

Muslim-Christian Conflict and the Rise of *Laskar Jihad*: Tracing Islamophobia in Central Sulawesi – Indonesia

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Abstract

This anthropological research investigates Muslim-Christian conflict and the rise of *Laskar Jihad* that affects Islamophobia in Central Sulawesi. Islamophobia appeared on the global political surface after the 9/11 tragedy, taking the world's attention to Muslim society. However, we cannot argue that, in recent decades, the media have depicted Muslim culture as backward, uneducated, bad, radical, terrorist, or with all negative images. Even so, Islam is often associated as a religion that supports violence and war. These illustrations depict Islamophobia as a global political threat. However, Islamophobia occurs not only in Western countries, but also in Indonesia, the country with the largest Muslim population in the world. The study focuses primarily on the island of Sulawesi, where the rise of *Laskar Jihad* organizations, Muslim-Christian conflict, violent extremism, and Islamophobia are interrelated. Data collection was also taken from online media that can be understood as digital anthropology. In addition, this research paper examines the theory of prejudice. Prejudice is discussed based on facts, but also from perceptions, actions, language, symbols, and

the media, to individuals or groups. The research findings show that the first element of Islamophobia in Central Sulawesi is associated with the Muslim-Christian dispute in the late 1990s. Islamophobia's second element relates to the transnational Islamic movement and the rise of Laskar Jihad after reformation.

Keywords: Islamophobia, Central Sulawesi, Media, Muslim-Christian Conflict

A. INTRODUCTION

Over the last 20 years, the Muslim world has become a wide-ranging scholarly discussion for Islamic studies, particularly the 9/11 tragedy inflicted by a militant and fundamentalist Muslim from Afghanistan, Osama Bin Laden. This tragedy globally transformed the "face of Islam" since Osama Bin Laden was identified as the Al-Qaeda pioneer leading a terrorist network targeting global peace. After the rise of Wahhabism in Eastern and Western countries, Islam has been associated as a conservative religion, anti-liberalism and secularism.

Islam is a religion in which the majority of adherents live in developing and ex-colonial countries. Islam has a rather clear political orientation (Brown & Esposito, 2002; Esposito, 2015; Firestone, 2002). On the other hand, this religion is often viewed as a militant religion against slavery and colonization. It's a religion for the African and Asian people of America. Following the tragedy of the World Trade Center, this perception was further strengthened by the emergence of various acts of terrorism in Western countries, in particular America and Europe (Haddad & Khashan, 2002).

The media plays a pivotal role in the incorporation of Islam into fundamentalist extremism triggering Islamophobia in Western countries. Islamophobia generates resistance from fundamentalist and extremist organizations which support “jihad” throughout the fight against Western countries (Bonner, 2006a, 2006b; Firestone, 2002). Islamophobia triggers actions of hate and prejudice against Muslims living in Western countries. On the other hand, Muslims themselves have perceptions of Western countries and perceptions of Western society’s reaction, which usually blacklists Islam in any case of terrorism. While the issue of violence committed by Jews in Palestine, the Rohingya genocide committed by Buddhist people in Myanmar, genocides committed by Hindus in India, or acts of terror in a mosque by a Christian in New Zealand, as well as many other examples of religious violence incidents by non-Muslims, have never been labelled by media as a terrorist acts (Springer, 2009).

Many attacks against humanity today are not even claimed to be acts of terrorism when the actors are not Muslims. In general, Western media present Islam as a religion of terrorism arising from Islamophobia. Islamophobia, or anti-Islam, is anti-Semitism. Islamophobia here means “an exaggerated, irrational fear, hatred and hostility towards Islam and Muslims, perpetuated by negative stereotypes resulting in discrimination and marginalization of Muslim society from civic, social and political life” (Bunglawala, 2014). Both Islamophobia and anti-Semitism have an influence on the issue of bigotry and the concept of human rights. “Islamophobia”, as Dalia Mogahed defines it, is “anti-Muslim bigotry and discrimination based on an irrational hatred

and fear of Islam". Nearly 80% of the media coverage about Islam is negative, portraying Muslims as more dangerous than countries armed with nuclear weapons, societal drug addiction, or rampant diseases such as cancer."

Indonesia is one of the case studies in which the Muslim majority population is witnessing violent extremism as a result of Islamophobia today. One of the signs of Islamophobia among Muslims is the clash between, for example, Islamic sects battling each other; the clash between Wahabi and Syiah, Sunni and Salafi, Ahmadiyah, and others. But what triggers conflicts among Muslims today are Islamic groups that promote *jihad* and kill non-Muslims in the name of Islam in acts of terrorism (Nurish, 2019a).

The problem of religious radicalism in Indonesia applies to the island of Sulawesi as an example of this study, where the concealed story of violence was intense. In this island, the history of Islamic radicalism and terrorism is important to study where Muslim-Christian conflict has been very tense (Adam & Malkan, 2017; Alganih, 2016). Islamophobia has taken place within both Christian and Muslim communities. This suggests that the signs of Islamophobia that exist in Indonesian society are linked to religious "radicalism" and violent extremism in Sulawesi.

