



Peace Spirituality Through Interreligious Engagement

A Case of Education to Toleration and Peace
Spirituality in Yogyakarta

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Keywords

Education to tolerance, public space, peace and spirituality, interreligious dialogue, interreligious engagement in the Indonesian context, Muslims and Christians in the public sphere.

Abstract

Historically, Yogyakarta had enjoyed the reputation of being a bastion of interreligious tolerance in Indonesia. Still, a growing spate of events that were manifestations of religious intolerance calls for a rethinking of that narrative. This paper examines public space civility, peace spirituality, and interreligious engagement in Yogyakarta. Through a quantitative survey approach, it is found that there is a statistically significant positive relationship between positive public space civility and peace spirituality. Apart from the positive correlations of public behaviour and peace spirituality, there is also a theory-practice gap, in that most measures seemed to make the Muslim and Christian participants alike appear very insecure. The current study extends earlier research and underlines how grassroots interreligious engagement can stand in front in peace-making, enhancing spirituality, and religious tolerance.

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1. Introduction

Despite its position as a beacon of tolerance, Yogyakarta confronts hurdles in sustaining social cohesion despite its diverse racial, cultural, and religious identities. A recent study by Kamil (2018) and Hakim (2021) emphasizes the prevalence of intolerance in the city, causing concerns among academics and religious communities. Thus, there is a need to examine the contradiction between Yogyakarta's reputation for openness and the documented intolerance. Of the works to note, by far, the categorization of Yogyakarta as an “intolerant city” by the Wahid Institute itself due to rising violence and intolerance over the past five years, hence requiring further investigation into the interreligious relations and engagements between Islam and Christianity. Among the guiding questions are: How is the behaviour of Muslims and Christians in the public sphere related to peace spirituality in Yogyakarta, and secondly, how does inter-religious engagement use a culture of peace and tolerance?

2. Interreligious Tolerance in Yogyakarta: A Contested Narrative

While Yogyakarta's reputation rests on a history of tolerance Smith (2014), recent studies by Kamil (2018) and Widjaja et al. (2020, 2021) reveal the rise of cases and tendencies that contest this narrative. Widjaja et al. (2020) studied how identity politics influences the behaviour of both Muslim and Christian groups in the public spaces of Yogyakarta, targeting particularly young people. It follows, therefore, that there is a relation between the salience of identity and intergroup conflict.

One such example, given by Sa'idah (2020), was in 2018 when people claiming to observe Islamic teachings destroyed other people's property, which they claimed was associated with the rituals called the “*Sedekah Laut*,” or Sea Offerings. This act heightens how misinterpretation of religious doctrine may lead to intolerance. Other incidents that make this storyline more complicated are given by Rusdi (2021). These are the vandalizing of a Christian tombstone and the rejection of residence to a Christian family on

account of their religion. The latter incident speaks to how local regulations could further add to increased interfaith tensions, as shown by the eventual repeal of the discriminatory decree.

Rusdi (2021) concludes that the state is an actor in developing interreligious tolerance in the country echoes broader discussions on the role of legal frameworks and state intervention. The case of Yogyakarta’s challenge to maintain its image as a tolerant city underlined the will of multi-approaches in dealing with societal attitudes affected by identity politics and failed legal and administrative structures.

3. Interreligious Relations in Indonesian Context

Indonesia was established upon the principles of Pancasila as the Unitary Republic of Indonesia in Bahasa Indonesia, *Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia* or NKRI, enshrining the national motto “*bhinneka tunggal ika*” or unity in diversity. The latter national motto underlines how the nation accepts the inherent diversity within it, including religious pluralism. The diversity of religions in Indonesia is not a matter of choice; it is a basic social fact. For this reason, interreligious encounters cannot be avoided within Indonesian society.

Cheetham et al. (2013) highlight the ongoing nature of interfaith relations, emphasizing that religious communities have interacted “both historically and in the contemporary world.” This ongoing interaction fosters stronger engagement and cohesion among today’s increasingly diverse faith communities. However, not all interreligious relationships are without complications. While a long history of harmony between religious groups does exist, Cheetham et al. (2013) also highlight the historical conflicts between religious groups. Phan and Tan (2013) add weight to this assertion when they state that while globalization and migration have enabled interfaith encounters, these elements of globalization and migration have brought the issues of power related to majority/minority distinctions between religious groups. In support, Phan and Tan state:

“ In addition, increased mobility in today’s world has generated large-scale movement of peoples, increasing diversity and plurality, and intensifying tensions between the dominant community in the host countries and newcomer minorities. More problematic is the use of terror and violence by a dominant majority community against a vulnerable minority community to conform to the majority’s definition of identity and social belonging. (p. 221)

On the other hand, Marianne Moyaert argues interreligious relations and dialogue should include modern ideals of equality, respect, and tolerance (Cheetham et al. 2013).

