Combating Radicalism and Communicating Peace: A Case Study of the Deradicalization Process of Terrorism Impacted Area of Gunung Biru

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Abstract. Deradicalization as an effort to eliminate the ideology of radicalism that has been ingrained in the people of Tamanjeka (Gunung Biru), including the families of suspected terrorists, must be a shared responsibility. Handling radicalization in conflict areas with radical understanding that grows from the roots of conflict is not an easy thing. It requires strategies and cooperation from all elements of society. The aim of this study is to determine the communication strategies and approach used in the deradicalization process in the Gunung Biru community of Poso. This study was done using a qualitative approach and in-depth interviews as data collection tools as well as overall direct observations. The result of this study is that the deradicalization process was done using three different approaches: cultural approach, psychological approach and interpersonal and family approach. While different people used or experienced different approaches and have different results, the ones that successful are not only kept for themselves but also spread what they experienced with others.

Keywords: Communication, Deradicalization, Gunung Biru, Messages, Poso, Post Conflict.

1   Introduction

In 1998, Poso experienced horizontal conflict between the Muslim and Christian communities for the first time. After the conflict broke out from 1998 to 2000, several large consequent conflicts were recorded in Poso. The Poso conflict was in line with the emerging radical groups. The radical groups that were present were considered to be one of the things that overshadowed security in Poso. The remnants of jihadist society gave birth to radical groups and radical understandings among society [1].

Central Sulawesi is considered to be one of the important areas for the growth and development of terrorism and radicalism. The radical and terror movements and actions that occurred in Central Sulawesi were actually driven through two main nodes, as an excess of the communal conflict of Poso and radical actions caused by the expansion of radical or terrorist groups [2].

Radicalization in Poso reached an extreme point with the arrival of Mujahideen groups who spread *jihadist* ideology in Poso and forged strategic alliances with local residents in order to launch revenge attacks against Christian groups. Acceptance of the religious agenda will be easily absorbed if the context of the conflict not only has missionary content, but also finds momentum. In the case of Poso, the arrival of the

Mujahideen coincided with conditions where the local Muslim desire for revenge was at its peak and when the threat from Christian groups [2].

One of the areas used as a gathering point for terrorists in Poso is Tamanjeka hamlet or better known as Gunung Biru. It is not uncommon for radicalism ideas to be born and grow in this place, including radicalization of children. Tamanjeka or Gunung Biru was one of the places that many people were afraid of when the Poso conflict occurred. Judging from several incidents and raids that occurred on Gunung Biru, this place has become one of the places that is widely discussed because of the stigma of being a place where terrorists live. The need for anti-radicalism education arose from the need to eliminate the extremist understanding and ideology of the people in Gunung Biru. Not a few victims of the Poso conflict have been influenced by radical ideas, making them want to take revenge in the guise of act of *jihad*. Seeing the urgency that has hit the Gunung Biru, an active role is needed from all stakeholders including the government, security forces and even the community and social institutions, to reduce the understanding of radicalism with an understanding of anti-radicalism or deradicalization.

2   Literature and Methodology

2.1. Communication Strategy for Peace and Understanding

Communication is a complicated process. In order to develop a communication strategy, several factors needed to be taken into account. A strategy is carried out based on organizational planning. Likewise, implementing a communication strategy is preceded by communication planning. Communication strategy can be described as the best combination of all communication elements designed to influence and to achieve optimal communication goals [3]. Cangara formulated an approach in determining a strategy in communication planning by returning to the basic elements of communication.

Communication behavior present in society can be observed both directly and indirectly [4]. Communication is born as a result of the ongoing construction of social reality and becomes a behavior carried out consciously or unconsciously by society. This behavior can be seen both verbally and non-verbally. As is the case with communication behavior that occurs between women in conflict areas especially when communicate with their family members [5], [6].

In the interaction process in communication, the fundamental aspect is the delivery and reception of messages or information. Messages are produced by the communicator and received by the communicant as a response which is then interpreted and understood [7]. In this process, if the understanding between the communicator and the communicant is the same, the effect expected by the communicator can occur. In conveying messages, the media that carries the message not only interference will affect how the message is delivered and/or received but also has its own influence [8]. In simple terms, messages in the communication process

sometimes do not match the hopes and goals of the communicator. This is influenced by several things, for example interference in the delivery of the message which can occur in all elements of communication.

