



# Religious Exclusivity, Harmony and Moderatism amid Populism: A Study of Interreligious Communication in West Sumatra

The religious moderatism is one of the constructive efforts in a diverse religious society. Plurality of beliefs as a whole part of the social landscape of Indonesian society is not yet fully understood and believed by the religious community. In the era of Populism, moreover in the dimension of religious practice, the case in West Sumatra shows horizontal disagreement or disharmony related to symbols and material aspects of religion such as the establishment of religious ritual places and supporting resource. This article confirms that communication serves vitally in addressing religious exclusivity. Resistance to religious entities is always found, as one of the markers of Populism, so that the symbolic interaction of religious leaders in undermining conflict and violence is indispensable. Religion pays particular attention to a social construct and practice with the main purpose of harmony and moderatism of a religion. It serves effectively as a contribution of communicative actions, as conveyed by Jurgen Habermas, through reconciliation among religious people. The values of interaction between religious people are emphasized with the principle of agreement and respect as fellow citizens and human beings.

**Keywords:** Resistance; Religious Exclusivity; Communication; Harmony; Moderatism

Moderasi beragama merupakan upaya konstruktif dalam memandang kemajemukan masyarakat beragama. Pada satu sisi, pluralitas kepercayaan sebagai bagian utuh dari kondisi sosial masyarakat Indonesia belum sepenuhnya dipahami dan diyakini oleh sementara komunitas agama. Di era Populisme, terlebih lagi dalam dimensi praktek agama, seperti kasus di Sumatra Barat, menunjukkan terdapat ketidaksepakatan horisontal atau disharmoni terkait simbol dan aspek material agama seperti pendirian tempat ritual keagamaan dan piranti pendukungnya. Artikel ini menegaskan bahwa komunikasi berfungsi vital dalam mengatasi eksklusivitas beragama. Sikap resistensi, sebagai salah satu penanda Populisme, terhadap entitas beragama yang majemuk selalu ditemukan sehingga interaksi simbolis pemuka agama dalam aspek peredam konflik dan kekerasan amat diperlukan. Agama, merupakan sebuah konstruk dan praktek sosial dengan tujuan utama harmoni dan moderasi beragama dapat berfungsi efektif sebagai sumbangan tindakan komunikatif, seperti disampaikan Jurgen Habermas, untuk mendamaikan antar umat beragama, apabila nilai-nilai interaksi antar-umat beragama lebih dikedepankan dengan prinsip kesepakatan dan penghormatan sebagai sesama warga negara dan umat manusia.

**Kata Kunci:** Resistensi; Eksklusif; Komunikasi; Harmoni; Moderasi

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## Introduction

Indonesia was more likely a fertile ground for religious communities to spread religious expression in the aftermath of the reformation era. The previous limitations of religious voices in Suharto's authority have shifted with the freedom to convey the aspirations and interests of the group. Likewise, access to mass media was increasingly open through State regulations that gave spheres that supported the freedom of speech and expression. Significantly, religious communities have experienced a new resurgence of democratic experience after more than three decades of authoritarian rule.

Some religious groups in Indonesia, based on experience under the authoritarian New Order, have immense hope that harmony between religious people could be realized. Social reality suggests *vice versa*, that in the aftermath of the 9/11 case, harmony between religious people was disrupted by claims of legitimacy of several radical Islamist groups. After the decline of the New Order, continuing with the post 9/11 situation, the socio-economic situation has not recovered properly after the 1997-1998's crisis. The situation made spacious room for political groups and religious militant groups. Religious and political claims have come to the surface marked by competition from political actors who used Islam as a political path to power. The militant groups with a radical understanding of religion were involved in some conflicts such as in Maluku and Sulawesi.<sup>1</sup>

During these conditions, as in Indonesia, there have been many cases of inter-tribal violence and religious claims as a result of the transition of social psychology conditions of society. With the background of New Order authoritarianism and post 9/11 image, religious people seem to begin to rethink the empirical issues that have massively occurred due to the

intersection of ideology, religion, politics, and power.

Furthermore, one of the impacts of the post-9/11 situation is the emergence of stigma threats against Islamic entities, so that the radical group positions itself as the most responsible party to fight the hegemony of power. In addition to the conflict, one important marker is the distrust of several groups on mutualistic relations between the state and religions. The most obvious form is the crisis of government legitimacy and the political system.<sup>2</sup> Some studies have been done to highlight potential radicalism and various ways to prevent extreme religious behavior.<sup>3</sup> The dissatisfaction of some of these groups continued every time there was an election and government program. The case of Ahok then rolled into the 212 movements is one of the markers of religious group sentiment on the political system, interest groups, and the legitimacy of state entities.

