



Communication Model in Conflict Cases "Closing the Statue of the Virgin Mary" in Yogyakarta

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Abstract. Indonesia is considered capable of maintain diversity, but recently, conflicts and violations of religion and belief have increased. One of the religious conflicts that often arises is the case of establishing places of worship. In fact, the government already had regulations regarding the construction of places of worship, but in practice, there are still many conflicts regarding the construction of places of worship. How to manage communication in building a place of worship that does not cause conflict is important to formulate. This research explains what forms of communication were carried out in the conflict over the closing of the statue of the Virgin Mary in Degolan Kulon Progo, Yogyakarta, which triggered a prolonged conflict. What communication model is used to reduce conflict? This formulation is important in the future to reduce communication that triggers conflict. This research found that the cause of the widespread conflict in Degolan was because communication toward external communicants did not prioritize the ethics of cover both sides, did not provide complete information on the facts, was not empathetic, and was not coordinated. On the contrary, communication prioritized the principles of cover both sides, empathy, and coordination makes conflict resolution easier.

Keywords: communication, conflict resolution, covering both side

1 Introduction

Indonesian society is a pluralistic and diverse society. This diversity has the potential to cause conflict. Conflict will easily arise if communication between groups does not go well. On the other hand, if communication between groups is good, there will be harmony [1]. However, creating good communication between different groups, including religious and ethnic groups, is not easy. Several countries experienced collapse due to the inability to manage diversity and interests between groups [2]–[5]. We can see and feel the diversity of Indonesian society. Indonesian society is diverse culturally, physically, religiously and also economically. Indonesia has 1,331 different tribes, 1,211 languages, 6 religions, and 421 islands [6]. In many countries, this diversity is a source of conflict and division, but Indonesia is able to unite these differences. However, after the New Order government ended, issues related to how to manage these differences emerged. Stability during the New Order era was due to repression so that differences did not dare to arise. As a result, after the New Order fell, many conflicts emerged in Indonesia. Ethnic and religious conflicts have emerged in several places [7]–[10]. Tribalism and religious radicalism emerged. But one by one these problems were solved. One problem that has been resolved, but still frequently arises is conflict in relations between religions. Religious extremism is emerging in several places. This extremism can cause intolerance, radicalism, terrorism and also result in conflict. Extreme attitudes are still emerging in Indonesia recently. Secondary data on religious freedom states that there has been an increase in extremism in Indonesia, including an increase in cases of violations of religious freedom and intolerance [11]. Setara Institut reports that the increase in intolerance in Indonesia is occurring in all circles, at the state level, individual citizens and community organizations [12], [13]. In 2023, 175 incidents of violations of freedom of religion and belief [14]. These data show the importance of analyzing the factors that cause conflicts that arise and how inter-religious communication

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should be carried out when conflict arises so that the conflict does not spread. One interesting case is the Kulon Progo Case which occurred in March 2023. The people of Kulon Progo as part of a society with Javanese culture in Yogyakarta should be an area where the people are more tolerant, moderate and tend to maintain harmony [15]. Apart from that, Yogyakarta is an educational city and has wide access to information regarding developments in digital media technology, but why have there recently been cases of intolerance in Yogyakarta [16], [17]. Cases of rejection of the Piodalan Ritual in Bantul Yogyakarta [18] and also rejection of non-Muslim residents living in Karet, Pleret [19]. A survey related to the Tolerant City Index also shows that Yogyakarta is one of the cities with the lowest tolerant city index in 2017 [20]. One of the recent phenomenal cases related to religious harmony in Yogyakarta is the case that occurred in Degolan, Bumirejo, Lendah, Kulon Progo. This case is the closing of the statue of the Virgin Mary which went viral on social media. Actually this case is simple, but this case becomes complicated. Is the reason the case became complicated because the case was not handled properly or because there was a change in the character of the people of Degolan, Kulon Progo Yogyakarta which turned radical. This article aims to answer the question, why did the case of building the statue of the Virgin Mary in Kulon Progo go viral and the conflict spread? It is important to provide an answer to this problem formulation because to date cases of conflict between religions in Indonesia still occur frequently.

