Interreligious Violent Conflict Resolution: Discoursing Communal Violence between Christians and Moslems in Poso City, Indonesia

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Abstract

After the reformation occurred in 1998, the political situation in Indonesia became unstable. Military forces had been concentrated in the central government to maintain stability. Thus, the situation in Indonesia became vulnerable and easy to be provoked. During that period, various conflicts happened and escalated, such as ethnic and interreligious group conflicts. One of those conflicts occurred in Poso, considered one of the most violent conflicts in Indonesia after the reformation. It was an interreligious conflict between the Christian and Muslim groups in Poso, a city in Central Sulawesi. In this city, the interreligious conflict between these two groups took place a few times through some phases, involving both militant and violent groups. The conflict was eventually settled through the dialogue between two conflicting groups, each led by respected religious local figures. The government mediated the dialogue through one of the public officials who was respected in the country. In the last stage of Poso conflict resolution, Malino Declaration was set to end the conflict, and the military was sent to the city to keep the peace process, and the conflict perpetrators were sent to trial.

Key Words
Conflict resolution, communal violence, interreligious conflict, reconciliation

1. Introduction

After the end of the Cold War, the number of interstate wars declined, whilst the number of intrastate wars or conflicts has significantly increased. Based on the data gathered by Uppsala, these intrastate conflicts are considered a new pattern of conflict. These conflicts were emphasized by challenging states' authority, including threatening territorial integrity by separatist movements, opposing central control, et cetera. (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, Miall 2011, p. 71). However, various backgrounds and reasons could cause intrastate wars or conflicts. Nevertheless, this conflict happened primarily due to inequalities or differences in ideas, perceptions, values, socio-economic situation, et cetera. These differences could escalate into a conflict involving arms and communal violence. Therefore, before it happens or when this armed conflicts and communal violence occur, conflict resolution or conflict management should be made to resolve the conflict and prevent the conflict from escalating.

Conflict Management

The discourse of conflict could not be separated from conflict resolution or management. Conflict could be defined as a situation when two parties or more struggle to acquire the same scarce

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resources simultaneously (Swanstrom, Weissmann 2005, p. 9). There are various types of conflicts, including ethnic conflict, communal violence, separatism, regime change, et cetera. (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, Miall 2011, p. 68). Since there are different types of conflict and other reasons for its occurrence, it is necessary to assess the roots of the conflicts in the first place to resolve the conflict.

In terms of resolving the conflict, there is a mix between conflict prevention and conflict management. Generally, both conflict prevention and conflict management are broad terms of methods and mechanisms used to avoid, minimize, and manage conflict between different parties (Swanstrom, Weissmann 2005, p. 5), yet they are different. It is said that conflict prevention refers to the measurement of preventing conflict or forestalling potentially escalating conflict by direct or structural prevention. While immediate prevention focuses on preventing potential conflict quickly, structural prevention focuses more on a long-term measure (Swanstrom, Weissmann 2005, p. 19).

On the other hand, conflict management has been defined in many ways. It could be defined as the containment of a conflict without necessarily solving it, a measure to change the interaction between conflicting parties, or it could be described as well as a process to eliminate violent or violence-related action so that the conflict could be dealt with (Swanstrom, Weissmann 2005 pp. 23-24). Conflict prevention and conflict management could be applied. When a potential conflict is about to occur, conflict prevention could be a measurement taken so that the conflict itself would not happen, and if the conflict has already happened, conflict management should be done in order to prevent the situation from getting worse.

Communal Violence

One form of the new pattern of intrastate conflicts is communal violence. It is considered a form of violence perpetrated across communal lines in which each violent party has solidarity with their groups, and victims are chosen based on their group membership (Najar, 2014, p. 5). This communal violence could also be considered one type of collective violence[1] and it could be seen in the form of violence between different religious communities or ethnicities. This conflict certainly might quickly happen in a multicultural country since it has a vast range of ethnicities, cultures, religions, etc. Still, it does not mean communal violence could not happen in a less multicultural country.

