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FOSTERING TOLERANCE AMONG INDONESIAN YOUTH: A MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Several studies have found that Indonesian youths (17-24 years old) are vulnerable to religious radicalism. As a result, fostering tolerance among them has been critical. This article describes how Indonesian youths understand religious tolerance and then offers suggestions to foster the attitude of tolerance among Indonesian youth through Muslim-Christian dialogs. For that purpose, a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was held with ten Indonesian youths (five Muslims and five Christians), which discussed open questions about the issue of tolerance. The discussion's outcomes were examined using a theoretical framework of religious tolerance and inter-religious dialogue. So practical suggestions are obtained for fostering tolerance among Indonesian youth. Such as theological understanding that leads to tolerance and pluralism.

Abstrak

Beberapa penelitian menemukan bahwa pemuda Indonesia (17-24 tahun) rentan terpapar radikalisme agama. Akibatnya, Menumbuhkan sikap toleransi beragama di antara mereka menjadi sangat penting. Artikel ini akan memaparkan tentang bagaimana pemuda Indonesia memahami toleransi beragama dan kemudian menawarkan saran efektif untuk menumbuhkan sikap toleransi melalui dialog Muslim-Kristen. Dengan diadakan Focus Group

Discussion (FGD) dengan sepuluh pemuda Indonesia (lima Muslim dan lima Kristen), yang membahas pertanyaan terbuka tentang masalah toleransi. Hasil diskusi ditelaah dengan menggunakan kerangka teori toleransi beragama dan dialog antar umat beragama. Sehingga diperoleh saran-saran praktis untuk menumbuhkan toleransi di kalangan pemuda Indonesia. Seperti pemahaman teologis yang mengarah pada toleransi dan pluralisme.

Keywords: *Religious tolerance; Interreligious Dialogue; Islam-Kristen; and Indonesian Youth*

A. Introduction

Youth is the spearhead of the nation's hope. Youth has always been synonymous with an agent of change, social control, and iron stock. The birth of Budi Utomo in 1908, Trikoro Dharmo in 1915, and the Youth Pledge of 1928 became clear evidence of the critical role of youth for the existence of the nation-state. Bung Karno once described the importance of the part of young people through the statement, "Give me 1,000 parents, I will surely uproot Semeru from the roots; give me ten young men, I will surely shake the world." If in the pre-and early-independence phases of the Indonesian nation, the critical role of young people for the existence of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) was evident as described above, then from the reformation period up to the present, the youth's gait was has shown the opposite.

The trend of disbelief, easy blaming, and misleading of other groups who are different from themselves and their groups, attitudes, and actions that tend to be exclusive, intolerant, radical, and extremist has the potential to divide the integrity of the Indonesian nation even more prominent among young people; especially with the increasing cases of religious intolerance in Indonesia. Throughout 2017-2018, there was a slightly increasing number of religious intolerance. The Setara Institute recorded 155 to 160 violations of Freedom of Religion/Belief (FoRB) (Rachman, 2019). In 2020, 180 violations occurred. Compared to the previous year, the number of incidents decreased slightly, wherein in 2019, there were 200 FoRB violations. Several religious minority groups have become objects of violation of their constitutional rights, namely Christians, Shiites, Ahmadiyya Congregation, Religious Sects, Catholics, Confucians,

Buddhists, and Hindus (Sigit, 2021). These religious minority groups have patterned experienced several acts of violation, the dominant ones include intolerance, misdirection, raids, discrimination, intimidation, sealing of houses of worship, disbanding of religious activities, freezing, assault, provocation, hate speech, prohibition of worship, and neglect. Compared to last year's data, there is a significant decrease in the number of events and actions (Naafs & White, 2012: 4).