Based on prior research, most cases of Islamophobia arise in non-Muslim or Western countries. The novelty of this research in comparison to previous study demonstrates that the phenomenon of Islamophobia in the local perspective of Central Sulawesi stems from the problem of Muslim-Christian conflict. However, it is rarely viewed that Islamophobia can be a recent concept in a Muslim country such as Indonesia. The aim

of this study is, therefore, to examine some crucial questions: what causes Islamophobia in Indonesian cases; how does religious life in Central Sulawesi affect Islamophobia? And to what degree is the nexus of Islamophobia interlinked with terrorism in the context of Indonesia? Islamophobia in Central Sulawesi is triggered by local problems such as land disputes and ethnic conflicts, rather than geopolitical and ideological issues as in Western countries. This study's findings make a significant academic contribution to the study of Islam and politics from an anthropological perspective. Finally, the academic contribution in this research demonstrates how the portrait of Islamic society in contemporary Indonesia is undergoing social, cultural, and geopolitical changes that are also influenced by global media, particularly the relationship between Islam and Christianity.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Prejudice

In digital life or cyberspace, types of media that play a significant role in our everyday lives present bias and stereotyping addressed to religious groups. In the social system, discrimination is geared against persons or groups that may have an impact on conflict. However, in public space, Chelini-Pont has a fascinating viewpoint on the theory of religious discrimination. According to him, religion in public space is very possible in the middle of majority-minority relationships that will create stereotypes resulting in acts of intolerance (Chelini-Pont, 2013). Prejudice, by its very nature, also has an effect on stereotyping and social tension through

the distinction between in-group and out-group social classes. In the case of Central Sulawesi, the phenomenon of Islamophobia over the last two decades has been linked to religious intolerance, radicalism, and violent extremism.

The prejudice theory has various levels and stages in social psychology, from the person, group, to the institutional level. Prejudice is a behavior and conduct that leads to discrimination, social antagonism, stereotyping, and the culmination of social distance between persons or groups (Augostinous, M. & Reynolds, 2001). Prejudice is a negative-oriented symptom in social science that is directed toward people or communities that may not support each other and this typically occurs because of misinformation. One of the causes of discrimination is that there might be a lack of open contact or discussion as a result of discrimination. Prejudice is discussed based on facts, but also from perceptions, actions, language, symbols, and media, towards individuals or groups. On the other hand, discrimination is a psychological process of expressing emotions of acceptance-rejection, conviction-not conviction, or likes and dislikes in social systems aimed at persons or classes. Typically, prejudice and related terms refer to negative attitudes or behavior towards a person because of his or her membership in a particular group (Augostinous, M. & Reynolds, 2001).

2. Political Clash between West and East

A number of studies on Islamophobia have been widely understood as religious harassment as a response to violent extremism addressed towards the Muslim population living in Western countries (Allen, 2013; Bazian, 2018; Kowalski,

2016; Rana, 2007; Saeed, 2007). Hate speeches, political and social discrimination, negative labeling, and prejudice comprise the psychological, social, and political expressions of Islamophobia. However, this attitude mostly happens in Western countries where Muslim society is considered a minority group. Islamophobia in this context is a concept that is deeply embedded in Western culture, language, and society (Sardar *et al.*, 2019).

Islam is represented by the global phenomenon of Islamophobia as a violent religion that supports terrorism that threatens Western countries. According to Karen Armstrong, the issue of violent extremism or terrorism addressed to Islam is connected between liberalism (Western) and fundamentalism (Arab). Even though ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) is rooted in Wahhabism, as a result of the proliferation of pro-Islamic radicalism and violent extremist groups, Europe has also contributed to the birth of ISIS, including Islamophobia. Karen Armstrong argued that because of the act of Western politics that scapegoats Muslims, the phenomenon of Islamophobia is fertile. Karen Armstrong said the birth of extremism, including ISIS, was due to the Western world's interference and support.

In short, Islamophobia is a symptom of the clash between Eastern and Western civilizations in the global context, according to Armstrong, which cannot be rooted only to Muslims, themselves, but also Western power issues in the treatment of Muslims, and it is proven when we search for conflicts and wars in the countries of the Middle East (Armstrong, 2015). The problem of Islamophobia, however, is not a matter of Islam, but rather deals with global political problems between the Middle East and the West.

C. METHOD

This qualitative research contains an anthropological approach where the author conducted fieldwork in Central Sulawesi. Data collection was also taken from online media that can be understood as digital anthropology (Miller, Daniel, Horst, 2012). While anthropological analyses look more at the reality of everyday social lives, this does not mean that the data sources behind photographs, pictures, newspapers, internet, and other virtual lives should not be investigated through digital models of anthropological methodology (Mark, 2002a). The role of the Internet and the modern world cannot be separated from daily life in this digital age. Researchers may focus on particular populations in anthropological studies focused on digital methods by using knowledge from the internet or virtual life as one of the research resources (Postill, 2011). For ethnographers, the internet involves many different technologies, practices and contexts: this is not one thing, and our research covers a variety of contexts (Postill, 2011: 21; Miller and Slater 2000: 3). As one of the causes of the rise of Islamophobia, this study focuses on the 'mainstream framing' of extremist and 'jihadist' groups. Videos, images / memes, internet news, blogs, and other visual evidence that can enrich the process of media anthropology research comprise the data analysis of this report (Dicks, Bella and Mason & Al, 2005).

D. MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN CONFLICTS IN CENTRAL SULAWESI

Central Sulawesi consists of 61,841.29 square kilometers with a population of about 3,222,241 inhabitants. There

are about 15 different ethnic groups and 22 different tribal languages in Central Sulawesi consisting of 12 regiments: Banggai Kepulauan, Banggai, Morowali, Poso, Donggala, Tolitoli, Buol, Parigi Moutong, Tojo Una-una, Sigi, Bangga Laut, Morowali North, and Palu (BPS, 2020).

Geographically, coastal and hilly areas that produce agricultural products such as cloves, coconuts, shallots, corn, and other crops are included in these regions. Central Sulawesi also produces marine products, especially fish and shrimp, in addition to producing agricultural crops. It has developed plantations such as oil palm and coconut and forms of mining as natural wealth for agricultural and marine products. There are 89,424 enterprises, both small- and large-scale enterprises, in the formal sector. Central Sulawesi is known as an island with a tourism industry because of its rich nature. The majority of the population on this island is Muslim.

Table 1.

(Central Bureau of Statistic, 2020)

Religions	Percentage of Population
Islam	77.72%
Christianity	16.89%
Hinduism	3.78%
Catholic	0.82%
Indigenous Beliefs	0.42%
Buddhism	0.15%
Unknown	0.02%
Confucius	0.01%
Others	0.10%

Although Islam entered this area in the 17th century, numerous places of worship and religious temples marked religious diversity. There are approximately 8,257 mosques, 2,127 Protestant churches, 235 Hindu temples, 222 Catholic churches, and 22 Buddhist temples. Though Islam is the predominant religion, this indicates that there are other current minority religions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, etc. The history of religious life in Central Sulawesi was well known by Albertus Christiaan Kruyt (1869-1949), a Dutch missionary. During his missionary assignment, before discovering the theory of animism and dynamism published in his book entitled (*Het Animism in den Indischen Archipel*, 1906), Kruyt found an ideal approach for religious classification of society based on cultural and ethnic categories. The most conflicting view for contemporary anthropologists is that Kruyt clarified animism as a primitive social belief system that was not “civilized” so it had to be converted to Christianity.

“Because of its modern paradigm biases, this theory of animism has been questioned by scholarship on the sociology and anthropology of religions. Whether the theory of animism is valid or not, in fact this offers grounds for the “civilization” project stating that primitive societies with animist beliefs are not civilized. They need to be civilized by converting modern religions (more specifically monotheistic religions)” (Adam, 2019).

Kruyt distinguished Muslim groups living in coastal areas and highlands and practicing Islam on the basis of animistic beliefs or syncretic Islam (Schrauwers, 2000). Since the colonial era, the relationship between Islam and

Christianity in Central Sulawesi began to endure political and religious tension. The strain was marked by the Indonesian general election in 1955 when the majority of Muslims supported the Islamic party at 49 percent, while the Protestant and Catholic parties reached about 27 percent and secular parties such as the Indonesian National Party, the Islam Sarikat Party, and the Indonesian Communist Party only reached 10 per cent (Schrauwens, 2000). Later, the Islamic group was very powerful in Central Sulawesi, strengthening the Darul Islam / Indonesian Islamic Army (DI/TII) movement to reinforce and articulate anti-Christianity in the region.

One of the core values of Darul Islam / Indonesian Islamic Army (DI/TII) was anti-colonialism, which brought the Christian mission to Central Sulawesi. The lack of support for secular groups contributed to the rise of an Islamic country that rebelled against the Indonesian government. "The brand of secular nationalism on which Sukarno had based the republic earned little support in Sulawesi. The flow, or religious foundations, seem much more pronounced in Sulawesi than in Java, where the word originated" (Schrauwens, 2000).

Evidently, the rivalry between Christianity and Islam did not end when the 1955 elections were held, and it continued in the Indonesian mass killing tragedy of 1965, which transferred control to the New Order with Darul Islam paralyzed by Suharto. Traces of friction between Islam and Christianity reemerged after Suharto's leadership failed in the late 1990s (Nurish, 2021). While there are many existing local religions (indigenous beliefs), religious life in Central Sulawesi has been successfully dominated by Islam and Christianity since the late 18th century. Christian

missions and Islamization brought about social, cultural and theological changes in society before the religious and political confrontation between Islam and Christianity began. In addition to this dispute in Poso, “radical” Islamic groups and terrorist networks are mushrooming in this region.