Method

This research is qualitative research conducted to look at conflict cases that occurred in Degolan, Bumirejo, Lendah, Kulon Progo. There has actually been a lot of research and reporting on this case, most of it reviewing the chronology, dynamics and analysis of the causes. However, all research was conducted not far from the conflict event that occurred. There are concerns about emotional bias. Seeing conflict cases more clearly when the community is distant from the events that occur. Writing about conflict when the atmosphere is still hot has the weakness of high subjectivity because people are still emotional. This research was conducted approximately one year after the conflict started. Choosing this time will make the data disclosed more objective because the atmosphere is conducive. The construction of the prayer complex in Degolan began at the end of 2022 and the closing of the statue took place on March 22 2023. This research was conducted from March 2024 to April 2024 or one year after the conflict occurred. Researchers studied two data sources, namely secondary data and primary data. Secondary data comes from newspapers, websites, social media and journals. The large number of journals makes researchers rich in perspectives in looking at this case. Secondary data for newspaper reporting comes from the writings of Dani Julius Zebua [21], Jalu Rahman Dewantara [22], Febrianto Adi Saputro [23], Silvy Dian Setiawan [24], Theo Reza [25], Cristin Adal [26], Public Relations of the DI Yogyakarta Provincial Government [27], news version bimaskatolik.kemenag.go.id [28]. The social media studied were Instagram @kabarsejuk, @yayasanlbhIndonesia, @WargaBicara, and @independen.ekspos. There are four journal articles related to the closing of the Virgin Mary statue, namely the papers by Pratiwi Nur [29], Jamalullail [30], Ernah Dwi Cahyati [31], and Gilas Anti Ampera [32]. Research data analysis uses a modification of interactive data analysis from Miles, Huberman, and Saldana [33]. This research starts from the secondary data collection stage through documentation. After the researcher collected data from secondary sources, he then compiled it into a story about the chronology of the conflict events that occurred. The story's validity was tested through primary data collection.

Researchers collected primary data by interviewing parties who knew about the conflict. Primary data collection was carried out using the cluster method combined with the purposive method. Three clusters were the informants for this research. The three clusters are Islamic groups, Catholic groups and also the authorities. Purposive or the withdrawal of informants is targeted and based on the criteria of people who know and were at the location when the conflict occurred. Apart from that, researchers also conducted interviews with government officials at the Lendah Ministry of Religion office and also RT and hamlet. After the chronological data has been compiled, data validity is carried out using the triangulation method. The triangulation used is method triangulation by comparing various data collection methods and also source triangulation which compares data from various informants. After the data validity process is carried out, the data is displayed and concluded.

Results and Discussion

A. Chronology of Events

One method of analyzing social problems such as conflict is time series analysis. Time series analysis is an analysis to decompose events based on time sequences so that agreement emerges about the chronology of an event [34]. Conflict often arises because one group only gets incomplete information. This chronology is a time sequence according to all groups involved. These sequences are validated by triangulation so that they become a complete story that is confirmed by the conflicting parties. In this research, a chronology was compiled whose sources came from three groups, namely the mosque takmir (Islam), prayer managers (Catholic), and government officials. This data and sequence of events is used as a comparison with the narrative communicated by online media and social media to the public to see reporting bias. Mr. Yacobus Sugiharto built a house of prayer in Degolan, Bumirejo, Lendah, Kulon Progo. Mr Yacobus Sugiharto is a native of Dagolan who migrated to Jakarta. Mr. Yacobus is still from the former Dagolan Hamlet family. Mr Sugiharto's wife, Mrs Maria Siti Khotijah, died [31]. At that time Mr Sugiharto requested that his wife be buried in the Degolan public cemetery, Lendah, Kulon Progo. In 2022 there was an idea to move the grave of Mrs. Maria Siti Khotijah to the family land which is located next to the public cemetery where Mrs. Maria is buried. The plan was implemented and no one in the community protested. Apart from moving the grave, Mr Sugiharto also built a prayer house in the complex. The location of the St. Mary's Family House of Worship complex. Yacobus is located directly opposite the Al-Barokah Mosque. Next to the location of the family house of worship there is also the Majelis Tafsir Al-Qur'an Council office.