Interpersonal communication is a selective, systematic and unique ongoing transaction process which will enable people to reflect and build knowledge with others [9]. William Schutz, a psychologist who developed the theory of interpersonal needs, emphasized that sustainable interpersonal relationships depend on three basic needs [10]. The first need is the need for affection. This need is a need where there is a desire to give and receive love. Second is inclusion, where there is a desire to be part of a certain social group. Third is control, the need where someone wants to influence other people or events in other people's lives.

2.2. Deradicalization Program and Post Conflict Recovery

Radical is an ideology that is born and develops from extremist understanding full of violence and conflict. One way to reduce and fight radicalization is with a deradicalization program. Deradicalization essentially has the aim of neutralizing ideology [1][11]. In particular, if the target of deradicalization is convicted terrorists, then the deideological portion will also be greater. Therefore, there is an expansion of reach and scale that not only focused to prisoners but also to their families and relatives.

The word deradicalization refers to the destruction of the legitimacy or delegitimization of the ideological foundations that support terrorist actions [1] [12]. Here, the *radical* deliberately wants to be countered: either resisted, destroyed, or deleted [1] [13]. In short, this is a *brainwashing* process, for former or potential terrorists to *repent*. Deradicalization programs and activities are the mainstay of many parties who are concerned about the threat of terrorism across the globe [14]. In Indonesia, these steps are being taken not only by the National Counterterrorism Agency (Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme abbreviated as BNPT), but also Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and a number of NGOs such as the Wahid Institute.

2.3. Research Method

This study was done using qualitative method of case study. This approach was done in accordance with the purpose of this study which is to describe the deradicalization process of the convicted terrorists that operated in areas surrounding Gunung Biru. We selected Tamanjeka hamlet area, also known as Gunung Biru, of Poso, Central Sulawesi because this location was a pivotal area of the terrorist group Mujahiddin Indonesia Timur (MIT) led by Santoso and, after his death, Ali Kalora. Thus, considering this area is a post-conflict area, both Poso conflict and the MIT operations, this location became the hotspot of security operations. We conducted this study by direct observations to the radicalism ideology and interviews with select informants within the community of Gunung Biru. Informants were convicted and former terrorists, police and military staffs, religious leaders, and government

officials involved in the deradicalization programs. Collected data was analyzed and categorized into separate sub discussions.

3   Results and Discussion

3.1. Direct Approach Deradicalization Program with the Community

Deradicalization is crucial for communities with a background of horizontal conflict. The radical understanding that is instilled and implanted within the communities tend to be the justification of impulsive acts beyond the bounds of what is considered ordinary within society. Suppressing the existence of radicalism by deradicalization program became difficult especially for people who live in Gunung Biru, due to the concentration of terrorist activities at that time, in addition to its secluded area and limited access to transportation.

Before the Poso Conflict, the population that dominated the Poso area was the Pamona tribe and Christianity was the dominant religion. However, along with the increase in access routes, such as the Trans-Sulawesi road network and sea access, this was accompanied by an increase in job opportunities from development and transmigration programs during the New Order era. This has led to a demographic transformation where the ratio of immigrants, both immigrants from outside the island of Sulawesi and from other Sulawesi areas such as South Sulawesi, is increasing, which ultimately shifts the ratio of population proportions in terms of ethnicity and religion. This demographic transformation is very visible if we look at it from a religious perspective, where the ratio of Muslims is almost close to the number of Christians, which was previously the dominant religion in the Poso area.

This demographic transformation also caused an economic transformation in which the trade sector developed rapidly and took over the agricultural economic sector, especially those managed by indigenous people, as the most prominent economic sector. This economic transformation also later became one of the factors that caused a sense of injustice and oppression among the native population by the immigrants. In the second layer in the illustration of the Poso conflict pyramid (see figure 1), the reality is that competition in political and economic transformation has involved the two religious communities in Poso facing each other diametrically. The reality of structural transformation then settles in the collective consciousness of each religious community. This situation makes the Poso people compete with each other, based on ethnicity and religion. Apart from that, socio-economic disparities are also felt from the transition of government from Pamona to Poso City which directly shifts the center of business. The increasing number of immigrants also directly increases competition in business and in the professional arena, such as the Civil Service recruitment process where there is a shift in the recruitment priority scale model which is no longer based on local ethnicity but on interpersonal competitive processes. The competition that occurs also causes a shift in land ownership from native residents to immigrants through the buying and selling process.