Islam in Central Sulawesi is under the control and position of Hadramaut, who has made progress in Islamic education (Wekke, 2018). The evolution of Islam there was inspired by Habib Idrus Bin Salim Al Jufri, the charismatic founder of Islam in Palu, who arrived there in 1930, while Islam had already been there since the 17th century under the influence of King Gowa, South Sulawesi. The most striking achievement of these Hadramaut refugees was in the field of Islamic education combined with local culture. Habib Idrus Bin Salim Al-Jufri had a significant role to play in the acculturation of Arabic and the Kaili ethnic groups of Palu. Islam grew very quickly, even before Habib Idrus Bin Salim Al Jufri founded an Islamic academy, Al Khairat Foundation (Khairil, 2018). Via Islamic education paired with local wisdom, Islam was adopted by the Kaili ethnic group, which had traditionally followed animistic values.

“Habib Idrus, who came as a spreader of Islam, even approached traditional leaders or local citizens to make Syria of Islam and carry out his educational mission in the land of Kaili. The goal of the early arrival is indeed to develop the science of religion into the Kaili culture” (Khairil, 2018).

In addition to the prosperous transition of the Kaili ethnic community to Islam, the people of Hadramaut also

managed to dominate both the trading field and the coconut plantations. Habib Idrus successfully established Al-Khairat, an Islamic school, for the Kaili ethnic community. Habib Idrus played an important part in teaching Islam with a local approach "In the area of da'wah, even though at that time the people living in the highlands still followed the habits of their ancestors, which defied the teachings of Islam, Sayyid Idrus transmitted Islamic messages with a syncretic approach. His approach in the implementation of Shari'a laws among the Muslim communities of Palu Valley was far from extreme" (Wekke, 2018).

This syncretic Islam between the 17th and the late 19th century was very high in the heterodox style of the Hindu-Buddhist elements in the Archipelago system of belief (M. C. Ricklefs, 2001a). In Java they are referred to as *abangan* (M. Ricklefs, 2006; M. C. Ricklefs, 2001b, 2012, 2014). In Sulawesi, Hinduism was inspired by the Balinese. During the Dutch colonial era, some Balinese were expelled to Central Sulawesi because they were considered against the Dutch government as a result of the Dutch expulsion. The Balinese spread Hinduism, although the numbers were not very large compared to Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism. As Islamic education in Central Sulawesi grew more and more in the 1930s, disputes over religious identity started to emerge. This is because the Dutch government restricted the propagation of Islam. Due to the tightly restricted spread of Islamic education in the Dutch colonial era, Habib Idrus received further support for the establishment of Islamic schools in Central Sulawesi. In order to free the Kaili ethnic groups from the problem of illiteracy, Habib Idrus founded an Islamic school.

“Addressing broad circles, the madrasah Alkhairats al-Islamiyah was open to the public and did not discriminate against the status of their students, unlike schools established by the Dutch whose students come from wealthier, richer and some circles” (Azra, 2015; Mahid *et al.*, 2018).

In addition to religious identity disputes, political tension between proponents of Habib Idrus, the Dutch government, and Christian missionaries was connected to natural capital. The Dutch Government monopolized the planting of products such as spices and coffee. This made the followers of Hadrami and Habib Idrus participate in the struggle against the Dutch administration. Islamic literacy became an instrument in the protection of lower middle class citizens against the Dutch colonial rule in Central Sulawesi, while Christian missionaries in Central Sulawesi aimed at the middle and top classes, government families, aristocrats, and the owners of capital allowing them to obtain Dutch education in churches. Unlike the Kaili ethnic people, poor workers and poor fishermen were introduced to Islamic teaching by Habib Idrus, who successfully turned the Kaili ethnic people to Islam and sent their children to Al-Khairat school to learn Islam.

Reflecting on the history of Muslim-Christian relations in Central Sulawesi, as well as between the Dutch colonial government and Habib Idrus, the concept of “Islamophobia” in this area had already existed long before the regional presence of Daulah Islamiyah and the Indonesian Islamic Army (DI/TII). The political and religious opposition of the Muslims is clear historical evidence. Since the beginning of Christian and Islamic conflicts in Central Sulawesi, followers

from each religion displayed prejudice. This is also articulated in the Burch-Brown study on religion and prejudice. Religion, he believes, has the power to promote or reduce prejudicial behavior among its adherents (APS, 2017). Although the word Islamophobia was not common in the early twentieth century, anti-Islam in Central Sulawesi had already arisen among the Christian people since Dutch colonial rule.

D. ANTI-CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT AND THE RISE OF *LASKAR JIHAD*

During Suharto's fall in the late 1990s, Muslim-Christian relationships in Central Sulawesi experienced conflict over political authority, natural resources, and economic capital, which triggered a severe rivalry. The conflict between religious communities, particularly Muslims and Christians in Indonesia, began to divide between 1965 and 1966 (Nurish, 2020a). In the past, Islam adopted a kind of syncretism with the local culture in Central Sulawesi. The presence of archeological inscriptions and historical evidence is depicted in ancient mosques. In their interpretation of faith and local traditions, the significance of the inscriptions found in the field cannot be distinguished from the local culture (Burhanudin, 2016). However, the Islamic Movement steadily started to lose its local identity, which after 1965 had been turned into a nationalist and anti-Christian movement, used to protect local ethnic groups.