At the start of construction going smoothly, residents knew that at this location a private place of prayer would be built for the Yacobus Sugiharto Family. According to the Bumirejo Village Head, the building was originally a house of prayer for the family [35]. The house became a place of rest and prayer when Mr Sugiarto's family made a pilgrimage and returned to Kulon Progo. However, during the development, residents were surprised because at the end of December 2023, a statue of the Virgin Mary was also built in the house, which is 6 meters high and has the words St. Yacobus House of Prayer above the entrance gate to the complex. On February 5 2023 Mr Yacobus asked the Archbishop of Semarang Mgr. Robertus Rubiyatmoko to bless the place, but it was canceled because there was no permission yet. On March 11 2023 Mr Yacobus handed over the house to the prayer community or categorical group Damar Djati Marganingsih (DDM) [28]. If we track it using Google Maps in April 2024 the location of the complex is marked as the St. Mary's Family House of Worship. Yacobus is open 24 hours.

This incident attracted the attention of the people of Degolan, Kulon Progo. Initially, the house of worship will be used privately but will be managed by the community so that it becomes a place of public worship. People became suspicious when the statue of the Virgin Mary was built very high. Some residents feel worried but do not express it, such as Javanese people who prefer to hide their problems rather than express them. However, people's suspicions about the construction of places of worship grew stronger, and finally, several residents objected and reported to sub-village leader.

Receiving aspirations from residents, the hamlet conveyed suggestions from the community to Mr. Yacobus Sugiharto's younger brother, namely Mr. Sutarno, who managed the construction of the complex. This objection was conveyed in the community forum. People ask what will be built and what the permits will be. At that time permission could not be shown so an agreement was made to close the statue. Pak Sutaryo also said that at the meeting an agreement was reached in the form of closing the statue before obtaining permission.

However, the closing process was not carried out immediately. This made some residents feel that the residents' agreement was not followed up. People are still questioning its continuation. This problem was heard by the Islamic Community Organization Group, *Gerakan Pemuda Kabah* (GPK). GPK finally communicated this to the management by coming to the mosque and prayer house location on March 11 2024. DDM (Damar Djati Marganingsih) as the mandated manager was not willing to close it, according to those who had the right to do so were the owners. The proposal was submitted to the owner and approved. In the process, the mass organization came again in three cars to pray at the Al-Barokah Mosque and ask about the progress of the case. On March 18 2023, a meeting was held between FKUB, Police Chief, Catholic Bimas (Kemenag), RT/RW, Village Head, and parties related to this problem so that this problem does not escalate. On March 22, 2023, the statue was finally closed. March 22 2023 coincides with the beginning of the month of Ramadan. After Wednesday, news appeared on social media in the form of an Instagram video which then became a national issue. Many Non-Governmental

Organization Groups questioned this incident and several Islamic mass organizations also visited Degolan. Some non-governmental organization groups commented that they regretted that the police did not protect them and allowed this closure to occur.

On Thursday, March 23 2023, another meeting was held which was attended by the Regional Police Chief, *Kesbangpol*, *FKUB*, Ministry of Religion, Community Leaders, Village Heads, *RT/RW*, Chairmen (*DDM*), and families. At the meeting, they agreed: to ask the family to close statues, in the future, the family and *DDM* must obtain permission to prepare the house as a place of prayer, a place of pilgrimage with conditions that must be met, both by the government and the Catholic Church. On March 27 2023, the position of Kulon Progo Police Chief was removed. Reports on social media and online news regarding the incident in Degolan are continuing. After the incident went viral on social media, many people came to get information regarding the problem and provide support to both prayer houses and Islamic groups. When they came, some institutions stated they were ready to help. However, the people of Denggolan stated that there were no big problems in their village, they said that the existing problems were not like what was conveyed on social media that there was a forced closure of mass organizations. Information that the community is fine is conveyed to mass organizations in Indonesia so there is no need for external advocacy.

