

# UNVEILING THE DIVERGENT NEEDS IN THE QUEST FOR RESOLUTION: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE 2016 DISPUTE BETWEEN THE ISLAMIC JIHAD FRONT AND ST. JAMES ALFEUS CHURCH IN YOGYAKARTA, INDONESIA

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## **Abstract**

*In 2016, the Islamic Jihad Front (FJI) organized a demonstration against the installation of a monumental statue depicting the face of Jesus at St. James Alfeus Church, located in Sendangsari Village, Bantul, Yogyakarta Special Region, Indonesia. Despite the occurrence of this event some years ago, it is crucial to pursue a theoretical framework for analyzing this interfaith conflict in the field of Sociology of Religion. In light of this requirement, the objective of this study is to reassess the dispute between FJI and St. James Alfeus Church by employing an onion clone conflict analysis that specifically examines the stances, desires, and requirements of both entities, namely the church and FJI. The research was undertaken using a process-tracing technique to gather extensive data on the causes and mechanisms of the dispute. The analytical results indicate that the disagreement did not facilitate integration due to FJI's refusal to comply with the requests of St. Yaobus Alfeus Church. Conversely, each participant possesses distinct demands and interests that are not mutually comprehensible, hence reducing the likelihood of integration. This study suggests that effectively addressing interfaith disputes may be achieved by identifying and comprehending the individual needs of each participant involved.*

**Keywords:** Religious discord; Collective needs; Cultural assimilation

## **Abstrak**

*Pada 2016 lalu, Front Jihad Islam (FJI) menggelar aksi memprotes pendirian patung besar wajah Yesus di Gereja St. Yakobus Alfeus, Desa Sendangsari, Bantul, Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Meskipun peristiwa ini telah terjadi beberapa tahun silam, namun upaya untuk terus mencari kerangka teoritik untuk 'membaca' konflik lintas agama ini menjadi kebutuhan dalam studi Sosiologi Agama. Berdasarkan kebutuhan ini, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk membaca ulang konflik FJI dengan Gereja St. Yakobus Alfeus melalui the onion clone conflict analysis yang berfokus pada posisi, kepentingan, dan kebutuhan kedua belah pihak, yaitu gereja dan FJI. Penelitian ini dilakukan melalui process-tracing approach untuk mendapatkan data yang komprehensif tentang apa dan bagaimana konflik tersebut terjadi. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa konflik tidak memunculkan peluang integrasi karena tidak diterimanya tuntutan dari FJI kepada Gereja St. Yaobus Alfeus. Pada sisi lain, masing-masing pihak memiliki kebutuhan dan kepentingan masing-masing yang tak bisa dipahami satu sama lain sehingga semakin memperkecil peluang integrasi. Penelitian ini selanjutnya memberikan rekomendasi bahwa penyelesaian konflik lintas agama dengan mengungkap masing-masing kebutuhan antar aktor akan berfungsi apabila kebutuhan tersebut dipahami dengan baik oleh masing-masing pihak.*

**Kata kunci:** Konflik lintas agama; Kebutuhan kelompok; Integrasi sosial

## **A. INTRODUCTION**

This article reveals the layers of interest behind a dispute over a place of worship in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, between Muslims as the majority and Christians as the minority. There was a protest against the erection of a monument to a church in a predominantly Muslim neighborhood. The protest was launched by a hardline Islamic organization, which, as we shall see, has complex intentions; it is not just a matter of religion but extends to political ambitions and the dominance of the public sphere. However, religion is the issue that has fueled these protests. The law or building regulation was also a point of contention, but it was superficial because it was driven by religious sentiment (Tusalem 2015). Although this protest took place seven years ago, analyzing it has a useful resonance and can provide a comparative insight to look at similar events in other places. One such case that has just been resolved after 16 years of struggle is the dispute over the building of the Indonesian Christian Church (*Gereja Kristen Indonesia*, GKI) Yasmin in Bogor that has been dragging on since 2006 between the Muslim majority and the Christian minority there (Ali-fauzi & Darningtyas 2023). It is inevitable that religious-based conflicts will plague contemporary democracy. This was particularly pronounced during the general election campaign. The case of Ahok (Basuki Tjahaya Purnama) in 2017, for example, will never disappear from the footprint of democracy in Indonesia. This case analysis provides an overview of the landscape of religious-based conflict in Indonesia.