Several studies show that a significant percentage of Indonesian youth tend to be intolerant. The Center for Islamic and Community Studies (PPIM) of Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University showed that 43.88% of 1,859 high school students supported religious intolerance and 6.56% of students tended to support radicalism (Medhy Aginta Hidayat, 2020). That number is similar to the research done by Wahid Institute, that 46% of high school students in Indonesia supported intolerance (*Laporan Kemerdekaan Beragama/Berkeyakinan di Indonesia*, 2017). According to Hidayat et al.:

Attitudes and actions that lead to indications of religious intolerance among students in Indonesia are often preceded by hatred and rejection of “those who are different,” such as feeling uncomfortable making friends with friends with different religions, refusing to wish happy holidays to adherents of other religions, supporting the prohibition of building places of worship of religious minorities in the religious majority neighborhood, referring followers of other religions or minorities as “infidels,” and repudiation of student council chairperson who is a religious minority (Medhy Aginta Hidayat, 2020: 2216-2217).

While it is important to note the difference between “in-thought” intolerance and “in-thought-and-in-action intolerance,” the two are inseparable. The first could lead to acts of intolerance, as many studies have shown that intolerance is the seed of radicalism. The Indonesian State Intelligence Agency (BIN) stated that youngsters from 17-24 years old are prone to be influenced by radical ideologies (Saputra, 2021). A person can think radically, meaning to think deeply to the roots. However, the result of this thought will be dangerous if it becomes *isme*, a *mahzab* or ideology because it can lead

someone to be strict in imposing the results of their views on other people or groups (Mulyadi & Novidasari, 2017). Extreme examples for that include joined ISIS and other terrorist network, suicide bombings, and many other violent actions, but the seed of those kind of extremism is the attitude of intolerance. Radicalism in its nature is ignorance of diversity and rejection of plurality (Lorantina et al., 2017: 280).

Therefore, this study is needed to show how Indonesian youth perceives religious tolerance, particularly in the realms of mainstream religions like Islam and Christianity. The beginning of the Muslim-Christian encounter is always associated with the arrival of European nations (such as the Portuguese, Spanish, and Dutch) to Indonesia (Shihab, 1998); (Aritonang, 2001). This is reinforced by Karel Steenbrink in *Dutch Colonialism and Indonesian Islam* when discussing “The Age of Mission (1850 – 1940) and The Muslims” and “Indonesian Reactions to The Christians Arrival” (Steenbrink, 2006). Even Fatimah Husein also points out that the Muslim-Christian relationship began in the Classical Islamic era, as represented by Ibn Taymiya (d. 1328) and Ibn Hazm (d. 1064), and in the 20th century in the context of international interfaith dialogue discourse (Husein, 2005).

Throughout history, Christian-Islamic encounters in Indonesia have incised the dynamics of fluctuating relations. There are times when encounters occur in harmony, but it is undeniable that sometimes they occur violently and tragically (disharmonious). For example, after the G30S incident, religious conversion took place on a large scale. At that time, in a short time, millions of people were baptized into Christianity, so prejudice arose among Muslims about the existence of "Christianization" in this country (Hartono & Suyanto, 2016: 9). The dark record of the encounter between Christian-Muslims from Christian perceptions can be seen in Aritonang's writing, he shows the discourse of the Jakarta Charter as a pillar of the Indonesian state. There are also initiatives to reaffirm Islamic law and the emergence of global Islamic terrorism. These tensions had several effects, such as the burning of churches in Makassar in 1967, Sidotopo (Surabaya), Tasikmalaya, and Situbondo in 1996, Rengasdengklok and Banjarmasin in 1997, and as well as rioting in various Indonesian towns in May 1998 (Aritonang, 2001:

463-478). Furthermore, the Ambon-Maluku conflicts in 1999-2002 and Poso in 1998-2002, were tragic setbacks in Christian-Muslim ties (Effendi, 2010: 46) This confirms the endless "*konflik bebuyutan*" between the two Abrahamic religions (Islam and Christianity). Although the political, social, and economic dimensions undeniably overlap and play a part in the events described above.

