

Religion Conflicts in Indonesia Problems and Solutions

Sintha Wahjusaputri^a

Abstract

Religious perspectives which place religion as a source of conflict have initiated various attempts to reinterpret and accordingly find some common ground at a certain level which hopefully may reduce conflicts among religious communities due to the existence of mutual tolerance. At the exoteric level, religions are different, but at the esoteric level, religions are not similar. All religions are viewed as equally valid paths toward God. However, in many ways, the reality shows that the tension among religious communities is closely related to the factors that are beyond the scope of religion. It is important for all religious believers to keep the peace among them. As far as the record of religious conflicts in Indonesia is concerned, it shows three major patterns: conflicts among adherents of different religions, conflicts between one religion with a group accused as heretical, and internal conflicts of the same people of faith with those who have different understanding of the religion. In any point of views, however, such conditions would be so detrimental to the human race in general, and society and the state of Indonesia in particular. This paper examines intensively about the issues and attempts to uncover the nature of the root-causes underlying them.

Keywords

Religious conflict, problems, solutions to problems

Indonesia has a very pluralistic society in which people from various backgrounds of tribes, races, and religions live together. In terms of religion, there exist the great world religions, namely Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. According to the 2010 census, the percentage of the adherents of the religions is as follows: Islam (88%), Protestantism (6%), Catholicism (3%), Hinduism (2%), Buddhism (1%), and Konghucu (.05%).

Based on the figures above, this multiracial, multicultural, multi-religion, and multi-language country demands badly tolerance in religion. A positive vision concerning the diversity becomes a necessity. Diversity in religion may not hamper the social relationship. However, religion is an instrument for integration in certain community, whereas for

others, it becomes a factor of disintegration taking place among the different adherents. Religion has become such a sensitive issue for some communities in Indonesia, by which some social or political conflicts which in nature are not religions issue have been drawn into one to gain support from its adherents. Religions in this case, are of very strong allure and easily provoking to cause tensions among religious

^aMuhammadiyah Prof. Dr. Hamka University (UHAMKA), Indonesia

Correspondent Author:

Sintha Wahjusaputri, the University of Muhammadiyah Prof. Dr. Hamka, Warung Buncit Street 17, South Jakarta 12790, Indonesia
E-mail: sinthaw@dnet.net.id; sinthaw@yahoo.com

societies. The tensions are caused by the following situations: (1) Religious people tend to “monopolize” the truth of their religion and consider the others false. This perception may trigger the holy war which is waged as an arena to defend the faith; and (2) The followers behave conservatively based on the thought that the truth is only in them (dogmatic) and this has led to neither critical dialogue nor tolerance to other religions.

Based on this issue, the two packages often become the main and permanent problems in the form of harassment/misappropriation regarding religion and worship house. These two problems become the main issues in the recent years in Indonesia which, so often, turn out to be violence that cannot be overcome properly. The two religious perspectives implied that there exists a religious community who rules out others. Relating a religion to any potential trigger of violent is not easy. A religion is regarded as a faith which is always associated with values, peace, and safety. In contrast, violence may cause damage, destruction, or even death. The peaceful portrait of a religion cannot be attached to the harsh face of violence. Some facts prove that religions may cause violence. The adherents use the religion doctrine, main drive, premium mobile to commit violence.

Violence in the name of religion is often interpreted by some as a legal doctrine that is mandatory to be implemented. Violence in the name of religion can be translated as violence which involves a religion as a premium variant. Violence entails power and pressure regarding religious issues on Indonesian people. Thus, the social and political conflicts which were not concerned about religion were often drawn into religious territory to gain more support from its adherents.

From any angle of perspectives, such a condition would be very detrimental to mankind in general, and the community as well as the state of Indonesia in particular. In fact, Indonesia with a variety of characters was once known as a model of a tolerant

country where people of different religious backgrounds could live together in harmony. However, the emergence of a number of conflicts between religious groups during the recent decades has made Indonesia be better known for its history of conflicts.