In Indonesia, one of the most common excuses for rejecting permits to build houses of worship is suspicion, especially among Muslims, of Christian proselytization (Bagir 2018). The regulation on permits for the construction of houses of worship stems from the 2006 Joint Decree of the Minister of Religious Affairs and the Minister of Home Affairs, which revised the 1969 regulation. This regulation stipulates that the construction of a house of worship

must be based on the legitimate needs of the religious community, represented by the consent of 90 of its adherents as well as 60 of the residents of neighboring regions. This proposal still has to be approved by the Religious Harmony Forum (*Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama*, FKUB) at the district level. If the proposal does not meet one of the three conditions, the permit cannot be granted, leaving the government with nothing to do but provide alternative places for the petitioners. In practice, the results are somewhat multi-faceted. There have been cases where the FKUB has been effective in finding a solution to the lack of consent to permit the construction of a house of worship. However, there are no shortage of cases where this rule serves as a justification to deny the existence of religious minorities in the public sphere. Most of these cases are against Christian communities that propose to build churches (Bagir 2018). The impact of this 2006 regulation is the perpetuation of the dominance of the religious majority, meaning, in this case, the dominance of Muslims in the tension to prevent the spread of Christianity. However, what made this slightly older case interesting and worth to revisiting is the fact that this present case is not so much about a house of worship but rather about a monument to a house of worship; *Jesus statue in the courtyard of the long-established church*.

The statue of the Jesus Mercy Face (*Wajah Kerahiman Yesus*) was erected in the courtyard of the Church of St. Yakobus Alfeus Jalan Pajangan-Sedayu, Hamlet Kamijoro RT 05, Sendangsari Village, Pajangan district, Bantul Regency, DIY. The church itself has been established since 1954. This statue is also right on the banks of the Progo. Inaugurated on October 2, 2016, by the Regent of Bantul, Drs. H. Suharsono, and blessed by the Parish Priest of St. Yakobus Bantul Romo, Fransiskus Xaverius Suhanto, Pr. This statue measures 4 by 4 meters and is about 5 meters high. The statue is actually a form of master sculpture donated by the Bantul

sculptor, Mr. Hardo Wardoyo Suwanto, while the original statue has been sent abroad in the country of the order.

The escalation of the protest of the Jesus Mercy Face statue began when a photo of Muslim women wearing headscarves and taking pictures in front of the statue along with pastors at an inauguration event was uploaded on Facebook and hit the news and local media; panjimas.com. It is worth noting that there has already been a harmonious relationship between the priests and the local community, and they have been living well together so far. Therefore, inviting the local community to the inauguration of the statue was a common thing to do (Lestari 2022). On that occasion, the church did invite the surrounding community to attend and perform the tradition of *gejog lesung*, an acoustic music performance that is often played by women farmers by hitting a rice pounder with a pestle. One of the communities that was also invited was the Women's Empowerment Organization (*Ibu PKK*) wearing a muslim uniform with the headscarves. It is they who perform the *gejog lesung*. Knowing this news, the extremist Muslim community, FJI did not tolerate it and felt that their religion was being blasphemed. They went to the village chief to file a petition. The objection they raised, oddly enough, was that the Face of Mercy statue did not have a building permit. For reasons of order and legality, they managed a series of protests that led to demands to dismantle the statue of Jesus because it was deemed to be causing further religious problems.

A dialogue was held between the church and FJI, mediated by the Sendangsari village administration and, oddly, the police. In response to FJI's objection about the legality of the building, the church showed a permit to build a statue. However, FJI still objected because the permit shown was not a permit to build a statue or monument but a permit to build a church. The church representative considers the church construction permit and the permit to build a monument in the vicinity are the same. Given that

erecting a statue must have its own permit, the Islamic organization demanded that the statue be demolished immediately. This culminated in an FJI demonstration in front of the church because the local government authorities did not immediately take firm action against the statue.

FJI escalated the issue of Muslims taking pictures at the statue of Jesus Mercy Face into a case of blasphemy and a case of the illegality of the building's status. The issue is being fueled in such a way that it becomes a bigger problem, going from a specific issue, namely the involvement of Muslims at the inauguration of the statue, to a general issue, namely blasphemy. With this as an excuse, FJI used the legality of the building to demand the demolition of the Face of Mercy statue. This is an example of how prejudice or suspicion plays out and escalates conflict, leading to manufactured hate (George 2016).

The issue became more heated when the Bantul city government issued a permit for the construction of the monument, which the FJI accused of not being in accordance with procedures because it did not consider the building aspect and was issued in haste. In addition, the license stated that the status of the statue was to serve a socio-cultural function and not as a means of worship. According to the FJI, this function would be an excuse to involve Muslims in any worship activities, as was the case during the inauguration of the statue. They see it as an attempt to weaken Muslims. However, to this day, the statue stands in the Pajangan Prayer Garden, next to St. James Alfeus Church. The case faded over time. Then comes the question: What did FJI really want with its protest? What were their positions, interests, and needs? On the other hand, what are the church's positions, interests, and needs in defending its Statue of Mercy monument?

## **B. METHODOLOGY**

Instead of relying on traditional approaches, such as essentialism, instrumentalism, constructivism, and institutionalism, that are inadequate to explain the complexity of conflicts that occur in a particular area, this piece will conduct an approach that seeks to trace the root of conflict in a certain area by focusing research on the need, interest, and position of each party who is being disputing and prejudice towards each other. This approach is called a *process-tracing* approach. (Varshney 2002). This research employs the onion tool of analysis.