This article seeks to discuss religious *outcomes* for harmony and religious moderatism. It argues that the constructive interaction among people is largely propelled by communicative actions in religious exclusionism. In this context, the important condition to note from the informant, religious communities were not easily affected by new issues, including how to view other groups or *out-groups*.<sup>4</sup> However, in practical aspects, some religious people preferred religious identity exclusively. The article initially examines a description of the construction of harmony and moderatism of religion. While the focus consists of markers of religious exclusivity into further forms of resistance, in the following sub-chapters

<sup>2</sup> Norhaidi Hasan, "September 11 and Islamic Militancy in Indonesia" in *Islam in Southeast Asia: Political, Social and Strategic Challenges for the 21st Century*, K.S. Nathan and Mohammad Hashim Kamali (Singapore: ISEAS, 2005), 318.

<sup>3</sup> Dita Kirana, "Enhancing Religious Education: An Attempt to Counter Violent Extremism in Indonesia", *Studia Islamica*, Vol. 25, No.1, (2018), 201. <http://journal.uinjkt.ac.id/studia-islamica>.

<sup>4</sup> Informant DS, "Interview", October 11, 2018.

<sup>1</sup> Angel M. Rabasa et.al., "Southeast Asia: Moderate Tradition and Radical Challenge", in *The Muslim World after 9/11* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2004), hlm. 367. <http://www.rand.org>. Accessed on March, 5 2021.





some communicative actions in approaching diverse issues among religious communities in West Sumatra should be further paid attention to.

### Harmony and Religious Moderatism

It is interesting to discuss how society should cope with such bewildering diversity and conflict. Arguably, there has been a collective consciousness that diversity is ubiquitous in Indonesia since it consists of diverse social, cultural, religious, and religious dimensions. In Sutasuma, Empu Tantular conveys that diversity is a blessing. On the other hand, conflicts are always present but do not disrupt mutual respect and brotherhood. In addition, the Walisongo inspiration of religious approach with moderatism and accommodation is an important experience.<sup>5</sup> In this regard, the state ideology Pancasila provides guidelines on how to manage conflicts for harmony among religious people.<sup>6</sup> Religious leaders must be prepared to respond assertively to intolerance and conflict. Selected groups of religious leaders in the community are prone to stand up against conflict and violence.<sup>7</sup> At this ideal level, the epistemology of society in dealing with conflicts is quite visible and can be used as a foundation for managing diversity in socio-religious relations.

Religious communities undergo several steps to understand and appreciate the

epistemology of diversity. On the other hand, intolerance viewpoints, in the psychology of society, are often manifest.<sup>8</sup> The traits include not only an intense inward groups' awareness but also refer to the imaginary socio-religious space.<sup>9</sup> Stereotype *attitudes* may impede social relations between individuals and groups if not well clarified. This stage of psychological recognition is quite vital in building awareness of peaceful coexistence. By realizing virtues and peaceful values, religious communities would imply abandonment of notions of negative attitudes found in a social context.

Much has been written about the claims of the religious community that will always be everpresent, but it is also interesting to observe Michel De Montaigne's discursive statement on the sociological-anthropological readings of the religious people as follow:

*Equidem plura transcribo quam credo: nam nec affirmare sustineo, de quibus dubito, nec subducere quae accipi.*

Translation: "I do indeed pass on more than I believe. I cannot vouch for the things that I doubt, nor can I omit what I have been told by tradition"

This passage refers to some markers of dialectical discussions between religious people and traces of religious and religious beliefs to provide a viewpoint of the past, present, and future."<sup>10</sup> Considering the suffering as a result of violence after a conflict, it is safe to say that the need to minimize conflicts is pivotal.<sup>11</sup>

United Nations documents reported that there were concerns about the difficulty of

<sup>5</sup> Samsun Ni'am, "Pesantren: the Minature of Moderate Islam in Indonesia", *IJIMS, Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies*, Vol. 5, no. 1, (June 2015), 118. <http://ijims.iainsalatiga.ac.id>. Accessed on January 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Arifinsyah, Satria Andy dan Agusman Damanik, "The Urgency of Religious Moderation in Preventing Radicalism in Indonesia", *ESENSIA*, Vol. 21, no.1, (April 2020), 93. <http://ejournal.uin-suka.ac.id/ushuluddin/esensia>. Accessed on February 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph G. Bock, *Sharpening Conflict Management: Religious Leadership and The Double-Edged Sword* (Connecticut: Praeger, 2001), 33.

