this collective identity dilemma, in order to form a collective identity that extends beyond regional, state, and community relationships, but it also touches on the national and subnational levels (Umar, p. 3). Moreover, Rosyidin (2015) also posited that the absence of collective identity among the ASEAN members leads to the lack of commitment in the institution that the nations have built themselves. His argument underscores the power of collective identity in creating solidarity among nations, where these international actors would act based on the shared perception and understanding of what is important, which ultimately leads to a collective action (Rosyidin, p. 11). He argued that the formation of a collective identity among the ASEAN countries is a crucial preliminary step before each country could play its part within the organization (Rosyidin, p. 12). The constructivist approach of collective identity is seen as building the "foundation of cooperation" that would endure long term.

Drawing from the findings of Fadhal and Nurhajati (2012), they focused on the contribution of digital media in the formation of both personal and collective identity, where a collective experience with mass media, in particularly

film and video, could lead to the formation of a cohesive group of individuals with a common goal. Moreover, they argued the idea of a collective identity refers to an individual's self-identity in a group or community that accommodate their interests, such as a virtual community on the Internet (Fadhal and Nurhajati, 2012, p. 188).

In regards to this research, community consciousness can be depicted through the symbolic convergence that happens at "The Collective Church" through Bormann's Fantasy Theme Analysis that seeks to "provide insight into the shared worldview of groups," (Foss, 2009, p. 97). The fantasy themes that would be found at "The Collective," which can come in the form of words, phrases, statements or paragraphs, serve as storytellers about how a group's experience is shaped and realized into social reality within the group (Takuya, 2012, p. 37).

As individuals assign meaning to the stimuli resulted from interactions, their reactions to the meaning they give to the stimuli inspires the researcher to discover how interactions at a church with multicultural aspects are carried out, which reflect the church members' perception, interpretation and dramatization that chain out from the culture, which would result in symbolic convergence. Drawing from the researches aforementioned, researcher seeks to discover how individuals of various cultural backgrounds, yet are a member of one religious body, can share a fantasy that would lead to an enhanced group consciousness, which in this case would depict as symbolic convergence in a religious institution in Indonesia.

Hiariej's research (2010) focuses on the extreme end of religious collective identity that evolves in radical social movements, where the problems given above accentuate religion as the focal point of research. However, the researcher seeks to discover the symbolic convergence that happens in a culturally diverse religious setting, including how the fantasy themes that chain out from the leadership team are perceived, received, and interpreted by the rhetorical community of the congregation. This is due to previous researches concentrating on the construction of collective identity and its power for social movements, such that Umar (2014) and Rosyidin (2015) highlighted the importance of the collective identity concept in preserving and strengthening the bond between nations, particularly the ASEAN nations. Moreover, the idea of collective identity in Fadhal and Nurhajati's findings (2012) refers to its formation in the digital world, with virtual community found on the Internet.

As mentioned above, findings from previous researches have not been able to answer how the members of a church so diverse in culture can experience an "exhilarating meeting of minds" through mutual understanding of common social reality, which is what researcher seeks to investigate. Moreover, the novelty of this research topic and question, along with the employment of Symbolic Convergence Theory that serve as a significant tool in conducting this research were not found in previous researches, underscoring the little research that has been done on symbolic convergence, especially specified to a multicultural church community. Researcher is intrigued to discover and find out how two private symbolic worlds of the culturally diverse individuals at "The Collective Church,"

which may include the congregation, the staff members, the lead pastors and visitors, come closely together to create a group consciousness.

I.3. Statement of Problem

How do fantasy themes at "The Collective Church" create symbolic convergence between members in a religious institution?

I.4. Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to observe and describe how fantasy themes found at "The Collective Church" create symbolic convergence between members in a religious institution.

I.5. Significance of the Study

This investigation into the creation of symbolic convergence in a religious institution is meant to fulfill several purposes:

I.5.1. Academic

A. To adapt the findings regarding symbolic convergence to a religious institution in Indonesia.

B. To contribute to the findings about the symbolic convergence phenomenon, particularly in regards to culture in a church setting.

C. To give augmentation to the research on symbolic convergence by providing new findings and perspectives regarding fantasy chain and fantasy themes.

I.5.2. Social

A. To gain an increased sense of awareness about the deliberate methods and/or processes applied by the members of "The Collective" to foster mutual understanding and healthy relationships amidst cultural differences.

B. To contribute to potential practical improvement at "The Collective," such as fostering cohesion and healthy communication among the congregation.

I.6. Organization of the Study

This research paper will comprise six chapters, where the first chapter entails the introduction of the overall research, including what the researcher seeks to discover and how they will come about in answering the research question. Chapter Two indicates the object of the research and what the researcher will be observing or analyzing in hope of answering the research question, where Chapter Three entails the literature review, where researcher refers back to previous findings about the topic to underscore the novelty of this research and how previous findings will support or assist in the findings. Chapter Four includes the research methodology and what method will be applied in conducting the research and deciphering the findings. Chapter Five will talk about the result of the findings along with its elaboration and discussion, while Chapter Six will close the research paper through its conclusion and suggestions for future studies.