It can be argued that religion has a "dark side" or "negative dimension" that can inspire crime and violence. On the other hand, religion also has good and positive aspects that can be used as a "common ground" and "theological foundation" to build healthier, dynamic, quality, and human inter-religious relations full of the spirit of tolerance and pluralism. Richard Solomon, president of the United States Institute of Peace, said, "While religion can and does contribute to violent conflict, it can also be a powerful factor in the struggle for peace and reconciliation" (David, 2002). Solomon's statement is intended to emphasize the nature of religion's "ambiguity," or what historian Scott Appleby refers to as "the ambivalence of the sacred," namely, that one side of religion can be used as a source of violence, war, riots, hatred, hostility, and so on, while the other side can be used to mobilize peace, love, harmony, and humanitarian actions, as practiced by the Taize community, Mopuya, Quakers, Mennonites, Muslim Peacemakers, and so on (Appleby, 2000).

Peacebuilding was defined in 1992 by former United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali as 'action to identify and support structures that will tend to strengthen and solidify peace to avoid a relapse into conflict.' The term emerged in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War when hopes were high that the new multilateral interventionist approach of the international community could better support countries emerging out of conflict. Barnett argues that peacebuilding is generally understood as external interventions intended to reduce the risk that a state will erupt or return to war. Peacebuilding is not only a post-conflict mediation, reconstruction, and rebuilding of society but also works to prevent future conflicts (Merdjanova, 2016).

In many ways, inter-religious relations in Indonesia and elsewhere are still at the level of tolerance, not yet reaching the stage of pluralism. As a result, as a bridge or road to a pluralist religious

community, a constructive and ongoing religious conversation is required. It can be said that if there is no peace between religions, there will be no peace between nations or within nations (Chaudhari, 2016). In line with that, Hans Kung in one of his works entitled "Is Dialogue Impossible," Hans Kung offers three hypotheses about the role of religion for the future of the world. First, there can be no survival without a world ethic. Second, there is no world peace without religious peace, and third, there is no religious peace without religious dialogue (Kung, 1991). This article will discuss how interreligious dialogue, particularly Muslim-Christian, can help to foster tolerance among Indonesian young. Because all responders emphasized the importance of interreligious dialogue. In addition, practical suggestions from young people were also presented to foster religious tolerance.

B. Research Methods

This research uses a qualitative approach to examine how to build tolerance among Indonesian youth: a Muslim-Christian perspective. Sources of data obtained by a focus group discussion (FGD) was held with ten (10) Indonesian youths (five Muslims and five Christians) aged 17-24 years old to discuss open-ended questions about tolerance. The discussion results were analyzed through the theoretical framework of religious tolerance and existing inter-religious dialogue. In addition, from various sources, such as newspapers, articles, books, previous research, and other sources related to the main research problem, to produce comprehensive data. Then practical suggestions were offered on how to foster tolerance among Indonesian youth.

C. What is Religious Tolerance?

Geir Afdal, in "The Maze of Tolerance," examines the notion of tolerance from numerous perspectives, especially its implications for interfaith education. He argues that tolerance is a concept that seems good and easy to agree on by all parties, but in reality, it is something that is confusing and can even trap. It means that while we may very well agree on the importance and value of tolerance

when we try to explicate and operationalize it, we disagree on the meaning and consequences (Afdal, 2010).

Religious tolerance is based on religion and *Kepercayaan*. In Islam, for example, tolerance is affirmed in the Qur'an and Hadith, including in fiqh books, interpretations, and evidence of Islamic history. In the Qur'an, contained in the QS. Al-Baqarah: 256 (no compulsion in religion); Yunus: 99 (prohibition of forcing followers of other religions to embrace Islam); Ali Imran: 64 (an appeal to the people of the book to find common ground and reach "*sawa* sentence"); al-Mumtahanah: 8-9 (recommendations to do good, act justly, and help non-Muslims who are not hostile to them and expel them). In the fiqh tradition, this principle is contained in the concept of "*maqashid al-syariah*": freedom to live (*hifz al-nafs*); freedom of opinion (*hifz al-'aql*); maintain survival (*hifz al-nasl*); freedom to own property (*hifz al-mal*); freedom of religion (*hifz al-din*). In Catholicism and Protestantism, tolerance is found in the Book of Galatians: Love your neighbor as you love yourself, the Gospel of Matthew 22:37-40 (Law of Love), and Adventists – Matthew 7:12-Advent.