Communal violence would likely happen in a multicultural country, and it could spread throughout the country since identity groups are divided by ethnicity, religion, and migrant-indigenous status (Tajima, 2014, p. 2). In a multicultural country such as Indonesia, a broad range of identities could be the trigger for identity-based violence, leading to communal violence throughout the country. It could happen because of solidarity and the sense of belonging to the same ethnicity or religious faith. As a result, people with the same ethnicity and religion would be able to be mobilized so that the possibility of communal violence about to happen becomes greater.

However, the government also plays an essential part in preventing communal violence from erupting. It was said that state's weak conditions are associated with the high of communal violence because it seems that the government is weak and allows some parties to create communal tension, which subsequently leads to conflicts, while on the other hand, strong

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[1] There are four types of collective violence, which are: secessionist violence or also known as military-sponsored violence; large-scale communal violence that includes inter-religious and inter-ethnic violence; localized communal violence, which occurs on the scale of one city and happens in a couple of days; and social violence which includes vigilantism and inter-village brawl (Van Klinken, 2007, p. 3).

government are considered capable of preventing communal violence (Tajima, 2014, p. 6). In this connection, the possibility of communal violence is more significant in a multicultural country where its government is weak or in a transition process so that some parties take advantage during this vacuum of power.

Interreligious Conflict

Interreligious conflict could be considered communal violence since it is collective violence that occurs due to people's membership in a particular religion. Conflict happens when something is contested. Thus, interreligious conflict could happen when different ideologies or beliefs are contested, and it occurs between other religious communities (Mayer, 2013, p. 2). However, different views should not be considered when discussing interreligious conflict because it is a complex phenomenon.

It might be easy to assume in the first place that different religion is the cause of interreligious conflict, but what is actually contested might be other domains, such as power. Groups of people sometimes use religion to feed the conflict (Little, 2007, p. 429) so that both religious and interreligious conflict would be easily ignited, especially in a country where various religions and beliefs are acknowledged. In addition, religion is sometimes used as a political tool to gain power and justify actions. Nonetheless, it could be understood that instead of politicizing religion, the lack of tolerance and respect for religious differences should also be considered as triggers of communal violence or interreligious conflict.

2. Literature Review: The Causes and Roots of Conflict in Poso City

As a multicultural country with various ethnicities and acknowledged religions, Indonesia is also vulnerable to communal violence, inter-ethnic and interreligious communities. The most recent incident of communal violence in Indonesia happened post-reformation when the authoritarian regime was overthrown. This communal violence occurred in Aceh, Kalimantan, Moluccas, Sulawesi, and Papua. Most of the conflicts were considered to have ethnic dimensions, so they were known as ethnic conflicts. However, since religious manifestation had been stronger in conflicts that happened in Moluccas (Ambon City) and Sulawesi (Poso City), these two were considered as interreligious conflicts or interreligious communal violence between Moslem and Christian communities (Sukma, 2005, p. 3).

It could be said that interreligious communal violence happened in Poso city as one of the major conflicts Indonesia faced in the post-reformation period. This interreligious communal violence in Poso City happened in some phases. Although the conflict in Poso City had been settled, it might still have the potential to happen again in the future as long as the roots of the conflict still exist because interreligious communal violence is not only happened due to religious differences but also could be caused by weak government or another factor such as inequalities.

2.1. Poso Conflict

Poso City is located in Central Sulawesi province.[2] This province is considered to have the most diverse ethnicities and religious diversity. In 1998, riots happened, which immediately escalated into communal violence between two major religious communities in the area. The early stage of the Poso conflict reflected ethnic differences, yet it was more considered interreligious communal violence.