The top layer in the illustration of the Poso Conflict pyramid covers the triggering factors, namely fights between youths that occurred and were then supported repeatedly with provocations by individual provocateurs which made the conflict spread widely and uncontrollably. It is also important to remember, as previously discussed, there are factors in the spirit of solidarity and diversity which are the basis for mobilizing the masses from each group of people.
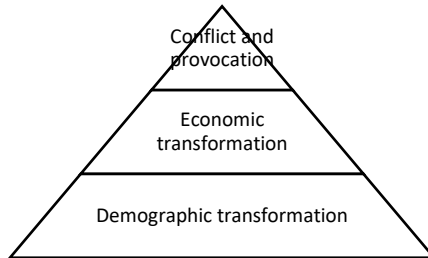
Fig. 1. Pyramid of causes of Poso conflict [4] [34]

The deradicalization program instils counter-radicalism values. The sustainability of the deradicalization program is the responsibility of all elements of society. The police also have a deradicalization program as a form of preventive acts. According to Inspector MM, the deradicalization program that has been running in Poso was implemented by several parties such as the regional government, National Counter Terrorism Agency (Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme Indonesia or BNPT), and the Special Operations Detachment 88 (Densus 88). The deradicalization programs, especially the post horizontal conflict of Poso recovery and deradicalization programs, synergizes with the idea of in-depth communication, such as dialogue forums. The existence of conflicts that give rise to radicalism in society to some extent disrupts the existence of the social environment. If this is not anticipated, it will have a greater influence on society. Therefore, the deradicalization strategies must be able to cover all groups and elements of society, both those who have been exposed to and those who have not been exposed to radicalism. Inspector MM statement also confirmed by F, as quoted:

> *"...this (deradicalization) program had been around for a long time. In particular, our activities involve more face-to-face meetings, FGDs, visits to religious figures and community leaders. Our target is the coastal areas. In this area (while pointing) there are non-Muslims.... In this deradicalization program, we provide several patterns of approach. For example, by providing basic necessities, house renovations, and major repairs etc. Ex-convicts who had recently released was provided assistance up to IDR 60 million. There we build them a house or we renovate theirs. We also repaired places of worship, from mosques, churches, temples, especially which the ex-convicts are directly related to. We also provide business assistance, from small business shop or kiosk, providing cows for small scale ranch if they wanted to, etc. Recently, we provided chicken coops to ex-convicts for them to kickstart their chicken ranch business.... There were lots of them. Don't let these ex-convicts be doing what they done before, that's why we embrace them."*

TT, one of the ex-convicts, also gave example and affirmation of said involvement even with the ex-convicts:

> *"Our friends convey the message of peace to society. There, they became speakers in seminars, explaining jihad, etc. That's why there is always a question and answer discussion session."*

3.2. Socio-Cultural Approach

A cultural approach is one way to provide input and understanding about the values of peace. The similarity of traditional and cultural backgrounds turns out to have a positive impact on conveying messages to society, especially to those who have been exposed to radicalism. In this sub section we provide insights on how socio-cultural approach was used in the deradicalization program. As quoted from the interview with L:

> *"Technically, is more of a socio-cultural approach. That's what I tried when I met Bror. Thank God he opened up in the process. For example, I found out that Bror had studied at Alkhairaat. Thus, I conceptualize my approach and I sought who his teachers were. I explored further, and mentioned to him several names which he might recognize."*

With understanding of each convict past lives, several methods of approach for each specific people can be made. One of such method is by using cultural closeness. Cultural closeness in this case, according to L, can be created identifying their culture of origin and using their language, as quoted from the interview with L:

> *"The first is a cultural message model. When I wanted to meet them with a cultural approach, I tried to capture the language because they didn't know who I am yet. This is done so I can be accepted by them. I identify what message I think I am part of. Therefore, I identified who I would meet...."*

One interesting aspect to point out is that cultural approach can be used as a bridge or starting point to explore other approach. One such example is how a convict's nickname in their own language opened up a path of interpersonal and familial approach. As quoted from the interview with L:

> *"Well, not really. It just means how his mother calls him, or you can say a nickname. Technically it leans more into culture (the origin of the language used). When I see this opportunity, I seized it. When I mentioned it, I felt a connection forming as if I'm no longer a stranger to him, because only select few know it (the nickname). By knowing his nickname, I'm considered as close as his family."*

With cultural approach as the starting point, the supervisors of the deradicalization program tried to incorporate, branch and explore other approach both from interpersonal or familial approach and psychological approach for the ex-terrorism convict. From the interviews we had done, we saw that this method was considered a way to enter life and gain the trust of ex-terrorism convict more quickly.