Similarly, Hindus in *Tri Hita Karana* (*Parahyangan, Pawongan, Pelemahan*), *Tat Twam Asi* (I am You, You are me); Buddha in the *Falisuta* and *Kalamasuta* books (don't criticize other religions because criticizing other religions means you have denounced or buried their religion); Confucianism in the teachings of "in the four corners of the sea, all humans are siblings." Meanwhile, in beliefs and indigenous peoples, for example, the teachings of *Ura' ngi Rua, Kaluppai Rua* (remember evil to others and remember people's kindness to you and forget your kindness to others and forget people's evil to you), and Bugis-Makassar philosophy or "*to kamase-kamase*" (Mulia, 2011: 344-345). This is implemented in *slametan* which shows how the symbol of harmony and tolerance is built-in in Javanese society (Abdullah et al., 2018: 3).

The essence of tolerance is essentially an effort to be good, especially in religious pluralism, which has a noble goal: the achieve of harmony, both internally and between religions. Acknowledging the existence of religion does not mean accepting the truth of the teachings of that religion. MA defines religious tolerance as the ability to criticize oneself instead of continuously criticizing adherents of other religions. Religious tolerance is manifested through expressions

of mutual respect and respect for differences.¹ When interacting with followers of other religions, we do not indoctrinate each other; instead, we try to make friends with them, how we can benefit the environment and how to knit harmony in differences.² It means tolerating something by not prohibiting it or demanding it, even though someone has the authority to do so (Ricoeur, 1991). For example, Christians try not to eat or drink during the month of fasting, and Muslims try to help Christians perform Christmas worship in various ways. Then, on the night of *takbiran*, I received Eid greetings from Catholic and Christian friends.³ Religious tolerance does not mean he agrees with Islam or vice versa, but he has a peaceful relationship between religious believers in carrying out aspects of life (Digdoyo, 2005: 78).

Harun Nasution, in the book "Islam Rasional Gagasan dan Pemikiran" states that religious tolerance will be realized if it includes the following five things: (1) Attempting to see the truth outside of other religions. (2) Minimize the differences that exist between religions. (3) Highlight the similarities that exist in religions. (4) To promote a sense of religious fraternity. (5) Stay away from the practice of attacking religions (Nasution, 2000: 275).

However, CR found that Indonesian youths are generally intolerant, clearly shown through their hate comments towards other religions on social media. The participant also experienced how his religious identity was being questioned while doing a live stream with non-religious content. He saw that action as the tendency of the young Indonesian generation to emphasize boundaries between different religions, even amid non-religious occasions. Some of his Muslim friends even came from fanatical Islamic families that saw Christians as religiously unclean (in Bahasa: "*najis*").⁴ On the other side, K claims that many young Indonesians are tolerant but that this tolerance does not appear on the surface, such as: not using social media.⁵ It can be said "the silent majority." MA also argues that although many Indonesian millennials are exposed to radicalism

¹ FGD with MA, male, 21, Christian.

² FGD with RJ, female, 23, Islam.

³ FGD with AR, male, 24, Islam.

⁴ FGD with CR, male, 24, Christian.