In Jakarta, on March 24 2023 the Minister of Religion made a statement that the closing of the statue was carried out by the family itself, not by community members and stated that the house did not have permission as a place of worship [25]. This statement from the Minister of Religion is in accordance with the chronological story conveyed on the Catholic Bimas website on March 24 2023 [28]. However, several media on March 27 2023 were still reporting based on sources from national figures that there had been violations of religious freedom [26].

Observations in April 2024 showed that the statue of the Virgin Mary was still covered with a blue tarpaulin and the words house of prayer had also been removed. Even now, there is no writing "*Sasana Adhi Rasa*" on the gate of the prayer room. The fence is also covered with mica, so it is not visible. It is conducted following regulations where the construction of public places of worship must obtain permission from the government. This chronology of events is used to see whether the information conveyed via social media and online news is the same as the chronology of this section or whether communication bias occurs. Referring to Michel Foucault about knowledge and power. Foucault always brought the concept of knowledge/power closer. Knowledge contains power which contains truth value. Differences in knowledge influence what actions are considered correct. Foucault gave an example when analyzing mad people. Religious knowledge about crazy people is different from psychologists and also medicine. Religionists analyze the causes of madness due to being possessed by demons and the method of intervention is by reading holy verses or being bathed in water, as demons are afraid of water. According to psychologists, crazy people are caused by psychological pressure that makes them lose context and awareness. Therefore, treatment is done with counseling. Meanwhile, medicine sees people as mentally ill because their nerves are damaged or because of hormones, so they are treated with medication [36]. Foucault also has the concept of epistemic lack in which people often convey knowledge to the public incompletely according to their interests.

B. Reporting Bias

The case of closing the statue of the Virgin Mary in Degolan has attracted the attention of many people because it is considered to violate religious tolerance. This assumption arose because netizens suspected that a group of Muslims forcibly closed the statue of the Virgin Mary on the grounds of respecting the month of fasting. If the data is correct, it is natural that reactions and conclusions emerge that the Muslim community in Degolan is intolerant. The notion of intolerance emerged as a result of news regarding the closure of the statue of the Virgin Mary. This news appeared on social media Instagram *@kabarsejuk* and *@yayasanlbhIndonesia*. The social media broadcast a video of the closing of the statue of the Virgin Mary in Kulon Progo on May 22 2023 which was narrated "The month of Ramadan in Jogja is not a Warteg Raid, but closing the statue of the Virgin Mary.....".

The information regarding the chronology distributed by *@kabarsejuk* and *@yayasanlbhIndonesia* with the video of the statue closing is different from the chronology that researchers obtained from informants as explained in the previous section. There is conflicting data, but it is still uploaded, such as authorities restricting the expression of beliefs. Apart from that, there is also important data that is not conveyed to the public, such as the lack of permits.

Seeing the responses to comments from netizens, some of the communicants immediately assumed the information was true and responded by saying that society is intolerant. There are even social media accounts that repost the incident without validating it, as did the @independent.ekspos account. There is also social media (@WargaBicara) which reposts with slight changes to the information. In fact, many news sites or government websites provide information that is different from this narrative [27], [28]. However, on social media there are also netizens who respond by looking for other sources and providing different information. There were even communications that said the video uploader did not apply the cover both sides principle, where there was an informant who said that the owner of the statue was covered by it. Receiving a response from the uploader's communication, they did not react and still let the upload stand until now (it has been more than a year). Communicators who do not clarify the truth of the information conveyed are one of the causes of widespread commotion. Cyberspace has become a public sphere for anyone who can express their ideas in an egalitarian manner without fear, as in the concept of Jurgen Habermas [37]. However, this freedom of public space gives rise to reporting bias. In the public space of social media, not everyone is willing to validate the truth, the tendency is only to pursue the speed of conveying information so that even biased information is easily spread, giving rise to chaos.