<sup>8</sup> Sugeng Sejati, *Psikologi Sosial* (Yogyakarta: Teras, 2012), 180.

<sup>9</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*. Trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2002), 52.

<sup>10</sup> Michel De Montaigne, *Four essays*, trans. M.A. Screech (New York: Penguin, 1995), 32 – 33.

<sup>11</sup> Indro Suprobo, *Spiritualitas Agama-agama untuk Keadilan dan Perdamaian* (Yogyakarta: Interfidei, 2011), 100.





religious people gathering to worship, destruction of religious sites, and carrying out religious activities. Ironically, according to the document, the prevalence of cases occurs in a country that upholds democracy and has proven to be quite progressive in its social and political situation.<sup>12</sup> Conflicts involving religious people not only cause fatalities but undermine social order and peaceful religious living. The proactive commitment of religious leaders can thus be directed at identifying potential conflicts, finding steps and means to explore the root causes of religious social conflict.

In religious societies' context, it is quite valuable to note what Pierre Bourdieu stated as a re-production of cultural order. Collective awareness is a form of appreciation of how religious people view the right ways of conveying knowledge. Communication knowledge about the importance of harmony is an effort in overcoming alienation, restriction, and violence. Protection of these values refers to the intellectual realm as well as the metaphor of habitus.<sup>13</sup> The experience of moderatism in Indonesia can be traced from how some moderate Islamic organizations such as NU, DDI, Muhammadiyah, and NW jointly seek the formulation of Indonesian Islam based on theological formulation with efforts to 'start from within'.<sup>14</sup> In addition, one important marker is the cultivation of values, both socio-cultural and religious.

Harmony, as a religious community experience, is inseparable from sacred efforts,

within the scope of society. There are sacred values of symbols and beliefs in society. Religious values, according to Johannes Supriyono, include morality.<sup>15</sup> Sacred ones can then be ideologies that become the ideals of society. Social integrity can be based on values that dynamically provide guidelines for movement for the community. Violation of value is behavior that is not accepted by the community. Conformity with the will of society will create self-identity. Public acceptance in other words rests on the identification.

A closely related issue concerns how the context of harmony is constructed in the community. Society creates rites to maintain harmony, in which collective values present the meaning of reality. Rites thus are legitimacy for the construction of society.<sup>16</sup> If the process of rites involving this myth is impaired, the community cannot seek epistemological renewal. Collective awareness of agreed rites and symbols such as customs, harmony, and cooperation among diverse communities becomes an important benchmark in harmonization.

Regarding aspects of society and cultural harmony, according to D. Mirkovic, culture includes the experience of individuals and groups in the form of transcendental expression, ideology, or pragmatic motives of the ability of the individual perpetrator. Religion in Mirkovic's view serves as a sociological part of the culture, "Culture is the lived and living experience of individuals and their groups which are expressions of self-generated transcendental, imposed ideological or altogether pragmatic motives that are rooted in competences of individual subjects. Culture

<sup>12</sup> 'Religious minorities continue to suffer in many countries', "UN expert says", October 23, 2008, [www.news.un.org/2008](http://www.news.un.org/2008). Accessed on Desember 23, 2020.

<sup>13</sup> Chris Jenks, *Culture: Studi Kebudayaan* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2013), 194 – 196.

<sup>14</sup> Masdar Hilmy, "Wither Indonesia's Islamic Moderatism? A Reexamination on the Moderate Vision of Muhammadiyah and NU", *Journal of Indonesian Islam*, Vol. 07, No. 01, (June 2013), 45. <http://jiis.uinsby.ac.id/index.php/JIIS>. Accessed on October 10, 2020.

<sup>15</sup> Johannes Supriyono, "Paradigma Kultural masyarakat Durkheimian" dalam Mudji Sutrisno & Hendar Putranto, *Teori-teori Kebudayaan* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2005), 89.

<sup>16</sup> Supriyono, "Paradigma Kultural", 97.





consists of institutions such as polity, economy, art, education, or religion".<sup>17</sup>

The experience of individual and religious groups is diverse since it reflects cultural-based awareness. Plurality awareness could occur naturally within the family and community. Individuals in this context are lucky enough because the exposure of introducing experience has already taken place in the family. Conversely, it will be a different implication if the process of introducing awareness of plurality at an early age has not been carried out well. In this regard, family culture is viewed as the capital of harmony.