Other than said local culture or language-based approach, religion-based approach also used. This decision was chosen considering that religions are assimilated into cultural basis. Thus, one of the strategies used to reduce or eliminate radicalism for

the people in Gunung Biru is to convey messages of peace through preaching from religious leaders. As stated by L:

> *"....religions are based on peace. For example, in Islam, there is inclusive da'wah. Da'wah that respects the diversity of the people."*

In Islam, *da'wah* are required to be able to interpret the reality. The task of *da'wah* is the task of the people as a whole. Da'wah and sharing experiences are one of the efforts used to familiarize those who have been exposed to radicalism to have the desire to improve their lives for the better. Those who have enjoyed living on Gunung Biru will share their experiences as an ongoing transition process. As stated by AT who once lived on Gunung Biru:

> *".....Sharing with friends, I participated in all of them. Whether it is in Palu or Poso, or with middle school and high school students, or even State Islamic College (Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri or abbreviated as STAIN) campus too."*

3.3. Psychological Approach

While interviewing L, he mentioned that equal standing is crucial to build trust. This was done to instill understanding of unbiased communication and judgement. Other aspect to point out with this equal standing is to avoid offending each other, as quoted from the interview with L:

> *"I prefer John Horgan way. He terms it the process of letting go and their heart was touched. Now how can they believe me. I am not going to repeatedly mention whether you are radical or not, whether you are a terrorist or not, that is none of my business. The important thing is that you can accept me. Vice versa, I can also accept you."*

This psychological approach was done not only to open up the ex-convict's heart but also to understand how their thought process work and what they are going to do in the future. As mentioned by TT:

> *"In my experience, what they have done after the heart was to hear. What skills and activities can be develop from and by them."*

As stated by several informants, efforts to deal with radicalism are not only the responsibility of certain parties, but all elements of society. One method that can be done is to provide an understanding of anti-radicalism idea in schools and other educational facilities as stated by S, one of the lecturers and also a driving force in the field of peace, as follows:

> *"....directly with Harmonious Religious Followers Forum (Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama or abbreviated as FKUB). That's why we went there and submitted a proposal for deradicalization activities this year. The activities themselves involve how we reach out to the children there (at Gunung Biru) to be actively involved in educational activities or other activities in developing their psychomotoric skills. The goal is to make them be more involved in positive activities."*

3.4. Interpersonal and Familial Approach

Involving yourself in interpersonal communication and being part of the family is one of the approach strategies employed as part of the deradicalization program of Gunung Biru. As stated in the cultural approach sub section, interpersonal approach can be a way to influence former convicts to receive deradicalization program and is easier for the public to understand deradicalization process because they can build trust in others. As quoted from the interview with AT:

> *"I was given advice. Never cut ties. Always communicate, contact. God willing, I don't have any thoughts like that anymore, right? In the past, I hid in for almost a year, 8 months at Gunung Biru, while in the forest perhaps (radical thoughts to be resurfaced)."*

L gave different analogy in his interview:

> *"....more or less, I can say that this process is like getting close to a woman. When she is not interested and comfortable around you, she won't be open with you. The other way around is true, after I touched their heart they would confide in me. To get to this stage though, was difficult, no joke. So, don't play with them. But when they already believe in me. Everyone I brought started to open up. They started to talk. Even his wives all talked to me. But if you want to know about a husband, ask his wife. Husbands more often than not are in touch with their wives. They will confide. There, you can see his household (condition). I tried to interview their wives. But don't go straight forward. It could be prematurely discovered that they were involved with me."*

When the personal lives of ex-terrorism convicts are going well, their work lives and social relations can also be integrated. This was proven by ex-terrorism convicts who were became presenters at several seminar activities on campus related to their lives when they were terrorism convicts.

Furthermore, interpersonal and familial approach opens the possibility to instill the deradicalization process in a long term and continuous manner. This is affirmed by the AT's statement in the interview, as quoted:

> *"To revoke radical understanding is difficult and have to do it slowly. If you want to remove these radicals, you will need a long time. Because it needs to be done gradually....That understanding won't be lost if it's only been 1-2 years."*

3.5. Discussion

Three main interrelated triggers or drivers are the reasons why *jihadists* in Poso stopped carrying out their acts of terror [2] [12] [15]. On a different level, the combination of these three triggers made them decide to *repent*. First, structural factors. This factor is to increase capacity of state officials, especially the National Police and Densus 88, in dealing with conflict and violence. This factor forces jihadists to weigh and reconsider the advantages and disadvantages of continued acts of terror. For this reason, some *jihadists* view continuing terror acts as very risky. In addition, some of those imprisoned admitted that their association with members of the National Police in prison changed their views about the National Police and the state. They, for example, discovered that the National Police members were also devout Muslims. This fact disturbs their previous belief that the Republic of Indonesia

and its officials are a *thaghut* nation. Second, pull factors. This factor focuses on the opening of personal relationships with other people outside the old *jihadist* or terrorist groups. This, for example, forces jihadists to follow their mothers' or wives' requests to stop being jihadists or change priorities in their lives. All of which pulled them out of their longstanding alliance with terrorist organizations. Third, push factors, in the form of growing disillusionment with the ideology, tactics or leaders of terrorist organizations.