Based on this, it can be said that there is an information bias in which there is a different chronology between the chronology of the three classes of informants and the chronology circulating on social media. The content of messages conveyed by social media creates a stir because it is epistemic lack in Michel Foucault's language. There are truths that are broken or not conveyed completely to the communicant, which causes noise and different perceptions. Researchers did not analyze whether this incompleteness was intentional and what the motive was, but incomplete information regarding this incident caused various reactions in society, both on social media, online media and in the real world. When a communication response appeared that conveyed different data, for up to a year the social media upload did not provide clarification regarding the veracity of the information conveyed.

Reports on social media and websites that are not news can be made by anyone and forget communication ethics. As a result, social media is unable to become an ideal public space because the information conveyed does not meet the elements of cover both sides and also a lot of information is not conveyed in its entirety. Thus, communication conveyed on social media in the case of statue closures tends to create stronger polarization. In the real world, several groups outside the Degolan community came to the location and provided support for one of the parties. This finding reinforces the finding that social media strengthens racialization [38]–[40]. Interestingly, some online news is also influenced by information on social media and assumes there is intolerance [26].

What is reported on social media is not the same as what happens in the field. People feel that nothing is happening in their area, but outside, especially on social media, the news is very excited. When people from outside Degolan came to get clear information about the conflict, the people were surprised. The informant said that since the excitement on social media, many people from community organizations had come to Degolan Hamlet. Dissemination of sensitive or conflict-related information must be conveyed carefully so that conflict and polarization do not spread. Coordination and empathy from the communicator are needed before conveying the message to the public. For the record, the majority of the people of Degolan Hamlet are Muslim, there are also those who are Catholic. The closest church to the location is approximately 3.8 km. The worship character of the Muslim community in Degolan Hamlet mostly uses the Nahdlatul Ulama method. Most of the people of Degolan Hamlet are not Muslims who pray in congregation at the mosque. The Al-Barokah mosque congregation is not too crowded during prayer time. An informant said, "The people here are not religiously radical. If there is a tahlilan and recitation they come, but when the call to prayer comes after the recitation they go home and don't pray in the mosque."

C. Lack of Knowledge, Misunderstandings, and Miscommunication

In the case of Kulon Progo, the community allowed the prayer house built in Degolan Hamlet to be a private prayer house. If the prayer house being built is a place of public worship, permits must be obtained according to applicable regulations. The construction of a prayer house in Dogelan is considered not in accordance with regulations because it leads not only to the construction of a private prayer house, but there are signs that the prayer house will be opened to the public. When a house of prayer becomes a house of prayer managed by the community or becomes a house of worship, it certainly requires permits. If everyone understands and follows the procedures for permitting the construction of places of worship, there will certainly be no cases. This case occurred because the parties did not have the same knowledge,

resulting in misconceptions and miscommunication. One of this knowledge is related to knowledge about the permit procedures for building places of worship/houses of prayer. The lack of knowledge about these rules causes misconceptions and misunderstandings (miscommunication) in the field. One piece of knowledge that is not understood equally is that if you build a family prayer house but it can be used for other people and managed by the community, do you need a permit like building a house of worship? Does the building with a large statue of the Virgin Mary indicate that the complex is a place of worship?

Signs of misconception and miscommunication of complex development are felt by the community. Initially, the community expressed objections to Dukuh Degolan. Dukuh then communicated with the manager of the prayer house and an agreement was reached. However, when an agreement was reached, it turned out that the results of the agreement had not been responded to. What should be done when the objection has not been responded to? Who should follow up on objections and enforce rules; is it a village, hamlet, ministry of religion, or police? The community also does not know, apart from being reported to the hamlet, whether it is necessary to make a report to other government agencies. Based on interviews with informants, they did not know how to communicate messages if they objected to the construction of places of worship. There are misconceptions and miscommunication about why people report to mass organizations, not to the authorities. This shows that there is no complete knowledge regarding the procedures for protesting the establishment of places of worship.

Licensing cases for places of worship in Indonesia often become a problem when the place of worship is built in a location where the majority of the population has a different religion. This condition affects not only Christians, but also Muslims in several places, such as North Sulawesi and Papua. Setara Intitut provided data that there were 199 cases of rejection of church construction and 133 cases of mosque construction from 2007 to 2018 [41]. The issue of building places of worship has even resulted in disruption to worship and places of worship. In 2007-2022, there were 573 disturbances to places of worship, in the form of rejection of places of worship and even destruction [14].