The overlapping between ethnic and interreligious conflict in Poso City might be due to the ethnic identities of two conflicting religious parties. In this conflict, the Christian community

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[2]Sulawesi is one of the largest islands located in northeastern Indonesia.

members were primarily ethnic Pamona, whilst the Muslim community members were mainly ethnic Bugis (Sukma, 2005, p. 5). However, once the conflict occurred, it immediately became a violent religious war. Furthermore, the situation in Poso City was getting worse because of the intervention of Islamist militias that ignited the conflict and other ethnic groups whose religion is the same as two conflicting parties took part in this communal violence as a form of solidarity and a strong sense of belonging of a religion.

Interreligious communal violence between the Christian and Muslim communities in Poso City happened in five phases. It started when a Christian youth fought with a Muslim youth who afterwards searched for protection in a mosque. The first two phases occurred as riots on a city scale. In the third phase, the tension between two conflicting parties escalated so that it involved the whole district due to attacks on Javanese Moslems villages. The fourth phase involved militias from outside the region. The situation worsened in the fifth phase since violence transformed from open fighting to sporadic bombing and sniper attacks (Tajima, 2014, p. 135).

It was said that the consequences of the Poso conflict were not as high as other communal violence in Indonesia (Sukma, 2005, p.5), but it does not mean that what happened in Poso is unimportant. Besides, the death toll due to this interreligious communal violence might not be high, yet it indeed affected and traumatized people. It might be simple to think that the Poso conflict happened because of religious differences since the Christian and Muslim youths' fight triggered it. Still, the cause of the conflict might be deeply rooted politically and socio-economically.

2.2. Political Situation of the Post-New Order

Since communal violence is associated with weak states (Tajima, 2014, p. 6), one thing that caused interreligious communal violence in Poso City could be related to the political situation in Indonesia. The conflict occurred for the first time in 1998 after the authoritarian regime was shifted to a more democratic government through reformation. However, the conflict in Poso City was not caused by democratization. Instead, it could be seen as an accumulation of what happened during the authoritarian rule.

Prior to 1998, some factors were considered the roots of tension, such as centralization. When Indonesia became a democracy, the changes in power from centralization to decentralization were considered to have the potential to trigger ethnic and communal violence while reducing tension simultaneously (Diprose, 2009, p. 109). Java Island became the centre of government and development, so other regions might be seen as the periphery. Furthermore, this situation could marginalize some groups and create tension between centre-periphery. This situation likely escalated into conflict or communal violence, especially when discourses to end the status quo spread among the different ethnic and religious groups.

Government's migration policy[3] might be considered a factor that contributed to interreligious communal violence in Poso city because it indirectly created a stage for conflict. It is known that since the colonial period, Christians have occupied privileged positions in the civil service in Poso City. Still, later it was occupied by Moslems after they came into the city. Therefore, competition over local government offices and hatred associated with economic and political competition (Tajima, 2014, p. 135) between Christians and Moslems in Poso City had sparked tension between the two parties.

Moreover, the riots in Jakarta after President Soeharto stepped down seem to have created an opportunity for some groups to take advantage during the transition period, mainly when

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[3] During New Order, there was a government policy called transmigration. It was a program to reduce population density in Java Island by sending people to less crowded regions and islands outside Java.

police and military forces were focused on maintaining security in the capital. Therefore, there were insufficiencies in police forces in the city. During that transition period, the Indonesian government might have been seen as weak, so communal violence in Poso and other cities happened, and they could not do anything to prevent the conflict. In addition, the riots might also be considered in fueling the long-existed tension between Christians and Moslems in Poso into interreligious communal violence.

2.3. Causes of Conflict between Christians and Moslems in Poso City

The cause of conflict in Poso City might be more deeply rooted in differences or socio-economic inequalities, which later created tension between predominantly Christian locals and majority Muslim immigrants. It started when government-sponsored migrants from Java Island came to Central Sulawesi, followed by spontaneous migrants. This condition was considered necessary for creating a new market, so immigrants started dominating agriculture and trade (Schulze, 2017, p. 4). Market domination by Muslim immigrants might be considered a starting point of competition and tension between religious faiths. However, it did not directly escalate into conflict since local Christians paid more attention to civil service positions when Muslim transmigrants dominated economic sectors.