### ***Onion Tool of Analysis***

The *Onion Diagram* can help us discern a conflict by showing and sorting out certain key elements that play an important role in a contestation (Bae & Shin 2012). The Onion's three-layered scheme (position, need, and interest) is used to sort out some of the dynamics of the conflict and can help us discover the common ground of a conflict by comparing the two sides in terms of these three layers of elements. The Onion layer metaphor is used to illustrate the layers of the Onion, from the outermost visible part to the deepest hidden part that is protected by the outer part. Therefore, this analysis aims to uncover the deepest layer that is at the core of the problems. That is the *need* of a person or group, layered by *interests* and *positions*. Every person or group has needs that, if not fulfilled, will lead to conflict and protest. Without knowing this deepest layer, the conflict will persist and even escalate.

The Onion depicts some of the numerous layers and aspects of conflict that accumulate during the course of a disagreement. The objective is to comprehend and recognize these dynamics and layers in order to address the true needs at the core of the conflict and settle it in a constructive manner. By identifying what people need

in order to be pleased, this study assists us in preparing the foundation for negotiation and communication.

The deepest layer of the Onion diagram scheme is 'need', which is the main goal that one party must satisfy. This need is often hidden and unknown to each party in conflict. It is this need that forms the presumptions, assumptions, and prejudices of each party. One party will suspect the other party's need as a threat to its own fulfilment, and vice versa. Need can only be known by unleashing the layers that cover it. The next layer is interest, which is a derivative of need. Usually, interest is pursued through rational justifications or public arguments that can be accepted by each party through negotiations. The outer layer is position, which is the underlying reason or excuse for what they are standing for. Usually, the reason used to argue for the position is the principle of human rights or existing civil rights. We will look at our case in light of this Onion diagram.

## **C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### ***1. Understanding Vigilantism in Yogyakarta***

Vigilantism is an expression of identity contestation that reflects an attempt to challenge an existing socio-political order that is perceived to be deficient in accordance with certain religious ideals. As a result, vigilantism is frequently associated with aspirations to uphold the supremacy of certain religious values in the public sphere, such as in sharia-based regulations. (Ahnaf & Hairus Salim H. S. 2017)

To understand religious-based conflicts, there are at least three explanations that are usually used in looking at a conflict. First, an explanation that assumes the source of violence is enshrined in a religion's teachings and serves as the foundation for its adherents to commit violence or terror. *When Religion Becomes Evil* (2008) by Charles Kimball, is one of the several manifestations pointing out the cruel side of religion. This book was published in

2002, just a year after the 9/11 tragedy took place. According to Kimball, religion has five violent potentials: absolute truth claims, blind obedience, establishing the ideal time, the end justifies any means, and declaring holy war. Violence becomes something rooted in the traditions and sources of the religion itself, which is resurrected in certain circumstances that can provoke a religious response. This model of explanation is called the ideational school.

The second explanation assumes a background of disappointment over existing socio-economic conditions that can encourage perpetrators of violence to commit terror or become part of groups that commit violence. Religion can be used to justify and motivate violent perpetrators to carry out their actions. The perpetrators of violence are usually educationally backward people who have been brainwashed. This explanation is called the psychosocial model. Mark Juergensmeyer's *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (2017), features lists of insane religious perpetrators behind tragedies around the world.

The third explanation is more complex because it presupposes the existence of the myriad conditions propitious for the rise and growth of social movement contention. This explanation is called the Political Opportunity Structure (POS). POS explains that conflicts can occur because of the existing power structures that allow them to launch their demands. Furthermore, there are conditions that make violence a constitutionally protected civil action. Opportunities and constraints present in the political environment enter into the rational calculus of movement actors and help shape intra-movement debates over the efficacy and legitimacy of violence. (Hafez & Wiktorowicz 2004)

In Yogyakarta, the third model of explanation seems to be more adequate to elaborate our case. M. Iqbal Ahnaf in *Krisis Keistimewaan: Kekerasan terhadap Minoritas di Yogyakarta* (2017), reveals that, despite being labelled a tolerant city, there are still many cases of intolerance and violence in the name of religion that



occur in Yogyakarta. In a span of six years, from 2010 to 2016, the author of this book highlights cases of violence in the name of religion that reveal the other side of the 'tolerant' city.

However, in any given year, there are different shades of violence. Extremists and militant groups in each period have a tendency to commit vigilantism based on their judgements of what is right and wrong. Vigilantism is carried out by intolerant groups against minority groups.

There are two arguments explaining the trend of vigilantism in Yogyakarta. This argument emphasizes the micro level of the phenomenon of religious vigilantism to overcome the limitations of a macro analysis based on trends in religious vigilantism at national and global levels that tends to identify one factor as the main cause of religious conflict, which is applicable to explain the violence that occurs everywhere.