Intercultural approach is one factor that greatly influences the communication activities of individuals within a society. The communication process that occurs in society is not only influenced by personal emotional and moral factors but also by society as their reference. William Schutz emphasized that sustainable interpersonal relationships depend on three basic needs. The first need is the need for affection, to give and receive love. Second is inclusion, to be part of a certain social group. Third is control, to influence other people or events in other people's lives. Thus, the interpersonal and familial approach of the deradicalization process fulfil those three conditions, especially for the ex-terrorism convicts. Firstly, the ex-convicts started to open and trust others which in turn fulfil the need for affection. Secondly, the trust with each other means to live without stigma. As such, the ex-convicts can live with their family within the community. Third, by spreading their past experience, they can change others to be better by avoiding radical ideology.

As a series of ongoing programs, deradicalization includes many programs consisting of motivational reorientation, re-education, resocialization, as well as social welfare and equality with other communities for those involved in criminal acts of terrorism. Sharing experiences with others can be a way of healing for those who have been part of radical groups. From the interviews we can conclude that in order to create peace, compassion, tolerance, mutual understanding and harmony within religion-based conflict area such as Poso is to build humanist, dialogical communication between religions. Communication between religious communities is a medium for learning and education in the context of creating peace, egalitarian attitudes, openness and honesty [16]. If this has been established then the deradicalization will automatically be established.

Both directly or indirectly, intense communication by providing messages of peace able to touch the point of understanding of the community, including those who have been part of radical groups. The radical understanding that has been ingrained to and guided their lives is eroded [17] [18]. Borrowing the educational philosophy developed by Paulo Freire which emphasized that education must be used for liberation and not domination [19] [20] education must be a process of liberation, not domestication and not social and cultural domestication. Education relies on the principle of total action and reflection, to change an oppressive reality while simultaneously and continuously trying to foster awareness of reality and the desire to change that oppressive reality.

4   Conclusion

Handling radicalization in conflict areas with radical understanding that grows from the roots of conflict is difficult and cannot be achieved in a short term of implementation. It requires strategies and cooperation from all elements of society. Seeing a heterogeneous society with an understanding of radicalism born from the experience of conflict requires interpersonal approaches from each element of society. Communication strategies for deradicalization are one of the steps that can be taken to reduce the notion of radicalization among the community and families of suspected terrorists in Tamanjeka or Gunung Biru.

Based on the discussion on this study, we can conclude that the communication strategy on deradicalization process in Tamanjeka (Gunung Biru) of Poso can be categorized into three approaches: socio-cultural, psychological and interpersonal and familial approaches. While these three approaches are used in conjunction with each other, some ex-convicts reacted more positively to some more than others, especially in starting phase. Most of the ex-convicts, after successfully followed through with the deradicalization program, chose to not keep their experiences to their own, but also spread the message of peace as deradicalization program follow up by having discussions with others.

Counter-terrorism policies need to focus on preventive efforts to increase public acceptance of multiculturalism and understanding of the dangers of religious violence. Weakening social and family ties can also be a supporting factor in recruitment and indoctrination of radical ideas. The family will always be the first field for carrying out or combating radicalism propaganda. Thus, the deradicalization program should be done by fortifying interpersonal and familial interactions as explained and shown in this study. Thus, the deradicalization program was not only a reactive effort but also became a preventive effort in the long term.

There are several recommendations that we can offer after considering the limitation of this study. First, there should be in-depth study on how the ex-convicts adapted to the community and community's acceptance of the ex-convicts and their families and relatives in a long-term manner. Second, following our first recommendation, an in-depth study concerning the relations between Christian and Muslim communities, especially those directly involved in the Poso conflict or the post conflict terror activities, is needed to understand the on-going interactions between the two communities. Third, while our study focused on the Muslim side of the radical/terror groups deradicalization programs, an in-depth study on the Christian side of the radicalization and deradicalization process. Because, while there were terror groups on the Christian side, there are no deradicalization process on similar scale of the Muslim side. Thus, comparison of the two sides can be studied to understand the difference in radicalization and deradicalization process and its efficiency.

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