Another vital cause that should be considered was the locals' loss of ancestral land due to transmigration. Although being protested by the locals and considered a violation of customary law, the government still sold the land. It used it for a transmigration program because, based on the law, local people only could use ancestral land as long as it did not clash with the national interest. The situation afterwards got worse since the Cacao plantation became a high-value export commodity after the Asian financial crisis happened, so some transmigrants just entered locals' ancestral land, cut down the trees, and planted Cacao trees. The loss of these ancestral lands greatly impacted local people because it was about economic values and locals' connection to their ancestors (Schulze, 2017, pp. 6-7). In addition, the grievances about the situation had created discourses about local-newcomer (Diprose, 2009, p. 117), which subsequently also considered driving communal violence in Poso City.

Lastly, people's perception is also considered to play an essential part in the interreligious conflict in Poso City, as Swanstrom and Weissmann (2005) argue that conflict in many cases is based on perception (Swanstrom, Weissmann 2005, p. 9). In the case of communal violence in Poso City, the political shift from authoritarian into democracy was considered a great contributor to enhancing people's perception of economic and political discrimination towards Moslems in the past, as well as the present and future discrimination towards Christians (Sukma, 2005, p. 13). As a result, the growing tension between Christians and Muslims escalated into communal violence in the city.

3. Research Method

This article is explanatory research, which generally aims to explain the relationship between two or more variables (Neuman, 2007, p. 15). The data collection technique used was a literature review through books, open access and reputable journals, official Indonesian government documents and reports, and other electronic sources essential to support the article's analysis. With this method, this article discusses the root causes of violent interreligious conflict between the Muslim and Christian communities in Poso City and its conflict resolution.

4. Results and Discussions: Reconciliation and Post-Poso Conflict

There would be no conflict that lasted forever, and the interreligious communal violence in Poso City could finally be settled. In this conflict, it seems that top-down settlement and grassroots

combinations were used to reconcile two conflicting parties involved in communal violence. Conflict resolution in Poso can be seen from initiatives carried out by various actors such as local community leaders, law enforcement, non-governmental institutions, media, women, and local and central government. All these initiatives were considered necessary since communal violence in Poso was a complex phenomenon; thus, various approaches were needed to reconcile conflicting parties. However, those initiatives must be seen more due to more coordination among the actors (Buchanan, 2011, p. 57).

4.1. Reconciling Two Conflicting Groups

After the first phase of communal violence broke in Poso city, the head of the local government set a series of meetings and created an assembly to discuss how to stop the conflict. Christian and Muslim representatives in one of the meetings signed a declaration to prevent further disturbance. The action taken could be said success to overcome the immediate cause[4] of conflict and stop the violence. However, since permissive causes of the conflict still exist, interreligious communal violence in Poso broke again for another phase. Besides, it seems the action taken at that time failed to prevent another outbreak due to a lack of participation from local community leaders because the success of early conflict management depends on work and a good relationship between community leaders and local government (Buchanan, 2011, p. 65). In addition, community leaders felt reluctant to control groups of people from outside Poso.

In conflict resolution for interreligious communal violence in Poso, women's involvement might not be as much as other actors. However, they played an essential role in promoting reconciliation and assisting the return of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) once Malino Declaration was signed. In addition to promoting reconciliation between conflicting parties, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and the media have worked together. Previously, the media negatively impacted conflict resolution in Poso because it only delivered one-sided news. The media finally worked with NGOs to contribute positively to the peace process between Christians and Moslems in Poso by promoting a campaign against the imposition of emergency status and disseminating an impactful peace image of the Malino Declaration process.