The first argument sees vigilantism as a manifestation of an ideological religious orientation. Vigilantism in this explanation is seen as an attempt to create an ideal order that is in accordance with the norms and standards of religious groups. According to this argument, vigilantism is an expression of identity contestation that seeks to change the socio-political order that is considered to not pay attention to the ideal standards of a religion. This vigilantism seeks to enforce the supremacy of certain religious values in the public sphere.

The second argument emphasizes the structural factors that are intertwined with the phenomenon of populism. Populism is a term that describes the expression of resistance among the lower and non-elite classes against the political-economic order that is considered lame and unfair. Therefore, vigilantism, in the explanation of this argument, refers to the efforts of certain religious groups to fight against social structures and orders using religious arguments. In fact, they are not promoting an entirely new

economic system. The goal is to gain greater control over resources and powers that are perceived as being impartial to their religion. Religious vigilantism, in this argument, uses a narrative of opposition or antagonism between "our religious group" and "corrupt rulers".

In Yogyakarta, intolerance cases reached its peak during the 2015 Sleman Regional Election. The role of religious sentiment could not be denied at that time. However, it is worthy of note that the dominant intolerant groups in Yogyakarta are not extremists who carry a religious ideology that is oriented towards implementing socio-political constitutions or regulations based on religious norms. This is because Yogyakarta is not a conservative area that has strong historical roots of radicalism. The tendency of religious vigilantism described in the first argument does not occur in the Yogyakarta case. If not with the first argument, can vigilantism in Yogyakarta be explained by the second argument, namely, as a populist phenomenon?

The case of intolerance in Yogyakarta, which culminated in the 2015 Sleman Regional Election, is unique. It turns out that the pattern of movement of extremist groups (in this case, the *Laskar Islam* FUI, FJI, and FPI in Yogyakarta) basically reflects the effort to exploit identity sentiments to build their power base as a pressure group. They did not break the order of the elite/corrupt oligarchy but instead became part of the oligarchy of a settled political-economic power. They do not mobilize the lower-middle class to take power or control over distribution but run as agents of the oligarch, distributing resources from top to bottom. Instead of criticizing the control of resources by ruling elite groups, these intolerant groups actually build the basis of their group's establishment by becoming part of the oligarchy of the ruling-dominant group. Instead of showing the spirit of populism, religious vigilantism in Yogyakarta does not act for radical change, especially on issues related to injustice and control over resources.

Similar to national-level vigilante groups, such as the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), in Yogyakarta, although the political landscape is quite different, vigilante groups such as the Islamic Jihad Front (FJI) have similar patterns and group strategies to the FPI in Jakarta, namely, through morality racketeering downwards and political patronage upwards. Ian Wilson names this activism "pragmatic populism" and categorizes it as "pragmatic Islamic militancy" which relies on aggressive conservative rhetoric (Wilson, 2014). As the result of structural social dynamics, vigilantism in Yogyakarta is very closely associated to the "*krisis keistimewaan*" (Ahnaf & Hairus Salim H. S. 2017).

## **2. Understanding Conflict Of Interests: Theoretical Review**

There are many sources of conflict, but it is still not clear what conflict is. The main source of conflict, according to Dean G. Pruitt, comes from the conflicting interests of two or more parties. Each party has its own aspirations, which might collide. Aspirations contain two things, namely goals and standards. The goal is the maximum aspiration to be achieved, while the standard is the minimum limit to be achieved. Conflicts arise from conflicting aspirations between parties. A party may desire to achieve its goals while threatening the minimum or standard achievements of another party. According to Pruitt, the absence of conflict is called stability (Pruitt & Rubin 1986).

Social conflict is escalated by the intersection of parties who have cross-interests. Conflict can escalate violence when those parties hold the *zero-sum game* principle, namely a condition when the interests of the other party are met, resulting in the party's own interests being unable to be fulfilled. This is exacerbated by the bad perceptions of others' aspirations that surround each party. The *zero-sum thinking* mindset closes the possibility for conflict resolution and could exacerbate segregation.

As Pruitt says, stability does not always mean the fulfilment of the interests of each party, but there may be efforts by those in power to silence, or even weaken, the potential struggle of the disadvantaged in order to perpetuate the status quo. For example, the workers with the capitalists' elite. Violence will be buried when the power of disadvantaged groups is divided, either by means of psychological separation or physical separation. In this case, violence can be avoided, but not by creating alternative solutions to conflicting interests but through the manipulation of a powerful party against a powerless party. Criticism of the establishment and stability will actually cause a conflict, making consensus between parties extremely difficult. On the other hand, much stability can be maladaptive because efforts to avert conflict run the risk of producing premature decisions and perpetuating outdated policies. Therefore, silent segregation can also be referred to as a source of stability.