⁵ FGD with K, male, 24, Islam.

when they are young, many change their views when they grow up. Often, hate towards Christians or Muslims is not based on experience but a wrong perception of one another. He believed that there are still plenty of chances for young people to change their views into a more tolerant position.⁶

D. Indonesian Youth and Interreligious Dialogue

In 1967, a Muslim-Christian dialogue emerged in Indonesia to prevent the negative influence of Western missionary activities on the Muslim community. According to Goddard, more dialogue initiatives come from Christian circles. However, this does not mean that Islam was never involved at all, as was done by the King of Morocco, Hasan II (1962-1999) in 1985 (Goddard, 2013). Then, on 13 October 2007, 138 Muslim intellectuals and members of the Muslim clergy, among them various *muftis* (deliverers of formal legal opinion) of various countries, signed a historic joint statement about the relations between Islam and Christianity. The document is called *A Common Word Between Us and You* or known by the acronym ACW. The document quotes some argumentative statements from the Qur'an and the Bible, as well as al-Hadith. The reason is that world peace and justice depend on good relations between Islam and Christianity because there are significant numbers in the world. The basic foundation for togetherness are *love of God* and *love of the neighbor*. Both Muslims and Christians support and appreciate these historical statements and documents with enthusiasm in maintaining peace and harmony (Abdullah, 2016: 142).

MA told about his experience in dialogue with Muslims led him to know the common or shared stories between the Bible and the Quran and how he recognized Jesus Christ in the Quranic story. Although there are differences, those shared or common stories could serve as a starting point of dialogue. However, he stressed that to create interreligious friendships with Muslims, Christians should be in a dialogue, not a debate. He had a significant experience of dialogue with a Muslim who was considerably older than him. That

⁶ FGD with MA, male, 21, Christian.

occasion shows how intergenerational and interreligious dialogue could also be a way to foster tolerance.⁷

Interreligious dialogue has various levels (top, middle, and grassroots) and dimensions (intrareligious, interreligious, and interworldview dialogue). In addition, it can be oriented toward a particular group, defined in terms of age (for example youth dialogue), gender (for example dialogue between women), or occupation (for example dialogue between theologians/ monastics/ clergymen/ laypeople/ scholars of religion). These diverse forms complement and reinforce each other, and often overlap in various ways (Merdjanova, 2016). In (Kadayifci-Orellana, 2013); (Abu-Nimer, 2013); (Sinaga et al., 2020); (Merdjanova, 2016); (Chaudhari, 2016); (Orton, 2016); (Kronish, n.d.); (Madjid, 1998); (Kung, 1991); (Wahyuni, 2019); (Masamah, n.d.); (Berg, 2016); (Abu-Nimer, n.d.); (Swidler, n.d.); (DeMott, 2015) it is said that interfaith dialogue as an essential complementary tool of long-term peacebuilding in any ethno-religious conflict. All respondents also expressed the same thing that interreligious dialogue is critical. Compared to Google searches the sources are sometimes inaccurate.⁸

To realize the idealism of religious dialogue is not easy, especially Muslim-Christians in Indonesia. CR said he experienced systemic intolerance carried out by the public school system from elementary to junior high. While he was a Christian, he had no option but to attend Islamic religious education for many years and to have an exam on it instead of on Christian religion. Although his mother was a school teacher at the elementary school that he attended yet, she had no power to prevent that systemic educational intolerance at that time. The educational system that he experienced instilled in the students the seed of discrimination and domination of the majority instead of tolerance and dialogue with people of other religions.⁹ Paulo Freire stated that the liberation of humans from everything that oppresses them begins with dialogue. Without dialogue, there is no communication; if there is no communication, there is no education, no education, no liberation (Freire, 1970: 66).

⁷ FGD with MA, male, 21, Christian.

⁸ FGD with SR, female, 21, Islam; RJ, female, 23, Islam.

⁹ FGD with CR, male, 24, Christian.