4.2. The Settlement of the Malino Declaration

The initiatives carried out by the central government and local community leaders could be pretty effective in stopping interreligious communal violence in Poso City. Malino Declaration, also known as Malino I, was signed as a result of this cooperation so that both parties could reconcile. It started when a prominent Christian leader named Pastor Tubondo came to Jakarta. He met Coordinating Minister of Political, Legal, and Security Affairs; Coordinating Minister of People's Welfare; and Minister of Defense to discuss and ask the central government to resolve interreligious communal violence in Poso.

The Coordinating Minister of People's Welfare at that time was Jusuf Kalla, from Sulawesi, who was highly respected in his hometown and had an outstanding network. He sent a team to assess the situation, choose people from each conflicting party to discuss with, and afterwards gave them three options, which were: let the conflicts continue, use security forces to take decisive action, and have the government facilitate the peace agreement (Buchanan, 2011, p.

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[4] Immediate causes of conflict refer to a particular action that triggers one party to use violence against another. Meanwhile, permissive causes of conflict refer more to a general context and condition usually related to socio, political, and economical that create potential conflict and the stage of the conflict. In other words, permissive causes of conflict are the same as the roots of the conflict (Sukma, 2005, p. 8).

59). The last option was chosen to resolve the conflict so that Jusuf Kalla hosted peace talks between Christians and Muslims.

Community leaders from each conflict were chosen to attend the Malino peace talks. There were 23 delegates (two of them were women) as representatives from the Christian community and 25 delegates (one of them was a woman) from the Muslim community. All of these delegates were community leaders, and once they were selected, peace talks were held in Malino City. The peace talks between Christians and Muslims finally could be concluded within three days, the final draft of the Malino Declaration was signed, and as a result, communal violence between Christians and Muslims was resolved. The role of community leaders from each party, especially religious leaders, were essential to resolve violent interreligious conflict because these leaders would be heard and followed by their community members.

However, although Malino Declaration had been signed, the implementation of this accord was considered unsuccessful. In addition to this, the conflict indeed had stopped. Still, there were 30 violations of the Malino Declaration, and another conflict occurred, which involved both Christians and Muslims, as well as incidents triggered by the security forces (Agus, 2007) who were sent to conflict areas to keep peace and security.

4.3. Trial of the Conflict Perpetrators

There was a demand for law enforcement since the early stage of interreligious communal violence in Poso City, so an agreement was made to sanction both conflicting parties whenever they attacked each other. Towards these demands, the government struggled to respond in the first place because of its lacking experience in dealing with complex interreligious communal violence. Afterwards, it started to maintain trials for conflict provocateurs or perpetrators.

It started with sentencing the perpetrators involved in the first phase or early stage of the Poso conflict, which are Herman Parimo and Agfar Patanga. The first was a Christian leader accused of mobilizing people in the first phase of the conflict, so he was convicted of 15 years imprisonment. The latter was a Muslim leader accused of provocation in the conflict's early stage, which sentenced him to six months imprisonment. Although sending the conflict perpetrator to trial was considered necessary, that trial provoked demonstrations from each perpetrator's supporters. It could not be strong enough to prevent the violence outbreak from the next phase of the conflict (Buchanan, 2011, p. 61). Therefore, when the next phase of the conflict happened, 90 persons were sent to trial and sentenced. In addition, three Christian men named Fabianus Tibo, Domingus Dasilva, and Marinus Riwu were accused of perpetrating violence during the Poso conflict, so they were sentenced to death and executed in 2006.

5. Conclusion

Interreligious communal violence in Poso City is considered one type of intrastate war or conflict. Differences in religious faith or beliefs might be seen as the cause of this interreligious communal violence in the first place. Nevertheless, the causes of the conflict in Poso were profoundly rooted and related to political and socio-economic factors. The failure to prevent this conflict from recurring should be considered as various actors were supposed to be involved in conflict resolution for communal violence. In this connection, it would be good to consider the critical role of religious community leaders in a peace talk between the conflicting parties since the Poso conflict was an interreligious communal violence. Moreover, it would also be necessary to set a robust legal framework to keep and maintain order so that the situation would not get worse and further violence could be deterred.

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