However, there are cases of conflict that can reach a resolution or normative consensus even though it has led to violence. Take the case of FJI objections above. As we can see in our case, religious freedom as a norm or value is taken to be the main issue. When this norm is weakened and the church, whose aspirations are not fulfilled, speaks up, the conflict will escalate.

According to Pruitt, the key factor in the escalation of conflict into violence is the weakness of norms in society that guarantee stability. Whether or not there is inequality in society, norms serve as a perpetuator of harmonization between interests. When norms are weakened and parties whose aspirations are not fulfilled speak up and form a force, then the conflict will escalate into violence. However, conflict is also often necessary to achieve justice because a seemingly tranquil situation may serve to mask gross inequities and exploitation. To quote Pruitt, "Stability, in the sense of the absence of conflict, seems superficially attractive, but effort to achieve this goal can easily be counterproductive. They may consign

society to a state of affairs that is static, sometimes unjust, and often unworkable in the long turn". Is there peace in this kind of stability?

### **3. Conflict as A Perceived Divergence of Interest**

According to Pruitt, conflict can occur when the aspirations of both parties, or one of the parties, cannot be fulfilled. Whether the aspirations are in the form of goals, targets, standards, or acceptable minimums. Conflict can arise from the assumption or perception that if the other party's aspirations are fulfilled, it will threaten their own aspirations, or from the idea that the other party trying to fulfil their aspirations will threaten the fulfilment of their own aspirations. Three elements contribute to the perception that the parties' aspirations are incompatible: the party's own level of aspiration, their perception of the other party's level of aspiration, and their perception of the availability of integrative solutions. Distrust in the other could encourage the perception that their aspirations are incompatible with our own. Otherwise, trust encourages the perception of their aspirations as flexible or reasonable.

In the case of FJI rejection, can this conflict be understood normatively in the sense that there is a clash of interests between the two parties? From the escalation process described above, it appears that FJI did not show any inclination to negotiate an integrative solution. Instead, they exacerbated the conflict by rejecting the letter issued by the city administration under the excuse of not properly following transparent procedures and instant. FJI's objection to the issuance of a permit to build the statue is also based on the government's compromise attitude towards illegal building. Abdurrahman, head of FJI, stated to the regent:

*“Tentunya kami sangat kecewa, semestinya bangunan itu dibongkar, karena dibangun secara ilegal, bukan malah dilegalkan. Ijin yang dikeluarkan Bupati adalah suatu kondisi untuk melemahkan umat Islam. Bupati harus bertanggung jawab sampai nanti di akhirat”*

(Of course we are very disappointed, the building should have been demolished, because it was built illegally, not legalized. The permit issued by the Regent is a means to weaken Muslims. The Regent must be responsible until the hereafter.) (<https://www.panjimas.com/news/2016/10/25/datangi-kantor-bupati-fji-tagih-janji-robohkan-patung-yesus/>).

In the same page, he illustrate,

*“Seperti halnya orang hamil namun belum menikah, apakah itu sah? Maka jangan sesuatu yang ilegal dibela, namun harus ditegakkan sesuai dengan peraturan.”* (Panjimas; 2016)

(Just like if someone is pregnant but not married, is that legal? So don't let something illegal be apologised for, it should be enforced in strict accordance with the law.)

This emphasizes the fact that the vigilantist group always problematizes the legality of non-Muslim places of worship as part of their intolerant actions. This intolerant action is unquestionably contrary to the fulfilment of constitutionally guaranteed citizenship rights, in this case, the freedom of religion and belief. The laws that are always used as an argument in the action of attacking this house of worship are Joint Regulation No. 9 of the Ministers of Religion and Home Affairs for 2006 and Joint Regulation No. 8 on the Establishment of Houses of Worship. (Lestari 2022)

Obviously, this conflict is not just about religion. There is a hidden motive behind FJI's protest. Resolving the conflict or reaching a compromise between the two parties with the issuance of a building permit will not fulfil this FJI's intentions. The church's legal efforts are futile because what FJI is demanding is demolition, a demand that is far removed from compromise and negotiation. By refusing to compromise, the FJI seems to want to continue this dispute while at the same time amplifying its actions as heroic through the media. Thus, it is quite clear that the legal-formal issue

in FJI's protest against the church is impure and instrumental. We shall now analyze the *Onion Theory Framework* as a strategy to understand the conflict between FJI and the Church.

#### **4. The Need of Both Side**

##### **a. The Church Party**

The Church of Yakobus Alfeus erected the statue of the Face of Mercy as a manifestation of the Universal Right to Freedom of Religion enacted by the state in the constitution. The Church refers to this principle as justification for the installation of the statue. This is the position that the church takes. However, behind that, the purpose of the church building the Face of Mercy statue is to have a monument where Christians can pray since it is located in the church's Prayer Garden. In his speech at the inauguration, the head of the church committee, Beni Handoko, conveyed that the facilities of the place of worship used to be very small and had not been touched by renovations. Therefore, here came the idea of renovating the Prayer Garden of St. Yakobus Alfeus Church and building a statue of Jesus' Mercy Face there so that parishioners could perform their worship with full enjoyment and peace (<http://www.tribrataneewsbantul.id/2016/10/peresmian-patung-wajah-kerahiman-di.html>). Also, according to [katolikana.com](http://www.katolikana.com), the establishment of the Statue of the Jesus Mercy Face is an enhancement of the church's facilities as a place of prayer for Catholics to honor the designation of 2015–2016 as the Year of Mercy by Pope Francis. Initially, this statue did not have a name. Since the inauguration of the statue coincided with the Year of Mercy, it is named the Statue of Jesus Mercy Face.