Paul F. Knitter (1995) argues for interreligious dialogue built upon a foundation of shared human experience. He criticizes the rejection of a common agenda of discussion, claiming it serves as a sign of the predominance of power play more than of the genuine expression of truth. For Knitter (2008) human suffering provides a converging point of religious dialogue. While he describes suffering as destructive, he then emphasizes common humanity as a uniting factor. In Indonesia and Asia, suffering has been personified in poverty, hunger, the spectre of natural calamities, and ecological destruction. This cuts across religious lines since it hurts every human being and the entire cosmos. The overcoming of hardships together brings to the fore the unity of all humankind. Whichever part of the earth it is, whichever religious persuasion it may be, humanity shares one destiny as inhabitants of this globe.

The strategy of Knitter (2008) is to opt for an interfaith dialogue based on a sense of common vulnerability and responsibility. As befitting a pragmatic approach, Knitter believes that an interfaith dialogue inspired by shared interests develops a sense of friendship with other faiths. Engaging in collective action, struggle, and suffering over issues like peace, justice, poverty, and disaster fosters this sense of camaraderie. This approach can be employed as a common path to facilitate more amicable dialogue across religious divides. Knitter (2008) illustrates this with his experience of dialogue with Maha Ghosananda (a Cambodian Buddhist leader).

They developed a deeper connection after listening to and being moved by the narratives of the Acteal massacre survivors in Chiapas, Mexico (December 1997). This connection transcended the one established during discussions on Buddhist and Christian teachings or shared meditation.

Shared concerns, however, are not adequate in the quest for an ethical structure for interreligious relations if an attitude of openness does not emerge among participants. Knitter (2001) therefore emphasizes that openness needs to be preconditioned before dialogues and shared ethical endeavours take place. It is simultaneously one of crucial importance to preserve and proclaim faith commitments amidst the dialogue, as Delio (2009) affirms. After all, the meeting of faith perspectives that is interfaith dialogue allows participants to learn from one another.

4. Interreligious Engagement

The rhetoric of interreligious relations has developed into an acting-oriented perspective now labelled as interreligious engagement. Interreligious engagement refers to the worth of an enabling and constructive relationship that flourishes among individuals hailing from various religious and spiritual backgrounds. Three theoretical pillars describe mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation. Thus, the pillars can be shown through formal dialogues, service projects, or educative ones undertaken together. Interreligious engagement is therefore all about fostering a deeper appreciation and understanding of the varied tapestry of religious and spiritual traditions that a community may host (Lattu, 2016, 2019).

Interreligious engagement goes beyond a conversation. It is a range of activities, formal and informal, intended to build relationships and understanding leading to respect and cooperation by and among people from different religious backgrounds (Lattu, 2016). In this context, the approach of deploying interreligious engagement for social change relies on the discourse as an interventionist methodology that is almost guaranteed to have an impact on addressing social ills to effect social change. Individuals of different religious backgrounds can share opinions and find commonalities to help

them overcome various challenges; this may provide a way to achieve social cohesion (Mayhew et al. 2022).

Lattu (2019) emphasizes the evolving nature of interfaith dialogue, noting its progression “from textual discussion to social action.” This perspective broadens the definition of dialogue to encompass everyday social interaction and communication between religions. When formal discussions are difficult to conduct, “life dialogue” becomes a valuable tool for understanding the teachings and values of different faiths (Lattu, 2019). Moreover, Lattu (2016) proposes a propositional oral-based interfaith engagement model that emphasizes ordinary contact and casual conversations in bridging the gap between people of different faiths. It realizes that formal talks are not the sole source of interfaith involvement, and day-to-day interactions may yield the same level of effectiveness to bring people closer to a mutual understanding.

Contextualization is emphasized in inter-religious involvement. The framework insists on the need for any approach to interfaith conversation to draw its relevance from the specific cultural, social, and theological contexts wherein they take place. This paradigm encourages inclusiveness. According to Lattu (2016) and Suheri & Maula (2022), it does point out that interfaith conversation need not be more than the passing or planned contact but possibly through ordinary interchange and informal conversation. This in turn opens participation to a wide variance of individuals.

5. Methodology of Empirical Study

In the study, a collaboration of the researchers from the Peace and Conflict Resolution Cluster, Faculty of Theology, Universitas Kristen Duta Wacana, namely Paulus S. Widjaja, Edy Nugroho, and Imanuel Geovasky, evaluated the possible correlation between the behaviours that Muslims and Christians have in public space with their peace spirituality in Yogyakarta. This study used a quantitative approach with survey methodology, conducted from January to May 2023. The target populations in this study are Muslims and Christians who reside in Yogyakarta City and its surroundings such as Kulon Progo, Gunung Kidul Sleman Regency, and Bantul Regency. A total of 1,277 questionnaires were distributed and collected between March and May 2023.

