



Communication Patterns of Sundanese Ulama to Maintaining Religious Tolerance in West Java

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Article Information

Submitted May 3, 2024

Revision September 27, 2024

Accepted December 10, 2024

Published April 1, 2025

Abstract

The West Java is a province that is synonymous with a polite, courteous, and friendly society. Still, ironically, West Java is claimed to be a province that is considered intolerant in matters of communication between religious communities. Even though in West Java there are many religious organizations, there are ulama in various regions, but the label as an intolerant province is challenging to get rid of. This research uses qualitative research with phenomenological theory to determine the da'wah communication by Sundanese ulama in maintaining religious tolerance in West Java. The research results show that the ulama is little involved because the ulama is busy coaching the congregation, solving fiqh problems, and improving the practice of ritual worship. Even if there are ulama who are busy with tolerance activities, this is initiated by the government, which holds various ceremonial activities; the ulama themselves do not have the initiative to keep them. The formal activities most often carried out by the government and ulama include the socialization of Governor Regulations, Laws, guidance, and dialogue between religious communities. There are two types of mass organizations and ulama in implementing ummah harmony, namely mass organizations and ulama, which are strict and firm without compromise. There are mass organizations and ulama who are moderate and love pluralism.

Keywords: Communication pattern, religious tolerance, religion, ulama

Introduction

According to data from the Setara Institute (2009), 200 incidents of religious conflict violated religious freedom in 2009. One of the regions with the highest level of violations of religious freedom was West Java, with 57 cases of violations. Followed by DKI Jakarta with 38 instances, East Java with 23 cases, Banten with 10 cases, West Nusa Tenggara with nine instances, South Sumatra, Central Java, and Bali each with 8 cases, as well as South Sulawesi and East Nusa Tenggara each. Each has seven cases of violations.

Apart from the problem of religious conflict, Indonesia also faces the problem of intolerance, which can trigger conflict. According to research by the Wahid Foundation in collaboration with the Indonesian Survey Institute (LSI) in 2006, the level of abuse and acts of violence that have religious reasons or are carried out in the name of religion is very high in the Indonesian Islamic community (Suaedy, 2007). According to a survey conducted on 1,520 respondents in 34 provinces, as many as 59.9 percent of Muslims in Indonesia expressed antipathy

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towards other religious communities, such as Christians and Confucians (Hakim, 2016).

According to a 2020 survey conducted by the Research and Development Center for Religious Community Guidance and Religious Services of the Ministry of Religion, West Java is in third place above West Sumatra and Aceh regarding religious harmony, scoring 68.5 (Batee, 2021). Meanwhile, according to Prabowo, in 2019, Indonesia's overall percentage of religious harmony was 73.83. Then, in 2021, the Religious Harmony Index (KUB) value fell to 72.39, even though this data shows an increase of around 4.93 points compared to the previous year (Ayu, 2021).

Almost all conflicts in Indonesia are caused by religion. According to Muhammad (2011), religion always has two different sides. On the one hand, it provides positive teachings and is often used as a moral guide and life value. Still, on the other hand, religion is also frequently the cause of disputes between people with different understandings or views. Effendi (1978) also stated that religion teaches its followers to spread and maintain peace, unity, and harmony. But sometimes, in other situations, religion can also be a source of conflict and trigger war. As with human history in religion, religion is often seen as a trigger for conflict between humans. O'Dea (1987); Ghozali et al. (2023) said that religion frequently triggers human attitudes that are less tolerant and strengthens conflicts based on differences.

Conflicts between adherents of different religions have frequently arisen from wars throughout human history that were started by disputes over religion or worship. According to Kafrawi (in Sanusi, 1999), the missions of individual religions are the root cause of bad relations between religious

communities. In addition, some immigrants engage in religious and cultural exchanges with the host community (Asy'ari, 1993). There are also misconceptions, biases, and antagonistic attitudes (Mulyadi, 2014).