*“Patung Wajah Kerahiman menjadi sarana devosi kepada Kerahiman Ilahi yang tenang dan damai serta memberikan kenyamanan dan keamanan yang baik dengan dasar cinta kasih kepada seluruh peziarah.”*  
(<https://www.katolikana.com/2023/01/21/patung-wajah->

kerahiman-gambarkan-tuhan-yesus-yang-dekat-dan-merengkuh).

(The Face of Mercy Statue becomes a medium of devotion to Divine Mercy that is serene and peaceful and provides kind comfort and safety on the basis of compassion to all pilgrims.)

This is the church's interest. With this argument, supposedly, the establishment of the Jesus Mercy Face statue is publicly justified. But what exactly is the need that the church wants to achieve? Let's turn to the FJI first.

### **b. FJI Party**

The FJI, which claims to represent the majority of Muslims, based its protest on the blasphemy committed by the church. A group of veiled Muslim women took a photo in front of the Face of Mercy statue during the inauguration of the statue (<https://www.panjimas.com/news/2016/10/04/ormas-islam-yogyakarta-protas-peresmian-patung-kerahiman-libatkan-umat-islam/>). This photo spread and provoked a reaction from FJI. The blasphemy argument, on FJI's part, can be considered a position. What was the interest behind FJI's protest? Based on news amplified by FJI's media partner, *panjimas.com*, legality of the building was the issue raised and then played out. The Face of Mercy statue does not have a building permit and should be demolished as soon as possible. <https://www.panjimas.com/news/2016/10/04/jika-tak-ada-ijin-ormas-islam-yogyakarta-desak-pembongkaran-patung-kerahiman/>. Thus, the interest is in the demolition of the statue. Based on the news, advocate for the FJI Legal Aid Service (*Lembaga Bantuan Hukum*, LBH), Syaiful Bahri, said there were two points of dispute raised, namely the issue of legality and intolerance. Regarding legality, he asked the church to show the basis for erecting the statue. As for intolerance, he protested against blasphemy under the excuse of 'conflating religions'. He said,



*“Saat peresmian patung itu mengundang ibu-ibu pengajian, berpose selfie di depan patung Yesus. Ini bentuk pencampuradukkan agama, ini jelas menginjak identitas agama. Yang kedua sesuai aturan Bupati nomor 43 tahun 2015, semua pembangunan harus dengan izin mencakup pembangunan tugu dan monumen. Nah pembangunan monumen itu sudah ijin nggak?”(Panjimas: 2016)*

(The inauguration of the statue involved Muslim women wearing hijab taking pictures in front of the Jesus statue. This is a form of religious conflation. It clearly undermines religious (Muslim) identity. The second objection is that, according to the Regent's Regulation 43 of 2015, all construction must be licensed, which includes the construction of monuments. Well, does the construction of this monument already have a permit?)

However, in addition to legal issues, FJI also uses informal issues in its actions. For example, it protests against the height of the statue, which is seen as too high, making it look obtrusive and too confronting in a Muslim-majority region. It can be observed that their position is not really related to their interests. By urging the church and local government to take down the statue, what does FJI want? At this point, one can see FJI's prejudice against the church. This prejudice will show what FJI really needs from their protest against the Face of Mercy statue.

FJI perceived the photo of Muslim-dressed women in front of the statue as an initiative made by the church to promote the church's Prayer Garden as a regional religious tourism destination. This statue, from FJI's perspective, would certainly become an icon of the region, which in fact has a Muslim majority, and shift the image of the area from a Muslim to a Christian area. According to the news, In addition to objecting to the issuance of the building permit letter from the city government, which was compromistic, instant and non-procedural, Syaiful also protested the functions specified in the permit, which serve as social and cultural monument. According to Syaiful, the permit should be used for religious prayer rather than socio-cultural purposes. This could

turn the area into a tourist attraction, and the Jesus statue would become an icon for the place.

*Fungsi tersebut akan menjadikan alasan untuk melibatkan orang Islam dalam setiap kegiatan ibadah sebagaimana yang terjadi saat peresmian Patung itu, pada 2 oktober lalu. Dan kami menegaskan akan mengambil upaya litigasi yakni melakukan gugatan atas dikeluarkannya ijin tersebut. (<https://www.panjimas.com/news/2016/10/25/datangi-kantor-bupati-fji-tagih-janji-robohkan-patung-yesus/>)*

(This function will provide the excuse to involve Muslims in every worship activity, as happened during the inauguration of the statue on October 2. And we affirm that we will take litigation actions, namely filing a lawsuit over the issuance of the permit.)