After the Suharto era, Islamic parties and organizations became more diverse in terms of political ideology. Influential religious movements are represented by Alkhairaat, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Darud Da'wah Wal-Irsyad (DDI), and

Muhammadiyah. In addition to these four, Salafi, Wahdah Islamiyah, Indonesian Islamic Da'wah Institute (LDII/*Lembaga Dakwah Islam Indonesia*), Jamaah Tabligh, and Indonesian Hizbut Tahrir (HTI/Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia) are also present including the Indonesian Islamic Da'wah Broad (DDII/*Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia*), Islamic Union (Persis/*Persatuan Islam*), and Ahmadiyah" (Ruhana, 2012).

According to Ruhana, the three Islamic Dakwah organizations in Central Sulawesi were dominated by Al Khairat, Darud Dakwah Al-Irshad (DDI), and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) with an orthodox and traditional pattern. While Muhammadiyah arrived in the 1930s, the presence of Muhammadiyah also affected conflicts between various Muslim organizations and communities. "The first Muhammadiyah entered Central Sulawesi in 1931 in Pagimana Luwuk, then entered Donggala in 1932, and on 6 March 1932 the Muhammadiyah branch was founded in Wani Pantai Barat Village." The controversy of Muhammadiyah's propaganda purifies Islamic teachings from superstitious, supernatural, heresy, and local beliefs considered to be misleading in Islamic teachings. "In the context of Central Sulawesi, Muhammadiyah entered Palu when Al Khairat had already approached local people. Therefore, the Tajdid (Renewal) brought by Muhammadiyah initially experienced resistance from local people" (Ruhana, 2012). In the case of Muhammadiyah, puritan groups are frequently associated with Salafi groups (Nurish, 2019b).

After going through numerous resistances in the past, the new Muhammadiyah movement in Central Sulawesi is well known and has successfully founded Islamic schools and

universities, and the political movement has started to grow. Islam in Central Sulawesi is no longer embodied by the spirits of Al Khairat, Darud Dakwah al-Irshad, and NU (*Nahdhatul Ulama*), but has evolved to become more dynamic, such as the reformist movements including Salafis and Wahabis, since reformation era. The reformist movement in Central Sulawesi was founded by religious organizations such as the “Ahlusunnah Wal Jama’ah Communication Forum.” This Islamic organization was established in Yogyakarta and proclaimed in Solo on 14 February 1998, a few months before the resignation of Suharto.

“*The Ahlussunnah Wal-Jama’ah* Communication Forum came to Palu following the religious conflict in Poso. Previously, there were already other Islamic movements in Palu, such as Jama’ah Tablig and Jama’ah Islamiyah initially based in Poso City, then in recent months it has only moved to Palu after the reconciliation process between parties involved in the conflict” (Ahmad, 2006).

The organization of the *Ahlusunnah wal Jamaah* Contact Forum in Central Sulawesi is well-known as the Salafi *Laskar Jihad* movement started by Ja’far Umar Thalib, a prominent figure in the Indonesian terrorist network after Abu Bakar Ba’asyir. Ja’far Umar Thalib studied Islam at Pesantren Al Irshad, Persis (Islamic Unity), after moving from *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) to Afghanistan and the Middle East to commit “jihad” (Bonner, 2006b; Millard, 2004; Springer, 2009). After returning to Indonesia, he built

pesantren, Ihya'us Sunah, in Yogyakarta, which is regarded as Salafi links and the seed of "radical" Islamic extremism.

The *Laskar Jihad* movement is spreading to rural areas for the "jihad" campaign. According to Hefner, *Laskar Jihad* is an anti-Christian militia organization (Nancy, 2019). The *Laskar Jihad* movement has a great influence in Palu, particularly those involved in the Muslim-Christian conflict in Poso. "On the contrary, *Laskar Jihad* received protests from other religious groups in Poso. Even among Islamic organizations there were serious protests about the presence of *Laskar Jihad* in conflict areas" (Ahmad, 2006). In addition to *Laskar Jihad* among the "extreme" Muslims in Poso, there is also a *Laskar Christ* movement among the "extreme" Christian community (Tempo, 2003). After the Muslim-Christian conflict ended in Poso from 1998 to 2001, *Laskar Jihad* and the loyal followers of Ja'far Umar Thalib moved to Palu.