Indonesia is a country that has diversity. Diversity is not only limited to culture but also includes religion. This diversity can be a wealth but also a potential for horizontal conflict. Nasikun (2004) revealed that conflicts originating from differences in interests start with various groups in society. Of course, uniting a harmonious life among people with diverse cultural and religious backgrounds is a difficult challenge because of these cultural differences. Therefore, conflict can arise if good relations between groups are not maintained well (Zakiyah, 2016).

However, despite these many concerns, there is still great hope for living in harmony side by side again among fellow believers and in diverse cultures. In several regions of Indonesia, there is evidence that different religions can live in harmony. And this is different from several previous views and findings. Yuliani et al. (2016) emphasized that there are ethnic groups that can live peacefully side by side, namely the Balinese and Sasak ethnic groups. These two ethnic groups can understand and respect each other and live in harmony despite their religious differences.

Harmony occurs because there is an attitude of openness among citizens, an attitude of empathy, an attitude of mutual support, each citizen has positive thoughts toward other people, there is a common vision in each citizen, and there is a strong emotional bond that has existed for a long time between Muslim and non-Muslim citizens. -Muslims (Pradipta et al., 2014). According to Sari et al. (2019),

communication plays a key role in creating harmony so that harmony can be achieved through communication. As can be seen from the level of tolerance between religious communities in the *Kebangsaan Wonorejo Village, Situbondo*, good communication between religious communities can minimize the potential for conflict when differences of opinion occur. When communicating, they want each other to achieve the same goal to transcend their differences in background. Ultimately, they can continue their religious activities without worrying about other people's religious activities (Susianto, 2019) in Manado, which has a good tolerance level between people of different religions. They can care for differences by carrying out social exchanges. The communication carried out by this tribe proved to be quite effective because it led to open minds and, ultimately, mutual acceptance of each other. It is associative communication between groups in Manado (Sari, 2018).

These are some examples and evidence of the importance of communication, especially in a cross-cultural context, in reducing and resolving conflict. It is because we try to understand other people's cultures when communicating. In this communication, the perpetrators try to create a sense of unity in meeting everyone's needs. Thus, this communication creates the comfort that every individual desires (Karim, 2015).

Tamburian (2018) stated similarly that cross-cultural communication can help resolve conflict problems caused by religious differences currently faced by humanity. Multicultural communication can also occur through television programs produced in Indonesia, which faces many foreign cultural programs entering it (Muntadliroh, 2018).

These are the phenomena that are the basis of this research. Even though there is a lot of information about religious conflicts and increasing levels of intolerance, there are areas that show differences. Several regions show how harmony between religious communities is maintained. By applying a phenomenological approach, this study aims to explore the experiences of Islamic religious figures in West Java in promoting peace between religious communities. West Java, which is located close to Jakarta, often hosts activities on a national and international scale. This province is steeped in Sundanese culture, which prioritizes harmony, but survey results show a high level of religious intolerance in West Java.

It is hoped that the results of this research can provide benefits in resolving problems between religious communities, especially in West Java, which experiences an increase every year, so that intolerance between religious communities can be eliminated. Tolerance will once again flourish in the Sundanese community.

Method

This qualitative research uses phenomenological methods to understand the experiences of Sundanese *ulama* in implementing religious tolerance in West Java. According to Raco and Tanod (2012), the experiences reported by these informants can be ascertained as truly experienced experiences. Direct experience has its dynamics, and each experience carries a unique essential meaning. In this research, the phenomenological method used is Edmund Husserl's phenomenology.

This research uses three data collection techniques: First, conducting in-depth

interviews. In the interview process, the researcher took an open approach, hoping the informant could provide as much detailed information as possible. Second, participation in observational observation. Researchers observed the activities carried out by the *ulama*. We observed the interaction of *ulama* with the surrounding community, the collaboration of *ulama* with other religious figures, the communication style of *ulama*, and the materials and language used in communicating. Third, we conduct documents to complete information that cannot be obtained from interviews and observations. Data sources for documentation studies can come from documents on religious harmony activities carried out by *ulama*, archives, and notes from *ulama* in carrying out religious harmony in West Java so that the data collected can complement each other.