Furthermore, communication as part of culture is the embodiment of associations or interactions with fellow human beings, which is human life as a collective being. According to Koentjaraningrat, at the level of interaction, there are two different ideas in the form of contact and communication. Contact does not only occur through the ability of the five human senses but also various cultural apparatuses such as writing, books, newspapers, telephones, radio, and others.

Contact has occurred when someone is reading someone else's writing or listening to television news, for example. Communication exists after contact and after the meaning of the action (motion, facial expression, speech, symbolism) of the first party is captured by the second party, and becomes the trigger of the second party. The presence of contact does not mean that communication occurs (e.g. if a reader does not manage to understand the writing of an author). Sometimes the meaning that the first party wants to convey does not get the communication and response it expects. Such circumstances often occur everywhere and become the main base of various tensions.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Khrisnan, P., *Critical Sociology: Essays in Honour of Arthur K. Davis* (Delhi: B.R. Publishing, 1995), 149.

<sup>18</sup> Koentjaraningrat, *Pengantar Antropologi* (Jakarta: Rineka Cipta, 2003), 132 – 133.

Interfaith and cultural understandings involve both individuals and communities overcoming conflicts. The acts of violence found globally such as the 9/11 attacks on the WTC on September 11, 2001, as well as at the national level, when Muslims and Christians engaged in religious wars from 1999 to 2002 in Ambon and Halmahera and 1998 – 2004 in Poso, Central Sulawesi. According to I.G. Singgih, the two contexts above involve violence related to aspects of religion and scripture.<sup>19</sup> Martin E. Marty (1997), wrote that religion as a source of peace is also sometimes used as justification for violence.

"Religion, most of the time for most people, is not an instrument for killing. People are religious ....as a part of their effort to find peace, consolation, and integration into a system of belonging and meaning... a second look, however, revealed that the same elements that made religion a consoler and healer could be turned into the weaponry of disruption and killing."<sup>20</sup>

In another context, the example is seen in the control conflict in Sudan between North and South, where disputes occurred between Muslims in the North and Non-Muslims and non-Arab Africans in the South.<sup>21</sup> Towards a peace process in 2003-2005, more than 4 million Sudanese were homeless while other 400 million were displaced in Uganda, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Congo. In the conflict, the killing of citizens and children, rape, and destruction of territory was very easy to find.

<sup>19</sup> Carl Sterkens, et.al., *Religion, Civil Society and Conflict in Indonesia* (Zurich: LIT, 2009), 42.

<sup>20</sup> Martin E. Marty, "The Role of Religion in Cultural Foundations of Ethnonationalism." in Rusli, "Pendidikan anti kekerasan: Upaya mencari Solusi Pencegahan Konflik Sosial." *Religi*, Vol. V, No.1, (Januari 2006), 2 – 3.

<sup>21</sup> George Rupp, *Globalization Challenge: Conviction, Conflict, Community* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 89.





In the context of communication between religious and cultural entities, Meredith B. McGuire stated that in contemporary society, the role of religion and its social context demonstrates perpetual social changes in that it does reflect also a close relationship between individuals and society. Furthermore, McGuire asserts that:

"The interface of religion with power and order, in the sub-societal, societal, and international arenas, constitutes one very important item on the sociological view. Recent history suggests that religion is one of the foremost forces speaking to issues of legitimation of power and moral order at the global level."<sup>22</sup>

Regarding religion and its relationship with society, historically, M. Akbar argues that along the way religion undergoes a process that is not stagnant.<sup>23</sup> Religious communities continued to develop in line with the cultural dynamics. Religion and its interpretation could be ambiguous since some have been distorted it to violence and terror. Religion can thus be placed diametrically in human personality. A growing religion is also constructed by orthodoxy, which then develops to form claims of truth, where subjective truth is not infrequently presented to another group of beliefs. The culmination of that claim often arises group's intolerance behavior toward minorities as in Tasikmalaya and Bangil case.<sup>24</sup> Segregation and self-grouping seem to be the hallmark of a religious community due to claims of truth. In so doing, it would imply differences to prolonged and vicious conflicts.