To build a place of worship, permission is required. If there is no permit, it is not permissible to build a place of worship. If a building is built without permission, it is the authorities who have the right to stop it, not the public in general. However, in many cases those who stop an activity are the local community or mass organizations. In many cases, solving a problem is done amicably, not through legal channels. Amicable solutions can provide appropriate and win-win solutions, even though there are times when there are dead ends.

The regulations relating to the construction of places of worship to date are Joint Regulations of the Minister of Religion (PBM) and the Minister of Home Affairs Number 9 of 2006 and Number 8 of 2006 concerning Guidelines for Implementing the Duties of Regional Heads/Deputy Regional Heads in Maintaining Religious Harmony, Empowering Religious Harmony Forums (FKUB), and the Establishment of Houses of Worship. A house of worship is a building that has certain characteristics that is specifically used for worship by followers of each religion on a permanent basis, excluding family places of worship.

In accordance with the regulations for establishing a place of worship, you must obtain an IMB (Building Permit) for the place of worship from the Regent, after that submit a list of KTPs for at least 90 users of the place of worship which are approved by local officials, and have the support of at least 60 local residents who are approved by the village head or village head. The next step is to ask for a recommendation from the head of the district/city Ministry of Religion office, a recommendation from the FKUB, and fulfill the administrative and technical requirements. If this is done then the permit can be processed. This regulation was made with the aim of guaranteeing religious freedom, but also providing certainty so that there would be no anarchist actions. Places of worship certainly have a connection with the people who use them. If only a few people use it, there is a possibility that places of worship will not be utilized properly. If these conditions are not met, it is prone to conflict, especially if the community where the place of worship is located has a different religion. After the pros and cons of closing the statue of the Virgin Mary, all parties exercised restraint. Finally, enforcement of the rules is carried out in accordance with applicable regulations, as long as there is no permit, no prayer house construction will be open to the public. After the conflict lasted one year, the prayer house area was used by the family and had not yet become a public prayer house. Even the plaque with the name Sasana Adhi Rasa, which was previously installed above the gate, has now been taken down.

3 Conclusion

Intolerance in the case of closing the Virgin Mary statue was more pronounced outside the location, than in Degolan. The sense of intolerance is more pronounced in digital spaces than in the real world. This data shows that the issue of closing the statue occurred because of public communications management. This problem is caused by reporting bias and unequal knowledge regarding the regulations for establishing places of worship, which causes misconceptions and miscommunication. Reporting bias occurs due to the emergence of video uploads on social media but they are narrated differently, not completely, not covering both sides, not empathetic, and not coordinating, giving rise to conclusions that are different from the actual chronology. This biased reporting gave rise to condemnation responses without checking the truth. The report was carried out by people outside Degolan Hamlet who were then reposted by many social media accounts without verification. On social media, there are actually people who warn and contradict the information conveyed. The biased narratives that other accounts respond to cause strengthening polarization and increasing noise in cyberspace. Disparate knowledge regarding the rules for establishing places of worship causes misconceptions, miscommunication and conflict. This knowledge includes procedures for establishing places of worship and how to communicate objections when deviations from the rules arise. So far, when objections and protests arise against the establishment of places of worship, it always gives the impression of intolerance. To overcome this, we need the same knowledge about procedures and communication channels if objections arise regarding the establishment of a place of worship. The case in Degolan stopped when clarifying information emerged regarding biased narratives and similarities in understanding procedures for establishing places of worship.

The case of the commotion over the construction of a place of worship in Degolan shows that in Yogyakarta, where the people are educated and have complete access to information, even the construction of a place of prayer can cause a commotion, let alone in other areas. Based on this, it means that public communication management is needed in the case of building places of worship. There needs to be comprehensive, empathetic reporting management, covering both sides to the public on official channels so that when a conflict arises the reference is clear. Apart from that, it is important to manage objection channels so that information does not cause a stir.

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