The informants for this research are Sundanese *ulama*, who live and are active in the West Java area, including those involved in various religious organizations such as NU, Persis, Muhammadiyah, Mathlul Anwar, and PUI (Islamic Community Unity). We use a purposive sampling technique with the snowball method. Informants were selected based on specific criteria, namely Sundanese *ulama*, who have experience implementing and teaching about religious harmony in West Java.

In this research, there are several steps in analyzing data, as mentioned by Cresswell (2010): Grouping data according to research objectives; Finding and marking significant data as a result of research findings; Describing data that is considered essential and appropriate to the research objectives; Interpret data; Writing data into research reports in narrative form; Analyze data by

referring to concepts, theories, and several relevant references.

This research utilizes phenomenological theory. According to Stanley and Deetz (Littlejohn and Karen, 2009), phenomenological theory has three assumptions. The first is that knowledge can be obtained from the experiences experienced in every event. Second, a person connected to the surrounding environment, including objects, will find meaning in it. Third, language functions as a vehicle to convey meaning so that when someone communicates with the surrounding environment through language, they will give meaning to the surrounding environment.

The phenomenological theory is used in this research to assist researchers in analyzing the experiences of Sundanese *ulama* when interacting with non-Muslim communities and practicing religious harmony. This way, their expertise in creating religious harmony in West Java can be known.

Result

According to information obtained from informants regarding the experience of West Javanese *ulama* in promoting religious harmony, it was revealed that the *ulama* had varied experiences. Several interesting and unique experiences from the *ulama* are worthy of being taken as a reference. Still, some are material for introspection to evaluate and take follow-up action.

The majority of the *ulama* who are sources of information in this research have tried to achieve peace with fellow Muslims who come from different religious organizations, as well as with non-Muslims who have different beliefs.

The number of Sundanese *ulama* involved in practicing harmony is quite limited. It is because the *ulama* has heavy responsibilities in society. The focus is not only on maintaining harmony between religious communities and resolving conflicts but also on a lot of work that must be done in matters of ritual worship. Only a few Sundanese *ulama* are involved in religious harmony, as can be seen from the number of *ulama* participating in these activities from each representative of social organizations.

In implementing harmony, government support is critical. Especially in formulating policies, programs, and activities such as inter-religious dialogue, as well as holding meetings between religious communities, both when conflict occurs and in sharing views on understanding and teachings between religions, it is crucial to create mutual understanding and respect, so that harmony can be realized between them.

Then, the practice of harmony among Sundanese *ulama* is quite diverse and can even be grouped into fanatical, moderate, and apathetic harmony practices. There are religious figures and community organizations who are very ardent about their beliefs and teachings, so they are steadfast and harsh in implementing these beliefs and appear intolerant of other people. If there are differences in beliefs, this group does not hesitate to consider them not part of them and requires them to adhere to their respective beliefs.

Then, there is the moderate group, which tends to cooperate more in maintaining peace. This group adheres to the principle that my religion and yours are yours. Please don't be too concerned about the actions of people from other religions as long as they

don't interfere with the practice of worship. Lastly, a group tends to be indifferent to different religions. This group does not want other teachings or schools of thought around it. They will enable the group to do anything; the most important thing is to feel happy and free to carry out their worship and beliefs.

There is an interesting story about Sundanese *ulama*, where some of them always carry out activities together with non-Muslims. Many also frequently visit and assist each other. For example, when there are road repairs, public facilities are repaired, or they have excess sustenance for food, they are happy to share food. When they experience problems and illness, they do not hesitate to help each other reduce burdens.

In carrying out this joint activity, there will be interactions between us who were previously less open and more open; those who were previously less familiar will become more familiar, and when we are familiar, we will be more active in communicating. In addition, these scholars have a strong Sundanese background with some *hade ka semah* culture (polite and friendly to guests), which makes guests feel at home and comfortable staying with them.