Religious society in general, can not escape from the aspect of the group, because the oddity

becomes emerging when the individual "per se" expresses his religion. Although religion may initially be an individual business, in every religion there can be certainly inseparableness in religion. In each religious grouping, there are two kinds of relationships, namely, *first*, vertical relationships that are the collective and individual relationships of its members with God, and, *secondly*, horizontal relationships between the members of the fellowship with each other.<sup>25</sup> Religion, including religious values, in AnNaim's view, does not necessarily detach from public life, but it considers the tendency of excluding the religious belief of diverse citizens.<sup>26</sup> In the context of inter-community relations, Osman Bakar describes humans as moral entities. On this ethical and moral dimension, Bakar further wrote:

"If there can be significant disagreements between cultures and societies in the domain of intellectual and rational values, the gulf is even wider in the domain of ethical and moral virtues. While we can agree on the general moral principles, differences will arise when we come to deal with specific issues and problems because of differences in the structures of our moral systems and the priorities and specific needs of our respective cultures."<sup>27</sup>

In this vein, it advocates ethical values, moral principles in which context it emphasizes the harmony of intercommunity relations. Bakar has argued the decision-making and moral considerations that point to moral consequences. Furthermore, moderatism rests on the technical and practical aspects rooted in the interests of

<sup>22</sup> Meredith B. McGuire, *Religion: the Social Context*, (California: Wadsworth, 1992), 281.

<sup>23</sup> Nico. L. Kana, , "Transformasi Praktik-Praktik Keagamaan Lokal." *Renai*, Vol. II, No. 3-4, (Juli-Oktober 2002), 186.

<sup>24</sup> Cahyo Pamungkas, *Meredam Permusuhan, Memadamkan Dendam* (Jakarta: Obor, 2019), 153.

<sup>25</sup> Djam'annuri, *Ilmu Perbandingan Agama: Pengertian dan Objek Kajian* (Yogyakarta: Kurnia Alam Semesta, 1998), 81- 96.

<sup>26</sup> Abdullahi Ahmed an-Na'im, *Islam and the Secular State: Negotiating the Future of Shari'a* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 3 - 4.

<sup>27</sup> Osman Bakar, *Islam and Civilizational Dialogue: A Quest of A Truly Universal Civilization* (Kuala Lumpur: Univ. Malaya Press, 1997), 118.





emancipators.<sup>28</sup> Habermas' relevance to the conflict of truth can be reiterated by pointed out the emancipation and enlightenment contained in the communication. Habermas epistemology serves as a meeting point between two opposing (distinct) thoughts. Now, this is not merely a communicative action done by communicating something that is considered unwise to be good, it is also conflict resolution seen as a way to harmony through liberating emancipatory interests.

Religion, as reviewed by religious scholars, may be manipulated to trigger and strengthen conflict. The discomfort that occurs complicates interfaith relations.<sup>29</sup> With the factual and universal facts of religion, at least the traditional approach of belief and religion is directed to focus on the universal aspects of religion. The management of that view coincides with the jargon conveyed by religious and state authorities in Indonesia. Religious moderatism becomes a discourse that according to Heiner Bielefeldt, it points out the challenge in the context of State and religion. It includes how the relationship between religious freedom and religious harmony, including issues of equality, non-discriminatory, and neutrality.<sup>30</sup> Indonesia has stepped back from the brink and is undertaking religious moderatism and harmony.

### Seeds of Resistance as Markers of Religious Exclusivity

The resistance that arises among religious people is quite diverse ranging from the issue of banning religious holidays and the right of worship to the refusal of coexistence as neighbors. The BPS 2014's national survey in the

province of West Sumatra stated that the level of harmony among religious people was intolerable. 37.71% of West Sumatra's Muslim community chose to reject non-Muslim neighbors.<sup>31</sup> The exclusive tendency found in the data suggests the seeds of resistance disrupting harmony among religious people. On the other hand, Indonesian society is a plural society with diverse religions and beliefs. It appears that communication among various entities is an important aspect, including the role of civil society institutions. The challenge is discrimination and intolerance such as found in banning or rejection of a series of Christmas 2019's celebrations in the city of Bukittinggi, Sijunjung, Dharmasraya, and Pesisir Selatan District. According to the data, every year there is a continuous rejection of the religious festivals by the community. The involvement of both local and government authorities in the intolerance's prevention, notwithstanding its limitation against the power of the local Islamist, is much more welcoming.