The theoretical framework for this research drew upon established concepts of public space, positive peace, and the virtue and spirituality of peace. The study utilized Jurgen Habermas' (1985, 1989) theories of behaviour in public spaces, focusing on deliberation, participation, and representation. Deliberation refers to the process of creating public opinion through communication, effectively bridging the gap between the private and public spheres. Participation signifies the collaborative effort in shaping the nation's history. Thus, representation is defined as serving as an ethical role model for one's social group within the public sphere (Habermas, 1985, 1989). In this research, it draws on the use of Johan Galtung's (1969, 1996) concept of positive peace. Positive peace is more than the absence of conflict. According to Galtung (1996), it is the intentional creation of structures and processes that contribute to peacebuilding. This is done by nurturing inclusive identities to embrace pluralism and a realization of the worth of diversified groups within society. These efforts contribute to the creation of a more just society, where power is shared equitably and grievances are addressed constructively.

The study also incorporated Paulus S. Widjaja's (2020) framework of peace virtues and spirituality, encompassing hope, vulnerability, humility, forbearance, and empathy. The findings of this research were presented at the Global Mennonite Peace Conference III held at Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Virginia, United States, from June 15-18, 2023.

6. Results

The quantitative analysis yielded the following key findings: *First*, correlation between public space behaviour and peace spirituality. A statistically significant positive correlation was observed between the behaviour of Muslims and Christians in public spaces and their peace spirituality (average correlation score: 0.578 for both groups). Notably, the average score for Muslims turned out to be a little higher, 0.609, as compared to that for Christians, 0.531. This would possibly indicate that there is some connection between good behaviour outdoors and inner peace stemming from spiritual values.

Another is the gap in positive peace versus empathy: the study has found a big difference between the conceptual understanding of positive peace Galtung famously called positive peace and how that is translated into the action of empathy towards others of different faiths. While there may be a conceptual understanding of positive peace, it appears that translation into actual acts that are empathetic toward those of other faiths is minimal. This suggests an area that might be further explored and attended to.

Thirdly, insecurity and interfaith relationships. One of the disturbing trends recorded was that of feelings of insecurity among Muslim and Christian subjects. This seems to stand in the way of being openly receptive to interfaith dialogue and having good relations with other people of a different faith.

Fourthly, God and Religion are double-edged swords. Surprisingly, the research found that God and religion, which may potentially bring peace and understanding, also contribute to feelings of insecurity within interfaith relations. This suggests an ambivalent interaction between religious identity and social interaction, which will require further probing.

Fifth, religious leaders and the public have a gap in Pluralism. The research uncovered a possible gap in the attitudes of religious leaders and those of the general public. Whereas religious leaders may adopt the principles of religious pluralism, the lived experience of the people seems to meet with civic pluralism: an experience rooted in shared citizenship rather than theological comprehension. This gap deserves further investigation on how these two different approaches to interfaith can be mended.

7. Discussion

The Interreligious Relations between Muslims and Christians in Yogyakarta

The atmosphere of uneasiness pervades relations between Muslims and Christians in Yogyakarta. It may have prevented the full acceptance of persons of different religions. There is a gap between each religion's ideas about peace and good relations with fellow humans and the reality of public

behavior that is still tinged by scepticism and fear of openness to individuals of different religions. It symbolizes the big gap that always exists between understanding and reality, as evidenced by the understanding between the Positive Peace of the idea and Empathy of the practice for others in every faith.

Interreligious relations, Cheetham et al. argue (2013), have always oscillated between peace and conflict. Long periods of peaceful relations can be characterized by conflictual relations that only appear a few times. As in the context of Yogyakarta, interfaith relations have historically been peaceful and harmonious. However, due to the emergence of several intolerance incidents in recent years, Yogyakarta is considered an intolerant province. Intolerance actions can affect the views of religious believers with a negative stigma, prejudice, and nuances that seem full of conflict and cannot fully accept the existence of other religious believers without the opportunity to clarify (Fordham & Ogbu 1986, Steele 1997). Particularly considering Phan and Tan’s (2013) perspective that relations between majority and minority groups are not easy because of different power relations, this interfaith encounter needs to be managed seriously. In the meantime, in daily life, more religious people have peaceful and harmonious relations with followers of other religions.

Therefore, serious attention to the issue of intolerance that arises and a comprehensive solution in every case that occurs is required. It is also important to involve all, whether it is the government, religious leaders, civil society, academics, and observers of tolerance, in the issue of interreligious intolerance. While stories of interreligious peace are fundamental, they may be drowned out by larger public discourses voicing intolerance. In this respect, we also have a greater need to promote the counter-narrative through the effective dissemination of stories of success in interfaith cooperation and collaboration. Increasing the volume of counter-narratives promotes a shift toward everyday practices of interfaith coexistence that are in truth reflective of the peaceful teaching of various religions.