The spread of photos of people in Muslim dress would indicate this. FJI does not allow that to happen. However, interestingly, in my analysis, this is not the only need for FJI. Or rather, it is still a matter of their interest.

Until today, the statue of Jesus Mercy Face still stands tall majestically and has become a religious tourism destination in the district, not only for Christians but also for public tourists. And this is the real need of the church. This need is hidden by layers of interest, in the form of a wish to have a monument and a place to pray for church congregants, and layers of position in the context of the civil right to build a house of worship and to worship (eventually, the church obtained a permit from the city government). Is FJI really concerned about this?

Meanwhile, we can assume that FJI's attempts to prevent the Pajangan district from becoming a religious tourism destination for Christians and the regular public is their need. That need will not be addressed until the church complies with this FJI's demand. However, it turns out that there is a deeper layer of their need. This need was identified when the case simply disappeared after the name of this extremist organization caught the public's attention through the media. It is clear, then, that it is not the removal of the statue but rather the growing popularity of FJI in the hardline

Islamic organization scene that has been their hidden need. This need was recognized when FJI decided not to dispute the existence of the statue any more without giving any reason. FJI withdraw from conflicts when the expected benefit from the conflict falls below their very need. This was made apparent by the fact that in the same year, 2016, FJI also carried out a protest that involved officers committing the same against a transgender Islamic boarding school in Yogyakarta (<https://www.dw.com/id/front-jihad-islam-menuntut-pesantren-waria-di-yogyakarta-akhirnya-ditutup/a-19077454>). This series of actions has successfully amplified FJI as an extremist Islamic organization that needs to be taken into account alongside organizations such as FPI (*Front Pembela Islam/Islamic Defenders Front*) which has been massively networking with political elites for the sake of political momentum such as the 2017 Jakarta elections. In some cases, this kind of symbiotic connection between FPI and certain political elites allows FPI to enjoy preferential access to impunity because they are clandestinely connected to the police as well (Klinken & Berenschot, 2018). This is also what FJI wants. Well, of course, FJI needs to exist and be well-known in advance.

**Table 1.  
Church and FJI's Needs**

	<b>Church Party</b>	<b>FJI Party</b>
Position	The Right to have a place of worship and Freedom of Religion	Reaction to religious blasphemy due to involving muslims in the inauguration of the statue
Interest	Provide a place for the congregation to pray.	Demanding the removal of the statue by raising issues of legality and cultural majority
Need	Promoting the church's prayer garden as a religious tourism destination in that region, with the statue of Jesus Mercy Face as its icon.	Preventing the district from turning into an iconic religious tourist destination for Christians so that Muslim-majority religious activities would remain dominant in the area

	<b>Church Party</b>	<b>FJI Party</b>
Deeper Need	Contending majority dominance (?)	Self-promoting to public as a prominent hard-liner Islamic organization

## **5. Notes on Law: Blasphemy and Freedom of Religion and Believe**

One crucial thing that we need to take into account when looking at cases blasphemy accusations, such as our case above, is the political problem of blasphemy laws that are based on Law No. 1/PNPS of 1956 on the Abuse and/or Blasphemy of Religion, which was later incorporated into the provisions of the Criminal Code in Article 156 a. This article is problematic because it harms the principle of Freedom of Religion and Belief (FoRB, KBB) that has been guaranteed in human rights as international law, the 1945 Constitution (Article 28A-J and Article 29), and series of laws, such as Law No. 29/1999 on the Ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, Human Rights Law No. 39/1999, and Law No. 12/2005 on the Ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICCPR). (Bagir et al. 2019)

This blasphemy article has been effectively used by dominant religious groups to harm the religious freedom rights of vulnerable groups. The case of FJI's rejection of the Jesus Mercy Face statue proves that this rubber article has real significance. The Law on Defamation of Religion and on the construction of houses of worship become the instruments that can be used with impunity by intolerant groups towards vulnerable groups such as minority communities or non-official religious communities (Bagir 2018). Hence, the erection of the Jesus Mercy Face Statue and the viral photos of headscarved women in front of it became open targets for FJI's protests. In our case, it is not a house of worship but a

monument installation. However, the issue of houses of worship and blasphemy became a ticket towards what FJI desired.

Nevertheless, not only defamation of religion or blasphemy and the construction of houses of worship laws, intolerant groups like FJI would also necessarily utilize state instruments such as the police and local government officials behind the argument of lawfare (Telle 2017). The involvement of the police in our case above is a testament to the effectiveness of the threat of demolition with which FJI terrorised the church of St. James Alfeus through its media partner, *Panjimas*. The lack of power of the local government to take a firm stance also proves the aggressiveness of this FJI banditry. It is clear that what FJI did was not only hate-spin but also an act of terror. Given this, the state apparatus will tend to take shortcuts on behalf of maintaining harmony and be more submissive towards FJI instead of undertaking fair dialogue or negotiation, or instead of standing for the church in the name of religious freedom.