Moreover, the right of every religious people is to obtain guarantees of religious freedom, including the implementation of rituals and religious expression. In the term of religious institutions, respectively according to the terms DGI, MAWI, and MUI, the right of religious people then becomes the basis of the obligation of religious people to seek harmony and freedom of religion, interfaith relations, and interfaith harmony.<sup>32</sup> The observations of the above term differences indicate that the concept of religious communication may be based on a different point of view. Beyond the inequality of the term in agreeing on the form of interfaith harmony, all agree that being resistant as an

<sup>28</sup> Wuryana, "Epistemologi Pengetahuan Jurgen Habermas dan Relevansi Dalam Resolusi Konflik", *Esensia*, Vol. 11, No. 1, (2010), 133 -150.

<sup>29</sup> John Kelsey dan Sumner B. Twiss, *Agama dan Hak-hak Asasi Manusia* (Yogyakarta: Interfidei, 2007), 124.

<sup>30</sup> Nelly van Doorn-Harder, *Kebebasan Beragama di Tingkat Akar Rumput* (Yogyakarta: Interfidei, 2017).

<sup>31</sup> Yose Hendra, "Dugaan Pelarangan Perayaan Natal di Sumbar Terjadi di 4 Daerah", *Media Indonesia*, Dec 18, 2019. [www.mediaindonesia.com](http://www.mediaindonesia.com). Accessed on February 7, 2021.

<sup>32</sup> J.B. Banawiratma dan Zainal Abidin Bagir, *Dialog Antarumat Beragama: Gagasan dan Praktik di Indonesia* (Bandung: Mizan, 2010), 179.





exclusive marker needs to be an important concern.

The idealism of interfaith attitudes in this article agrees on the principle of justice and equality for all citizens before the State. The significant point is an attitude of upholding human rights under the constitution such as the acceptance of multireligious rights and creating non-discriminatory treatment.<sup>33</sup> The resistance to such treatments may be against interfaith harmony.

The next exclusive form is some Islamists' demand for the closure of the crematorium. This sentiment of rejection, according to the informant, is more on obscure issues. One of the media reported the case of rejection of the crematorium along with the pros and cons of the establishment of Siloam hospital and the closure of many cafes, as stated by Muhammad Siddiq, Secretary-General of GNPf MUI West Sumatra.<sup>34</sup> Some masses from the Minang Community Forum-Islamic organizations, GNPf MUI, and Golden Generation 212 were also previously involved in the demand for the crematorium's closure because customary law prohibits the burning of corpses. A local authority based on the crematorium's side has explained that the crematorium is not what some people imagine with waste and dust pollution. It uses clean dust technology and does not pollute the air. The reason for the objection, according to the informant is actually to disturb the diversity and tranquility among religious people.<sup>35</sup> In this situation, the desire to accentuate the identity of the group strengthens.

<sup>33</sup> Najib Kailani, et.al., "Meneroka Wacana Islam Publik dan Politik Kebangsaan Ulama di Kota-kota Indonesia" in Noorhaidi Hasan, *Ulama, Politik dan Narasi Kebangsaan: Fragmentasi Otoritas Keagamaan di Kota-kota Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: Puspidep, 2019), xxiv - xxv.

<sup>34</sup> "Ribuan Massa GNPf MUI Demo di Padang Tolak Tempat Pembakaran Mayat", Monday, April 10, 2017. <http://www.haluan.com>. Accessed on Maret 3, 2021.

<sup>35</sup> DS, "interview", October 11, 2018.

Some who objected to the crematorium's stance expressed a strict line between the insider and the outsider. In this case, the characteristics of religious groups, including places of ceremonies and religious processions, tend to be seen more as sharp differences. It became a solid justification of 'inward' religion in the form of an attitude of upholding consciousness as Muslim groups became dominant. Then at a time when the exclusive attitude with the basis of *in-group* awareness is strengthening, it becomes a marker of the limitations of the way of the view of the outsider group.

Why identification as a religious people is often a vital question is like reading Michel De Montaigne's remarks about the discussion of various sides of human differences. Some fail to implement the genuine virtues among diverse religious communities. In his collection of writings, Montaigne mentions "in conversation the most painful quality is perfect harmony", an effort to build awareness for communicative construction and harmony.<sup>36</sup> One of the elements emphasized in the discussion by not repeating past mistakes. In religious societies, Montaigne's point about the obligation to give the best attitude to each individual, group, and community is a consideration of value.

With Montaigne's exposure in place, religious people are subjects that define his own identity. Between subjects thus the potential to give each other the impact of identity construction. This aspect relates to how religious society behaves with religious subjects inside and outside of itself. At the same time, they are constructions of subjectivity that are intertwined with each other. In the crematorium case, the local politics uses religious sentiment to strengthen the majority interests.