Inclusivity and Exclusivity in Interreligious Relations

Only the elite religious leaders engage in religious pluralism, while ordinary people continue to engage in civic pluralism. This reflects a significant divide in the comprehension and application of interreligious interactions between public religious adherents and the elite. According to the data analysis, religious elites or leaders share an inclusive identity, while ordinary people (religious believers) share an exclusive identity. This outcome supports Mietzner and Muhtadi's (2020) research findings, which stated, "a significant mismatch between the self-perception of the NU leadership and the actual views held by the NU grassroots. NU followers are generally as intolerant of religious minorities as the rest of the Indonesian Muslim population, and in some cases, even more intolerant."

Given that grassroots religious people are used to interacting with one another in their daily lives, this finding is ironic. However, this daily life interaction appears not sufficient to make them have complete openness to other religious communities. In the findings, religious pluralism is only a feature of religious leaders, therefore more authentic interfaith dialogues that involve religious believers at the grassroots are needed. In this sense, an inclusive identity will encourage authentic interreligious relations not easily influenced by negative issues that generate intolerance towards people of other religions.

The Challenge for Interreligious Engagement

The finding indicates that the behaviour of Muslims and Christians in public spaces is correlated at an average score of 0.578 concerning peace spirituality. This means that interreligious engagement leads to peace. The finding brings forth the importance of deliberation, participation, and representation in public spaces, which are elements of interreligious engagement. These behaviours are positively associated with peace spirituality; hence, these are contributing to a culture of peace and tolerance.

There are, however, some challenges faced with the interreligious engagement discourse. The result reveals the large gap between understanding and actualities in the areas of positive peace and empathy. This challenges by suggesting that there is a need for more interreligious

engagement and cooperation to bridge this gap. The finding shows that the feeling of insecurity toward each other hinders the full embrace of people of other religions. This challenges interreligious engagement by highlighting the need to address this insecurity, particularly when God and religion are brought into the picture.

This finding underlines that elite religious leaders are already acting in the mode of religious pluralism, whereas ordinary people are still in the civic pluralism mode. Religious pluralism means a recognition of, and respect for, the legitimacy of different religious traditions. It emphasizes peaceful coexistence and interfaith dialogue despite differing beliefs. John Hick (1989) defines it as “the view that the ultimate reality, or God, is known or experienced in different ways within the various world religions.” On the other hand, civic pluralism focuses on shared values and principles that create a cohesive society, even if citizens hold diverse religious beliefs. It emphasizes tolerance, respect for the law, and the separation of religion from the state. Charles Taylor (1992) discusses civic pluralism in the context of multicultural societies. Taylor (1992) emphasizes the importance of citizens developing a “shared space” where they can “affirm a good within which, and for the sake of which, they can endorse differing and even antagonistic ultimate ends.” This challenges interreligious engagement by suggesting that there is a need for more inclusive and widespread interreligious engagement to promote peace. General empirical data support the approach through the identification of the importance of interreligious engagement for the nurturance of peace spirituality. However, it also works to challenge the theory in identifying further areas of work needed if there are to be gaps and insecurities in the full embracing of interfaith cooperation.

8. Conclusion

This, considering recent conflicts, requires the giving of a new commitment to interreligious engagement if Yogyakarta’s reputation for tolerance is to be maintained. This can also provide insightful lessons in building an inclusive and peaceful region. This study tests one association between positive behaviour in public places and inner peace premised on spiritual values that

were affirmatory of the central pillar in interreligious engagement frameworks: mutual understanding. Positive social contact along religious lines is more urgent today. On the other hand, the gap that has appeared between understanding positive peace and the practice of empathy underlines the requirement to go beyond theoretical discussions. Lattu (2019) emphasizes the shift from “textual discussion to social action” in interreligious engagement. Interreligious engagement that actively cultivates empathy between Muslims and Christians through collaborative service projects or educational initiatives can bridge this gap.

The insecurity felt by both Muslim and Christian adherers presents a significant barrier. Such insecurities are torn down by interreligious programs that foster honest dialogue. Moreover, religious pluralistic programs that celebrate religious differences develop an appreciation for the community's “rich tapestry of religious and spiritual traditions” as stated by Lattu (2019). This is the gap between religious leaders embracing pluralism while their public directs them to civic pluralism, hence needing a grassroots approach. Grassroots inter-religious engagement between ordinary people in both communities may nurture a sense of shared humanity and advance a tilt toward tolerance at the level of the community. It recognizes the importance of contextualization and allows the possibility of participation beyond formal settings, enabling inclusivity. With such interreligious engagement policies, Yogyakarta can further develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of the various religious expressions within its midst and firmly establish its reputation as a bastion of tolerance.

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10. Short biography

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