It is critical to underline that inter-religious dialogue is not an alternative to other conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts, such as official negotiations, mediation with the involvement of third parties, or secular conflict resolution tools such as problem-solving workshops. While the interreligious dialogue is only one of many resources for conflict resolution, it is a very important one (Kadayifci-Orellana, 2013). As Marc Gopin, a Jewish peace scholar and practitioner points out, dialogue is only one phase in the peacemaking process and cannot be thought of as the answer to the entire conflict itself (Coward & Smith, 2004: 111-128). Interreligious dialogue as a medium for building creation which Diana Eck calls "one world," namely a perception that all God's creatures, including humans, regardless of their ethnic or religious background, have the same right to life. The concept of "one world," said Eck, can only be realized if it is based on the "stockpiling of trust through dialogue and the creation of relationships that can sustain both agreements and disagreements" (Qurtuby, 2011).

Realizing the ideals of "inter-faith dialogue" and "religious pluralism" as described above requires extra hard work. Moreover, in many respects inter-religious relations in Indonesia are still at the level of tolerance, not pluralism, the debate is not dialogue, or "formal dialogue," not "substantial dialogue." In many cases, religious leaders only want to talk but are less willing to listen. In fact, religious dialogue can only function appropriately if each party is willing to listen. Not everyone can do this. Moreover, listening to "outsiders" who are fundamentally different in religion, tradition, culture, belief, or school of thought (Qurtuby, 2011).

E. Practical Suggestions to Foster Tolerance

In the 21st century, dialogue between Muslims and Christians is carried out in an atmosphere of the progress of the times and the interaction of a changing world. Along with the currents of globalization, the increasing Muslim population in some Western countries, and the emergence of several acts of religious violence in various parts of the world, it is necessary to create a new critical academic response to renew the relationship between adherents of

global religions, particularly the relationship between Muslims and Christians.

According to MA, theological understanding is the most critical factor in fostering tolerance between Muslims and Christians. He found that the radical Islamic doctrine that Christians are religiously unclean (*najis*) as the primary cause that hinders interreligious friendship and dialogue.¹⁰ Goddard says these are called "double standards." This means that there is a standard that raises the issue of truth claims: "Our religion is the truest because it comes from God, whereas other religions are only human constructs. Other religions may have come from God, but they have been tainted by humans." Throughout history, this double standard has been utilized to assess the doctrinal validity of other religions compared to their own. We witness the emergence of theological prejudices that further cloud the atmosphere of inter-religious relations through this double standard (Goddard, 2000). The dialogue will fail if it constantly promotes double standards. Any dialogue process presupposes an equal relationship where both communities can tolerate each other within agreed-upon parameters (Shihab, 1999).

Furthermore, CR also suggested to foster tolerance, especially in Islamic-Christian relations, people should return to their religion's teachings on living a good life. He believed that there is always a concept of goodness and harmony in every religion that would allow harmony among interreligious communities.¹¹ So that they can discuss and overcome poverty, injustice, ignorance, the environment, climate change, gender inequality, drug misuse, religious violence, scientific developments, and the current state of education around the globe (Banawiratma & Bagir, 2010).

F. Conclusion

Muslim-Christian dialogue has become an important dimension in the relationship between the two religions, especially among Indonesian youth spearheading the nation's hopes. Both Muslims and Christians have an intellectual and moral obligation to

¹⁰ FGD with MA, male, 21, Christian.

¹¹ FGD with CR, male, 24, Christian.

uphold the views of their respective religions. Involving themselves with the beliefs of others means understanding and learning them. Especially those that lead to kindness and harmony. This allows the creation of tolerance among interfaith communities. Religious tolerance means allowing other people to be themselves, respecting others, and respecting their origins and backgrounds. Tolerance invites dialogue to communicate mutual recognition. That way, there is no need to worry about intolerance issues because every individual has a strong foundation.

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FGD with H, male, 19, Islam.

FGD with AR, male, 24, Islam.

FGD with K, male, 24, Islam.

FGD with SR, female, 21, Islam.

FGD with RJ, female, 23, Islam.

FGD with GH, male, 21, Christian.

FGD with PW, male, 23, Christian.

FGD with SA, male, 22, Christian.