Based on the religious conflicts that occur in Indonesia, the affecting factors have been identified as follow: (1) society relationships to the government; (2) dissemination of religious teachings supported by militant action; (3) the crisis of authority in certain groups and among social groups within the community; (4) the phenomenon of the relationship between races and religions (Chinese Christian and the relevant fundamentalist); and (5) strategy to mislead multi-culturalism. These situations might create a rift between religious communities. Based on such point of view, the urgent need to be considered by Indonesians is the redefinition of religious attitude which is good and right in the middle of a pluralistic society. This is an important agenda to discuss, so that the plurality of religious communities does not cause tension, conflict, and rifts among religious adherents. Among the methods that must be developed in order to foster harmony in the community of multi-religion such as Indonesia is the development of attitude of tolerance among religions.

The author argues that the religious conflicts need to be differentiated based on the type of religious issues as the source of contention. Therefore, in this paper, “religious conflict” or “conflict with the nuance of religion” is defined as “a conflict which involves values, claims, and identity regarding religious issues or issues which are framed in a slogan or religious expression”.

RELIGION, CONFLICTS, AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION

The classic definition of conflict proposed by Louis Coser is: “a struggle over values and claims to secure status, power, and resources, a struggle in which the

main aims of opponents are to neutralize, injure, or eliminate rivals”.

This definition reveals one among several weaknesses in various explanations of conflict, including ethnic-religious conflicts. Jacques Bertrand said, “In general, theories of ethnic conflict have been poor at differentiating between forms of conflict and better at developing theoretical propositions about the causes of all forms of ethnic conflict”. In a more general context, Bertrand’s statement may be understood as an indication that a lot of explanations of conflict, including ethnic conflict-religious do not pay much attention to the variations or peculiarities forms of conflict. Indeed, religious conflicts emerge in certain time and location, whereas other types occur in different occasion.

The worst impact of such conflicts is the loss of the inter-religious tolerance. It should be realized that at the level of exoteric, religions (sharia) are indeed different, yet at the esoteric level (culture), they are all the same. All religions are ultimately viewed as the equally legitimate paths toward the one and only God. Effendy (2001: 24) said, the reality shows that tensions between religious communities in fact are closely related to factors that are beyond the scope of the religion itself. Due to the sensitive nature of religion, then everyone is leaning in the name of religion. This situation is a very complicated problem which is faced by a community of various religions.

SEVERAL CASES OF RELIGIOUS CONFLICT IN INDONESIA

Since the downfall of Soeharto, followed by the emerging of Reformation Governance of Habibie, Abdurrahman Wahid, physical violence and mass murder of several formats had been already underway in certain parts of the provinces in Indonesia. According to Thontowi (2003: 48), the local confrontation and conflict, both involving ethnics and religions which trigger social disharmony are alarming.

Among the major cases that surfaced during the recent years are Sunni in East Java, the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), and the Case of Tolikara in Papua.

The Conflict Between Sunni and Shia in East Java

East Java, in which the majority of Moslems adhere to the tradition of NU (Nahdlatul Ulama), is one of the main basis areas of the spread of Shia mainstream. The Shia missionary movement began to emerge in the era of 80s. Shiite groups in East Java built their base in Tapal Kuda and the surrounding area. Therefore, the area of conflict between the Shia and NU often located in the vicinity of Tapal Kuda or in the areas in which the nadliyyin base was strong enough, such as Madura. After a long time living in the absence of religious conflicts, people in East Java were again stunned by a violent incident in the name of religion. The bloody incident taking place in Puger felt like lightning during the daylight that surprised many. Before the outbreak, the public still recall the case of conflict and similar issues that previously occurred in the Karanggayam and Bluuran Villages in Sampang Regency. The conflict that led to mass violence caused hundreds of suspected followers of the Shia to take refuge in Sidoarjo for the sake of stability and conducive society. In this province, the escalation of the conflict with Sunni-Shia issue was constantly increasing and the resistance against Shia teachings got intensified and more widespread in the community. Thus, it is not surprising that afterwards, conspiratorial assumptions which accompanied the series of Sunni-Shiite conflicts in East Java surfaced. It is assumed that the Sunni-Shiite conflict is designed on a purpose which involved transnational force.