Then, other Sundanese clerics have Islamic boarding schools. Next to the Islamic boarding school, a church often carries out joint activities in various communities. Usually, non-Muslims are also involved in religious events.

Another experience carried out by Sundanese *ulama* was holding an open dialogue, which was attended by *ulama* from various community organizations and invited by Christians and religious groups. This activity is held when differences can cause

significant. conflict and is held by the district, city, and West Java Province governments.

Dialogue between religious communities is carried out to calm conflicts and find fair solutions for all parties, maintaining harmony and peace.

Another example of the practice or implementation of religious harmony occurs when there are inter-religious marriages in West Java society, such as marriages between Muslims and Christians. They respect and appreciate each other, thus creating an atmosphere of harmony between them. Interfaith marriages are common in several West Java areas, such as Bandung, Bekasi, Kuningan, and Cianjur. It is an example of how, in West Java, there are areas that are examples of peaceful life between religious communities.

Ulama always reminds prospective bridal couples, families, and society to maintain family harmony because family harmony can influence harmony in the community.

Discussion

Minimal *Ulama* Participation and Initiative

Few Sundanese *ulama* are involved in religious harmony, as can be seen from the number of *ulama* participating in these activities from each representative of social organizations. Therefore, it needs government support. Especially in formulating policies, programs, and activities such as inter-religious dialogue and holding meetings between religious communities, when conflict occurs and when sharing views on understanding and teachings between religions. It is crucial to create mutual understanding and respect to be harmonious.

Guidelines for implementing religious harmony have been established in the Joint Regulation of the Minister of Religion and the Minister of Home Affairs Number 9 of 2006 concerning procedures for implementing regional heads/deputy regional heads in maintaining religious harmony, strengthening religious harmony, and building places of worship. So, there is no longer any reason to refuse religious harmony.

Article 2 states that maintaining religious harmony is a joint responsibility of religious communities, regional governments, and the government. Then, in Article 3 (1), maintaining religious harmony in the province is the duty and obligation of the governor. The head of the regional office of the provincial religious department supports the duties and responsibilities of the governor.

This regulation also states that orders to create harmony must be implemented not only at the district level but also at the sub-district level. In article 6, paragraph 3, it is explained that the tasks referred to in paragraph (1), letters a and letter c, will be carried out by the sub-district head in the sub-district area and by the village head/ head through the sub-district head in the sub-district/ village area.

Regarding this rule, Sundanese *ulama* has experience implementing inter-religious harmony, but unfortunately, few *ulamas* are involved. However, the results of research conducted by Ujang Hidayatulah (2019); (Muzaki, 2015) show that the role and influence of *ulama* in maintaining harmony in religious life is very significant because *ulama* can be accepted and trusted by society.

Complex, Moderate, and Apathetic Approaches

Harmony among Sundanese *ulama* is quite diverse and can even be grouped into fanatical, moderate, and apathetic harmony practices. There are advantages and disadvantages to these three approaches. A multicultural approach is used to create religious harmony. It is to avoid absolute, subjective, and exclusive attitudes in religion (Jufri, 2019).

Organizing Activities Together

There is an interesting story about Sundanese *ulama*, where some of them always carry out activities together with non-Muslims. Many also frequently visit and assist each other. For example, when there are road repairs, public facilities are repaired, or they have excess sustenance for food, they are happy to share food. When they experience problems and illness, they do not hesitate to help each other reduce burdens.

By maximizing communication, the strategy of holding joint activities will create harmony. Communication is essential in interaction (Sari et al., 2019). Communication can also be the right way to unite or converge. Maintaining harmony between citizens is dominated by convergence rather than divergence strategies rather than expressing differences between identities in public spaces (Eko and Putranto, 2019).

Then, other Sundanese clerics have Islamic boarding schools. Next to the Islamic boarding school is a church, which often carries out joint activities in various activities in the community. Usually, non-Muslims are also involved in religious events.