The *Laskar Jihad* movement in Central Sulawesi supported violence against Christians. However, the tension between Muslims and Christians triggered a symptom of Islamophobia. The Muslim-Christian dispute in Poso-Central Sulawesi was one of the consequences and manifestations of Islamophobia in the sense of Indonesian society. Moreover, the emergence of radicalism following Indonesia's reformation led to the phenomenon of Islamophobia not only among Christians, but also within Muslim society. On the one side, Islamophobia promotes a negative image of Islam. Labeling and bigotry were targeted at Islam affecting discrimination against Muslim communities. Muslim radical groups with the spirit of "jihad" respond to Islamophobia with demonstrations (Farisi, 2019). The symptoms of Islamophobia are faced not

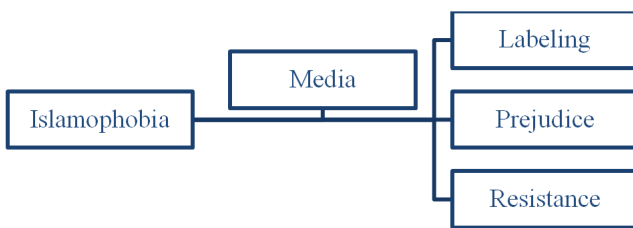
only by non-Muslims or Christians, but also by moderate Indonesian Muslims, who firmly condemn religious radicalism and violent extremism, which challenge religious freedom, religious pluralism, and democracy in the Indonesian context. “At this point, the term “religious radicalism” is synonymous with fundamentalism and anarchism aimed at promoting violent extremism and terrorism (Nurish, 2020b)”.

F. ISLAM, MEDIA-LABELING, AND PREJUDICE

George W. Bush, American president from 2001-2009, denounced Islamic terrorists and warned Muslim countries, including Indonesia, to battle terrorist networks as the world’s greatest enemy after the 9/11 attacks. The Bali bombing took place on 12 October 2002 and was followed by more terrorist attacks in many parts of the city of Jakarta. The Muslim community is becoming a global political threat to the West, particularly to fundamentalist groups that are anti-Christian, and anti-Western. According to Edward Said, Islam is still tied up with the understanding of the Western world. The aggressive history of Islamic political expansion in the West has had an influence on fear and Islamophobia. International media spotlights Islam with a negative rather than a positive image. Western scholars who research Islam usually approach this religion on the basis of ingenuity and ideological constructs defined by circumstances of anger and discrimination (E. W. Said, 1979). Islam and the West have undergone ideological and political conflicts for centuries (Iskandar & Rustom, 2010; E. Said & Ghazoul, 2007; E. W. Said, 1979; Turner & Said, 1981).

Islam has been described by the media as the religion of terrorism with the ambition of global political power to declare jihad, although fundamentalist Muslims view Western countries as an invasion of world society colonizing Eastern countries, oil exploitation, liberal politics, and so on. When it comes to labeling and racism faced in the Islamic world, Edward Said also listed “talking about Islam in the West today means talking about a lot of negative objects” (Said, 2002). On the other hand, exploiting the Islamic world has generated political concerns for the West about the spread of terrorism targeting Western countries and creating Islamophobia. Such racism has given rise to acts of violent extremism in response by fundamental and “radical” Muslim groups. While the definition of “extreme” is still biased, these radical Islamic groups seem to have more scope among reformist Muslims, such as Salafism and Wahabism (Nurish, 2019b).

Islamophobia interlinked



“In digital modernity, human lives are profoundly shaped and intertwined with smart and intelligent machines. This has led to an existential shift in the way relationships are forged, sustained, mobilized, and maintained. Computers, smart phones, Wi-Fi, broadband, fiber optics, apps, and social media, alongside game and virtual worlds, are part

of a vast connective tissue of communication and commerce that is central to human life and sociality” (Gibson *et al.*, 2018).

Today, we cannot hide from the internet, and virtual life (Bakardjieva, 2005; Gibson *et al.*, 2018; Mark, 2002b; Nunes, 2016). The technological power of the internet is an important factor in the dissemination of hoaxes, propaganda, and Islamophobia. In the context of Indonesian culture, the symptoms of Islamophobia in Central Sulawesi are represented by a feeling of fear of “radical” Muslim groups damaging places of worship, as well as hatred or hate speech directed at Christian people. However, local people in Central Sulawesi have a social and cultural approach to reacting to Muslim-Christian conflicts (Ilyas, 2014). Interfaith dialogue is one of the methods to tackle Islamophobia from the local background.

In the digital world, all aspects of life represent human needs in smart machines, including religious concerns. Religion and virtual life today are interlinked (Højsgaard & Warburg, 2005; Shelton *et al.*, 2012). Religious issues, such as all the representation of a Muslim community on the Internet, however, promote Islamophobia. The problem of Islamophobia on the rise is the result of emerging digital technology that offers misinformation on Islam. In the sense of American society, Islamophobia affects not only the politics of hatred of Muslim migrants as an ethnic group, but also racism (Werbner, 2005). “The politics of Islamophobia begin from the restriction of symbolic religious attributes. For example, in a case study from France, state harassment against the use of Arabic, similar to the experiences of

the Uighur Muslims of China and the Rohingya Muslims of Myanmar” (Sardar *et al.*, 2019).