On Sunday, March 22, 2014, the church of St. Stanislaus Kostka that would be built in Bekasi swarmed with the FPI. As reported by Metrotvnews.com, around 150 members of the FPI asked for the termination of construction of St. Stanislaus Kostka Church in Bekasi. FPI’ refusal was

due their opinion that the construction was actually rejected by local communities. In the view of Moslems, FPI's behavior is unacceptable, because the right to build a house of worship is a right that should be protected anywhere in Indonesia. Neither Islam nor Christianity ever banned the construction of houses of worship. Throughout the history, there were religious leaders who attacked the place of worships. However, it is almost certain that it was done by those of narrow thoughts and it was not a proper pattern to follow. Any religion would not prohibit the construction of the worship place as it is a place where people learn to draw near to God, worship God, and celebrate their religious feast. The worship place is where people learn the virtue. Of course, sometimes there are bad preachers who are happy to spread hatred. But the presence of religious leaders of this kind is certainly not a valid reason to ban the construction of worship place or the existence of a religion. Moreover, in this case, no indications were found that the church would be an instrument to spread hatred.

In the case of burning mosque in Tolikara, Papua, when Eid Al-Fitr was celebrated on Friday, July 17, 2015, the conflict was not merely caused by the religious issue. Several factors such as local politics, social jealousy, and security also contributed to the conflict. Trends in local politics in Indonesia could easily lead to conflict. The existence of the Special Autonomy Law of Papua has caused tension and an identity claim was made to distinguish the indigenous people from immigrant. In addition, the better economic status of the immigrants triggered social jealousy on the side of local residents. An opinion states that Moslem immigrants, despite their staying of 30 years, were still called immigrants. However, in Papua there are particularly too many repressive measures undertaken. The actions of security personnel could be one factor that led to problems during the conflict in the area. Peace in Papua can be reached through customary law. To that end, the government should provide the necessary support.

Governments need to promote dialogue approach to all relevant parties. The settlement by means of customary law should be based on local customs, that different area should have their respective methods. In this case, people have to find their own process to settle the issue and the government should provide support where the customary law becomes a possible solution.

SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEMS

Several solutions to religious conflicts that occurred in Indonesia are:

(1) Religious dialogue (interfaith dialogue). As mentioned above, in order to break the ice that occurs among religions, the possible alternative would be the religious dialogue mechanism, known also by the term of interfaith dialogue. This interfaith dialogue is expected to lead the religious adherents to an inclusive and open way of life that they may arrive on the concept of "unity in diversity" and "to life together" based on theological pluralism.

(a) A parliamentary dialogue: This dialogue is carried out by involving the world religious leaders with some examples of the already established World's Parliament of Religions and the already conducted Conference on Religions and Peace, and the World Congress of Faiths aiming to develop cooperation and peace among religious communities in the world;

(b) The institutional dialogue: This dialogue is carried out by involving religious organizations aiming to discuss and solve problems of the religious people and develop communication among religious organizations as the Alliance of Indonesian Churches (PGI) for the Protestants, WALUBI (the Masters of Indonesian Buddhists), the Conference of Indonesian Bishops (KWI) for the Catholics, the Association of Indonesian Hindu-Dharma, and the Council of Indonesian "*Ulamā*" (MUI) for the muslims;

(c) Theological dialogue: This method aims to discuss theological-philosophical issues and provide

an understanding of the theological concept of each religion with an attempt to build the understanding according to the preference of a religion and to avoid understanding matters subjectively;

(d) A dialogue in community: This dialogue is carried out by means of or in the form of cooperation between plural religious communities in capturing and resolving practical problems in daily life;

(e) The spiritual dialogue: This model of dialogue aims to develop and deepen the spiritual life among the various religions. The aforementioned models of dialogue are possible options in the effort of building harmonious life among religious people. The dialogue will develop a model of religious understanding which not only confirms the differences, but also finds common ground or similarities that exist between those religions. Interfaith dialogue is expected to deliver religious paradigm of “ritual piety” and “individual piety” to form “social piety”.