The actions of this *ulama* are under research by Marpuah (2019), which states

that to maintain harmony, it is crucial for Muslims and non-Muslims to often work together in building houses or places of worship. This can be done by strengthening harmony in the KUA, the Taklim Council, Friday sermons, and religious instructors, as well as building harmony when holding PHBI (Commemoration of Islamic Holidays) and PHBN (National Holiday Commemoration) events such as commemorating August 17 and its kind.

Another term for this joint activity is an integrative approach. This integrative approach focuses on cross-cultural understanding, especially tolerance, empathy, and positive thinking (Srikandi et al., 2019). Along with the feeling of brotherhood with fellow Sundanese people, the strength of togetherness also increases.

Having an Open Dialogue

Dialogue between religious communities is carried out to calm conflicts and find fair solutions for all parties, maintaining harmony and peace. According to Sari et al. (2019), interfaith communication can help strengthen understanding between religious communities to prevent misunderstandings, conflicts, or even divisions between them.

Discussions between religious communities must begin with the first step from the *ulama* and community leaders to open up and find the right solution to dealing with conflicts. Bahfiarti (2019) said that intercultural communication must be carried out with leaders with an open mind, empathy, and the same attitude. This conversation can be held in person or via online media. In Indonesia, the number of internet users continues to increase from time to time, which means that access to information and

communication can be done anytime and anywhere. The type of conversation can be official and informal, even in discussions about how important it is to maintain family relationships between religious communities (Masmuddin, 2017).

According to Hakis (2015), Mahadi (2013), and Pangestu (2023), communicators such as *ulama* and community leaders play an important role in maintaining religious harmony. They need to use language that does not trigger conflict and can give the message to the congregation to remain calm when there are differences of opinion. Religionists are also expected to be able to remind their congregation not to be easily influenced by issues whose source is unclear, as well as order their congregation not to respond to issues whose truth is uncertain (Masmuddin, 2017).

Ulama and community leaders can also remind their congregations that they share the same culture and history, ancestral values originating from the same ethos, and use the same language. This equality supports increasingly harmonious inter-ethnic relations (Makmur et al., 2019). When communicating with followers of other religions, *ulama* should not generalize the way they communicate with students. Usually, the *ulama* communicates with the students with symmetrical messages, but the *ulama* also stands out in this communication (Utami, 2018).

Different Religion Marriages

The emergence of religious harmony due to marriages of different religions was also found in Marpuah (2019), that religious harmony occurs because there are people from other faiths in one house and

one organization; there are also different religions. Syatriadin's research results (2019) show that interfaith marriages have many obstacles in Indonesia. Apart from having difficulty obtaining legal recognition, one of the partners often returns to their original religion after marriage.

Conclusion

The majority of Sundanese *ulama* who promote religious harmony is small because many are busy coaching the congregation, solving fiqh problems, and carrying out ritual worship. If the *ulama* is involved in tolerance activities, this may be because the activity was initiated by the government that held it. If the *ulama* themselves lack the effort to maintain it, the activities most frequently carried out are outreach regarding governor regulations, laws, community development (*ummah*), and dialogue between religious communities. There are three approaches people use in mass organizations and *ulama* to implement religious harmony: those who are firm without compromise, those who are moderate and accept pluralism, and those who are apathetic.

Sundanese *ulama* and community organizations in West Java have implemented a harmonious life because they have lived in the same area for a long time with the strength of language and culture that unites them, namely Sundanese.

Some differences triggered conflict, but they managed to resolve it through open dialogue involving the various elements. However, some experiences involve building harmony between people of different beliefs, such as between a Muslim and a Christian, based on the marriage bond. As

respected community figures, *ulama* should be leaders and examples for their followers in maintaining peace between religious communities. Don't ignore the issue of harmony because the potential for conflict caused by religion continues to increase. It is an agenda that every *ulama* and community organization must implement.

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