Though Western labeling of Muslims is concerning, the discrimination posed to Muslims involves symbols such as beards, veils, *burqa/hijab*, as well as some attire and characteristics associated with “radical” and terrorist groups. Islam is described in the media as people’s religious symbols that describe actions and political orientation. Religious symbolism is the concept, feeling, or message conveyed in the form of pictures, gestures, or language as one of the messages to be conveyed. According to Clifford Geertz, religion is part of a set of symbols within the cultural framework of culture (Geertz, 1977, 2013; Parker, 1985). Australia provides another example of Islamophobia in the West. In this region, Muslims are seen as uneducated, weak, backward, and hostile to both Christian and Western worlds.

“Australian history shows that the media portrayed Muslims as aliens coming to Western countries as a “backward, uneducated, disrespectful, aggressive” community, which subsequently disrupted relations between Muslims and other Australians” (Iqbal, 2010).

Media in Western countries represent that Muslims like to kill infidels and that Islam, as a religion, supports violence and war against non-Muslims. William Miller, in his book *A Christian’s Answer to Islam* (1976), said that ‘Islam is Satan’s most brilliant and powerful creation for those who are astray.’ Salman Rushdie, a popular British writer who wrote the controversial book ‘*The Satanic Verses*’ (1988), in which he

surprised the world by referring to the verses of the Prophet Muhammad as Satan's whisper (Patterson & Patterson, 2015); Salam Rushdie's novel got a positive response from Muslims around the world before he was criticized by Iranian leader Ayatollah Khomeini. The debate over Salman Rushdie further spread Islamophobia with media support in the West (Iqbal, 2010; Trousdale, 2017). Geert Wilders, a Dutch politician, made a controversial documentary film called "Fitna" (2008) that was protested by a Muslim.

The Fitna Controversy, Geert Wilders, received a response from the writer, Ali Eteraz. "What the film really tells me is that Wilders knows the difference between Islam and Islam; and when it comes to Islam, he's totally confused" (Eteraz, 2008).

Islamophobia has been on the rise in Europe for a long time, as well as in the Netherlands, Italy, Britain, and Germany. France adopted a public policy ban in 2010 against Muslim women wearing veils. "The French Senate today adopted a law prohibiting any veils that cover the face including burqa/hijab, a full-body covering worn by some Muslim women making France the first European country to plan such a measure" (CNN, 2010). France is an example of a European country with severe symptoms of Islamophobia that discriminates against Muslim groups as minority citizens. Islamophobia discriminates against Muslim groups in French culture (Pradipta, 2016). Islamophobia significantly affects Muslim bigotry, such as hate speech, hate crimes, and other anti-Muslim sentiments (Lopes, Clare M., Peer, Rolan, & Brim, 2009).

G. RELIGIOUS BLASPHEMY AND NEXUS-ISLAMOPHOBIA

Indonesian politics today has moved to more of a theocracy where the religious majority (Islam) has greater political influence. The Indonesian government obliges citizens to declare adherence to one of the recognized religions (Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc.) that bans interfaith marriages and limits the practices it considers to interfere with communal rights, such as interfaith proselytizing (trying to convert people) and blasphemy (The Conversation, 2017). Muslim groups in Central Sulawesi direct their political ambitions where fundamentalist Muslim organizations are anti-Christian. The Islamic Defenders Front (FPI/*Front Pembela Islam*) is one of the political supporters of the Gerindra party that successfully organized mass demonstration 212 in the case of Ahok — a former governor of Jakarta who is of a Chinese Christian ethnic group, accused of offending the Holy Verses of the Koran (Woodward & Nurish, 2016). The case of Ahok has gained a media spotlight covering the rise in religious sentiment among Islamic groups against Christianity and vice versa. And in that regard, the Indonesian Muslim war against blasphemy, and Ahok's prosecution, are simply other moments in a long struggle to establish a devout democracy while avoiding the templates of secularism or theocracy (The Conversation, 2017).

In addition to triggering protests from Islamic mass organizations in Jakarta, the incident in the Ahok case also seriously increased further protests in Central Sulawesi, such as Palu. Aksi Bela Islam from Ahok in 2016 was an anti-Christian campaign by fundamental and "radical" Islamic groups who did not want non-Muslim leaders. This case in

Central Sulawesi called for significant protests from Islamic “radical” organizations (Perkasa, 2016). In addition to the FPI/*Front Pembela Islam* (Islamic Defenders Front) there is the FUI/*Forum Umat Islam* (Islamic Community Forum) which is anti-Christian and anti-Ahok. “Ustad Abdul Gafur said in his speech that Ahok must be punished because he deliberately and openly insulted Islam (Manggona, 2017). Ahok’s case was not the first that Muslims had been insulted and humiliated by a Christian” (JurnalNews, 2016).