(2) Establishment of tolerance among religious people. Religious harmony can only be realized when any community behave gracefully toward others. In addition, this behavior will have impact on the life and progress of the plural society, when manifested in:

(a) The attitude of self-control regarding the different teachings, beliefs, and habits of groups of other religion, which may be contrary to their own teachings, beliefs, and behaviors; the attitude of respecting the rights of others who solemnly adhere to the teaching of their religion; and the attitude of trusting the good faith of other religious communities;

(b) The actions which are realized in an attempt to understand the teachings and the beliefs of other religions; the attempt to express their own religious belief wisely without any mockery of other religions; the attempt to help each other in social activities to overcome the underdevelopment together;

(c) The effort to learn the strengths and advantages of others which results in exchange of experiences to achieve the common progress.

CONCLUSIONS

The stereotype of another community of different religions has been one of many causes that leads to religious conflict. Cases followed by attempts to attack, to kill, to burn worship places and valuable places of religious people have occurred everywhere on earth. In the recent decades, Stereotypes of Moslems which have been believed by different religious adherents are radical, intolerant, terrorist, fundamentalist and highly subjective attitudes in perceiving other truth of different religions. On the other hand, Christians are seen to be aggressive and ambitious people, who tend to conquer any aspect of human life. In this case, it takes wisdom of all parties to cut off the existing potential that beautiful Indonesia which is free of the prolonged religious conflicts may come into reality.

From the description above, it is proper to reaffirm that in order to settle the conflict between religions, dialogue is an option and is not something that is impossible. The word of “dialogue” is not necessarily a formal event or organized in the room. The more fundamental aspect of dialogue is that it is performed in the daily interaction, on television, in newspapers and books. The dialogue between religious communities will deliver and establish an inclusive theological point of view.

References

- Ali, M. 1971. *Dialog Antar Agama*. Yogyakarta: Yayasan Nida.
- Effendy, B. 2001. *Society Religion and Religious Pluralism*. Yogyakarta: Galang Press.
- Faisal Ismail. 1999. “Agama dan Integrasi Nasional” (Religious and National Integration). *Makalah*. Yogyakarta: Program Ketahanan Nasional UGM.
- Magnis-Suseno, F. 2000. “Beberapa Dilema Etis Antara Agama Dan Negara” (Some of the Ethical Dilemma Between Religion and the State). Pp. 101-113 in *Kuasa Dan Moral (Power and Morality)*. Jakarta: PT Gramedia Pustaka Uterus.

- . 2002. "Underlying Factors of Conflicts Between Ethnic and Religious Groups in Indonesia: Prevention and Resolution." Pp. 186-201 in *Communal Conflicts in Contemporary Indonesia*, edited by C. S. Bamualim and K. Helmanita. Jakarta: The Center for Languages and Cultures of the IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah in Cooperation With the Konrad Adenauer Foundation.
- Pals, D. L. 2001. *Seven Theories of Religion*. Translated by A. N. Zaman. Yogyakarta: Qalam.
- Riddell, P. G. 2002. "The Diverse Voices of Political Islam in Post-Suharto Indonesia." *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 13(1):65-84.
- Sunardi. 2001. "The Dead End of Religious Dialogue in Indonesia." *Interface* 4(1):40-65.
- Taher, T. 1997. *Aspiring for the Middle Path. Religious Harmony in Indonesia*. Jakarta: Center for the Study of Islam and Society.
- Tasmara, T. 2000. *Moslem Towards Kaffah; Digging Potential*.

Jakarta: Gema Insani Press.

- Thontowi, J. 2003. *Rebuilding Peace and Understanding Value Through Social Violence and Reconciliation, Islam and Peace*. Jakarta: Progres.

Bio

Sintha Wahjusaputri, Ph.D., lecturer, Postgraduate School, Muhammadiyah Prof. Dr. Hamka University (UHAMKA), Indonesia; expert of national training and education co-operation, the University of Muhammadiyah Prof. Dr. Hamka, Indonesia; research fields: teacher professionalism: a study on teacher's professional and pedagogic competence at junior, senior, and vocational high schools; the influence of the role of leadership and organizational commitment to career development in improving Teacher Performance Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) on the Northern Coast of Cirebon.