It should be acknowledged that the Islamists' demand for the crematorium's closure proves the linkage between the interest of local

<sup>36</sup> Michel De Montaigne, *Four essays*, trans. M.A. Screech (New York: Penguin, 1995), 32 – 33.







politics and sensitive religious issues. The intolerance occurs that endanger the promise of multicultural societies. The tension created self-victory and hostility are obstacles to note that accentuated the seeds of resistance and religious exclusionism. Religion does not teach violence, but advocates openness, mutual love, chivalry, and cooperation.

### **Intolerance amid Populism: Between Political Interests and Communication Criticism**

Amidst the backdrop of Populism, the case for intolerance is part of deviant social action as shown in resistance attitudes to different religions. It is obvious to say with certainty that a context of new middle-class aspirations using mass mobilization for political purposes has been carried out. The disagreements that were put into practice with the demonstrations pinpoint religious claims as socio-cultural markers. Part of the Populist act is an exclusive attitude with religious claims that accentuate the superiority of the group. Vedi R. Hadiz, showing "like all Populisms, the Islamic variant involves mobilization and homogenization of a range of disparate grievances of the 'masses' ..."37 This mobilization marker in the case in West Sumatra, is in the form of a crowd of groups such as Minang community forum, GNPf MUI and Generasi Emas 212.

This tendency has led to intercommunal conflict. In addition to religious leaders and indigenous elders, police authorities responded to the crematorium's refusal as a form of lack of communication.38 Non-Muslims see this as being in contradiction with the harmony among religious people. There is a growing hope that some legal procedures can be taken for people who object to the legality of crematorium permits.

<sup>37</sup> Vedi R. Hadiz, *Islamic Populism in Indonesia and the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2016), 3.

<sup>38</sup> "Generasi Emas 212 Tolak Krematorium", March 23, 2017. [www.postmetropadang.co.id](http://www.postmetropadang.co.id). Accessed on Februari 21, 2021.

Furthermore, this disconnection between religious people as a result of the Middle-Class Muslim' political struggle in Padang, shows the marker of identity politics who exactly the Minang Muslim is. As a form of action, it unites, albeit temporarily, a variety of marginal feelings in a practical social and political context. Minang Muslim identity is at an intersection and is used for a series of identity claims. It is, as Hadiz said, a social alliance action that uses sentiment as a unity of the ummah.<sup>39</sup> Its main purpose is contestation to the state and its resources including the politics of harmony between religious people.

Various challenges of identity politics in the form of horizontal social conflicts in populism can be approached with some communicative actions and strategic steps. The case I have explored has its roots in the temporary moment of political dissatisfaction. It reflects the problem of communication as well. Communication can be established through interaction between religious leaders and indigenous elders. The attachment of religious and indigenous figures and representations can further inspire people to work together.

Although the other cases in Indonesia did not provide any specific details of an alternative perspective, some lessons learned from other parts of the cities in Indonesia is how different religions can help each other in the preparation of religious festivals and celebrations, as has become a practice in some Muslim, Christian, and Catholic groups in Kupang, Manado, and Palangkaraya.<sup>40</sup> Religious people have genuine mindfulness of harmony based on psychological closeness as a result of social cooperation.

In a macro context, the most influential symbolic interactions on life among religious people in Indonesia can be found in the repeal of Presidential Decree 14/1967 which is considered quite discriminatory on religion and

<sup>39</sup> Hadiz, "Islamic Populism in Indonesia", 6.

<sup>40</sup> Noorhaidi Hasan, *Ulama dan Negara Bangsa: Membaca Masa Depan Islam Politik di Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: Puspidep, 2019).





belief. Confucianism was later re-incorporated into a recognized religion in Indonesia.<sup>41</sup> With this policy, all religious people can exercise their rights and obligations as part of the religious community in Indonesia.

The practice that religious people believe with various forms of interaction is quite vital. It is a universal value of brotherhood, cooperation, peace, and friendship. As the basis of peaceful coexistence, every society consistently fights for harmonious values through a struggle to be able to live together in the dignity of rational and social beings.<sup>42</sup> The rationality of life is when it can breathe freely and uphold the universal purpose of humanity. Thus, religious life will be more meaningful. Ekaterina Kostina said that religious community groups must pay attention to aspects of cooperation, communication, and virtues in humanitarian interactions. Such cooperative measures are important enough to minimize misunderstandings that lead to religious intolerance.<sup>43</sup> Religious people in Indonesia can take these socio-cultural values to be more optimistic in looking at the dynamics of harmony between diverse people in the future.