The argument that human rights need to be limited is also frequently used by majority groups (typically by those who claim to represent the majority) to restrict individuals or other groups of people who are most commonly minors and vulnerable. In official documents, it is true that human rights need to be limited. This is the basis for the political rhetoric of "freedom is not without limits," which is repeatedly echoed, signaling the wide open possibility of excessive and even arbitrary limitations. Public order is one of the arguments often used to restrict freedom (besides safety, security, health, and morals). The problem, then, is whether the argument for limitation can be justified properly, is not excessive, and achieves the purpose of the limitation. This, in fact, is also a complex problem that is still highly discussed in international human rights discourse.

The problem has been solved in part thanks to the new KUHP that was passed in early January 2023, which replaced Article 156

a with Article 300. There was an important proposal on articles related to religion put forward by civil organizations and academics. The proposal was to remove the word 'blasphemy'. The reason is that historically, blasphemy laws have often targeted vulnerable groups. Instead of fostering harmony, which is the reason for the government to maintain it, it is actually counterproductive to harmony. In the new Criminal Code, the word blasphemy or "*penistaan terhadap agama*" is no longer mentioned. However, the question remains: does the removal of the term mean the removal of the implication?

Zainal Abidin Bagir, in his article entitled "*Agama dalam KUHP: Kemajuan Setengah Jalan*" (2023), observes that there are still potential abuses against Freedom of Religion and Belief even though the term blasphemy has been eliminated from the Criminal Code. He sees that the word religion (*agama*) still exists in Article 300, which mentions religion/belief (*agama/kepercayaan*) itself as a subject that must be protected besides individuals/groups (*orang/kelompok*). This goes against the understanding of Freedom of Religion or Belief in human rights documents, including those ratified by Indonesia, which emphasize that protection is given to the individual human being, not the religion/belief *sui generis*. Protection of religion/belief is a problematic legal criterion for blasphemy, as it can be interpreted politically by dominant groups to restrict freedom of religion, targeting minor and vulnerable groups.

Should the words '*agama*' and '*kepercayaan*' be removed from the part of the article that says, "*terhadap agama, kepercayaan, orang lain, golongan, atau kelompok atas dasar agama atau kepercayaan*" (against religion, belief, another person, group, or group on the basis of religion or belief), then the element of blasphemy can arguably be vanished. With *agama/kepercayaan* remaining the protected subject, this article still has the disadvantages that are prevalent in every blasphemy law. However,

the following question is: can the hegemony of domination be challenged through a mere rule, considering that it is the dominant group that has great influence in determining the rules of law? This question needs to be answered through further study.

#### **D. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Based on the conflict analysis enacting Onion theory, it can be found that the opposition situation between the church and FJI does not open up opportunities for finding an integrative solution due to the unacceptability of one party's demands to the other (FJI demands the statue be removed). At the Need level, both parties, or one of the parties, know nothing of the other party at all but rather only prejudice. FJI is presuming that the church wants the area to become an icon for Christian religious tourism so that it will dominate the activities of Muslims, who are the majority there. The church, in my analysis, does not have any prejudice against FJI, because this FJI organization is not well known enough to the public and came out of nowhere. Arguably, the church is sure that they are not provoking conflict or protest, or intentionally breaking the rules.

Reflecting on the case of the Jesus Mercy Face statue rejection, it is clear that not all conflicts require an integrative solution to be resolved. The necessary intervention is not to negotiate the interests or needs of both parties but to understand the psychosocial conditions and needs of each party. These needs are sometimes, as shown in our case, non-intersecting and deeply hidden, but have a massive escalating power that can give rise to interests and positions that facilitate their pursuit of need and lead to violence. From our case above, I highlight the weak position and indecisiveness of the regional civil apparatus in addressing FJI's objections and the indifference of the police towards this case. This is signaled by FJI's freedom and vociferousness in staging

demonstrations, protests to the village office, and protests to the regent's office. As if this small organization has such great power, or perhaps it has connections with local officials and police (indicated by the involvement of the police in the negotiation process).

Hence, the connection has become a kind of weapon for carrying out actions in the name of religion. It is then necessary to reveal the interests behind the conflict. The intervention that needs to be done is, I argue, to advocate for the church and use a personal approach to minimize the destructive effects of the conflict and maximize the potential for civic engagement, either in associational form or in everyday, organic manner (Varshney, 2002). In the personal realm, it is also important to exercise the potential for growth and well-being in the person as an individual human being at the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual levels to prevent any form of negative prejudice towards each other. (Lederach 2014)

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