While the Muslim-Christian conflict in Central Sulawesi has ended, the religious sentiment between these two religious groups has not. In targeting minority groups such as Christians, “radical” Muslim organizations are very violent. Extreme Muslim groups are a threat to religious life and freedom of faith. In Central Sulawesi, religious radicalism has alarmed the Department of Religion on the island. “This region has been in turmoil in recent years, where radicalism or terrorist groups have been in revolt” (Thobib, 2015). In this field, FKPT/*Forum Kordinasi Penanggulangan Terorisme* (Forum for the Prevention of Terrorism Coordination) took steps to anticipate the problem of bigotry, “radicalism” and terrorism.

“The movement of intolerance, radicalism and terrorism is an enemy of the state as one of the greatest challenges facing the Republic of Indonesia. We therefore need to counter intolerance, radicalism and terrorism in an organized and all-systematic society to develop community resilience and fight against such groups” (Kabar Sebelas, 2020).

The role of institutions such as BNPT/*Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Terorisme* (National Counterterrorism Agency) and FKPT/*Forum Kordinasi Penanggulangan Terorisme* (*Forum for the Prevention of Terrorism Coordination*) at the local level, such as in Central Sulawesi, play a very important role in the prevention of intolerance, “radicalism” (Nashrullah, 2019) and violent extremism. From the perspective of local people in Central Sulawesi, the problem of ethnicity, race, and intergroup issues is more vulnerable to the growth of “radicalism.” Local government in Sulawesi has taken frequent steps to prevent the issue of intolerance, “radicalism” and terrorism, with a range of programs involving experts, religious leaders, community leaders, security forces, civil society, and former terrorist convicts in the region.

MIT/*Majelis Indonesia Timur* (East Indonesia Council), a “jihadis” and violent extremism group based in Central Sulawesi, is very influential. The terrorist networks have benefited from the Covid-19 outbreak by recruiting members. While the MIT/*Majelis Indonesia Timur* did not stop carrying out its “jihad” mission in the middle of Covid-19. According to the Central Sulawesi Regional Police, 17 people who were strongly suspected of involvement in a terrorist organization in Poso were arrested from January to April 2020 (Umar, 2020). Acts of intolerance, “radicalism” and terrorist networks implicitly help the phenomenon of Islamophobia, not just among Christians, but also among Muslims. In the context of Central Sulawesi, the phenomenon of Islamophobia has been discussed by modernist Islamic groups such as Muhammadiyah, including the Muslim Community Forum (FUI), the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), and so on. There are

several ways to defeat the reputation of Muslims in this era of the Internet. Muslims have always been victims of intimidation and wars like those in Gaza-Palestine, Syria, Iraq, and other Islamic countries. Fundamental and conservative Muslim groups also feel that Muslims are the victims of Islamophobia.

E. CONCLUSION

The emergence of Muslim “extreme” organizations and violent extremist networks such as the East Indonesia Council (*MIT/Majelis Indonesia Timur*) is one of the entities that triggered Islamophobia in Indonesia, following the history of the Muslim-Christian conflict in Central Sulawesi. In the 1930s, Islam was dominated by syncretic and traditionalist Islamic groups in Central Sulawesi, and after Indonesia’s independence in 1955, Darul Islam’s separatist movement became the starting point for militant Islamic groups to promote anti-government and anti-Christian movements. Islamophobia in Indonesia started with the Bali bombings and many bombings in Jakarta, as well as the emergence of terrorist network figures such as Abu Bakar Baasyir, Jafar Umar Thalib, and Ali Kolara, who carried out recruitment and terrorist operations across Central Sulawesi.

The first element of Islamophobia in Central Sulawesi is the Muslim-Christian dispute. Islamophobia’s second element relates to the transnational Islamic movement after the age of reformation. After the fall of Suharto, new organizations and Islamic schools have been related to the transnational Islamic Movement, leading to instances of bigotry, radicalism, and violent extremism. Globalization and technological

developments such as the internet and digital media are the third element in Islamophobia. Internet technology involves a manipulation of media that makes a global contribution to the portrayal of Islam. Islamophobia is inseparable from the role of media framing in the Muslim community. The role of the media has had a major effect on Western society's view of Muslim culture. The influence of media and emerging technologies is interconnected. As we know, we live in a modern age where information on the Internet, such as social media, presents Islam and the Muslim culture. After looking at a number of cases of Islamophobia, I see that the media is one of the most important factors in stimulating the phenomenon of Islamophobia. Digital technology plays an important role in religious, political and social emotions.

Islam is labeled a religion that encourages violence and fighting, a patriarchal legal structure that is militant in political conflicts, including symbols and attire such as beards, veils, as well as practices polygamy and many other negative images. The fourth element is the polarization within Muslim communities between Wahabi, Salafi, Sunni, Shia and other Islamic sects that conflict with each other such that Islamophobia exists within the Muslim group. The results of this study show that Islamophobia comes from two groups. The first type, Islamophobia, comes from a non-Muslim or Christian community. The second category of Islamophobia comes from inside the Muslim community, itself, who are anti-intolerance, anti-radicalism, and against violent extremism. In short, there are two models of Islamophobia. First in non-Muslim countries and second in Muslim countries, such as Indonesian society, in this case.

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