Related to the decline of modern society which is immersed in the inability to learn the available culture, is Jurgen Habermas' statement that warned the need for a critical attitude to social reality. Habermas called it an effort to intensive attention to a communicative society, where science, culture, and society realize universal ideals as *the outcome* of the rationality of social practice.<sup>44</sup> In its typical critical theorists,

<sup>41</sup> J.B. Banawiratma dan Zainal Abidin Bagir, *Dialog Antarumat Beragama: Gagasan dan Praktik di Indonesia* (Bandung: Mizan, 2010), 72.

<sup>42</sup> C.B. Mulyatno, *Filsafat Perdamaian* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2012), 46.

<sup>43</sup> Ekaterina Kostina, "Universal Human Values: Cross-Cultural Comparative Analysis", *Procedia, Social and Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 214, (December 2015), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.11.696>. Accessed on November 11, 2020.

<sup>44</sup> F. Budi Hardiman, *Menuju Masyarakat Komunikatif: Ilmu, Masyarakat dan Postmodernisme*

Habermas' idea could provide a marker of inter-subjectivity that includes proactive *communication* among religious communities. The contributions of indigenous and religious leaders cannot be underestimated. The informant said that the crematorium case could be unraveled after both sides together with the MUI and other government authorities engaged in dialogue.<sup>45</sup> The communication gap blurs the real problem of being inclined towards religious sentiment. Considering Habermas' view, the public decision is formed in equal access to all without violating the diverse rights of the citizen.<sup>46</sup> The objections that occur to cremation activities, according to the informant, were propelled by the logic of prejudice and suspicion.<sup>47</sup> The problem raises since questions about the crematorium establishment are not answered thoroughly and completely.

Arguably, the case of banning the religious festivals and celebrations in some cities in West Sumatra has its root in non-intensive communication among religious communities. Partly it was the challenge of what Amartya Sen stated as "the freedom to achieve".<sup>48</sup> The disconnection of communication nowadays leads to a disastrous plunge of communal ignorance. While misunderstandings are always raised as a result of the normality of conflicts that have occurred over the past few years, it appears that every citizen has the right to perform religious activities such as festivals and celebrations. In addition, it is simply not realistic to exclude practical involvement from religious leaders, *the Tetua Adat*, and the government, particularly if the act of intolerance is massive.

menurut Jurgen Habermas (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 1993), xiv –xv.

<sup>45</sup> DS, "interview", October 11, 2018.

<sup>46</sup> Jurgen Habermas, "Religion in the Public Sphere" in James Farganis, *Reading in Social Theory: The Classic Tradition to Post-Modernism* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2008), 409.

<sup>47</sup> DS, "interview", October 11, 2018.

<sup>48</sup> Amartya Sen, *Inequality Reexamined* (New York: Russell, 1992), 148.





## Conclusion

Despite a continuous way of preventing intolerance the profane interest—such as attracting the masses to support the claims of certain religious groups, as the description of Populism notion—was certainly present. Particular Islamist' groups such as those shown in West Sumatra, took their political interests that disrupted the enforcement of harmony among religious people. Cases of intolerance as a result of exclusivism in West Sumatra require the contribution of state authorities, religious leaders, and *the Tetua Adat*. Electoral momentum including Presidential and regional elections, for example, is a time when religion is used for the justification of Populism. Thus religion is not used as a doctrine of harmony and moderatism, but rather as a source of malignant identity politics such as conflict and disharmony among religious people.

Furthermore, the context of religion as a support for social harmony requires a new form of consciousness. Through interaction not only between religious people in the form of equality but also state and indigenous symbols, it supports religious life more constructively. The state and local authorities such as the *Tetua Adat* may act as the guardian for harmony and moderatism. Various efforts for the enforcement of religious harmony and moderatism have certainly been made, but the latent threat of Islamist groups using religion in the Populism lens deserves further study.

While religion in Indonesia is a highly respected aspect, the context of structuring moderatism relations among religious people through inclusive communication is needed. In religious exclusivism, one of the important things emphasized is the literacy or education of tolerance, harmony, and communication within the framework of religious moderatism.

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Roma Ulinnuha is the sole author of this fieldwork investigation article.

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