

Interreligious Environmentalism: The Way Ahmadiyya Group Engages to Interfaith Dialogue

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Abstract

There have been many studies on Ahmadiyya and their involvement in inter/intra-religious dialogues. However, the dialogues' context is mainly at formal events. Ahmadiyya, which is a vulnerable religious group, certainly needs a new model of dialogue or encounter. This study suggests that "mutual collaboration in public matters" can be seen as an encounter space for interfaith dialogue among religious groups, especially for minorities. Hence, this research aims to investigate the strategy of the Ahmadiyya community in Yogyakarta in engaging with society and the inter/intra-religious dialogue model this community used. This research equipped with qualitative research methods. Furthermore, data collection was conducted through interviews and literature reviews gleaned from Ahmadiyya online media. Data were analyzed using descriptive and interpretive analysis techniques. This study found that the Ahmadiyya community raised environmental issues to develop dialogues with other religious communities. These dialogues became fruitful encounter space to garner acceptance in the society.

Keywords: interreligious environmentalism, Ahmadiyya, minority group, interfaith dialogue

Introduction

Some studies that have examined the Ahmadiyya community in Indonesia only focus on the conditions of oppression and pressure experienced by the Ahmadiyya community (Connley, 2016; Ropi, 2010; Simamora et al., 2019). The dynamics of the Ahmadiyya people are indeed very interesting to see, because if some people consider that some religious conflicts occur between religions (significant differences) in Indonesia, the Ahmadiyya receives a conflict response within the Islamic community (Fuller, 2014). If we look back to history, the Indonesian Ahmadiyya people experienced treatments such as violence, injustice, persecution, discrimination, and so on. One example of a recent case is the burning of

the Ahmadiyya community mosque in Sintang, West Kalimantan (Kumalasari et al., 2022). Besides the mosque, there are several buildings such as houses around the mosque that were also damaged.

The conditions experienced by the Ahmadiyya people are not limited to the response of ordinary people regarding its existence. The injustice experienced by the Ahmadiyya people are not only perpetuated by the resistant attitude of other Islamic communities, but also this problem exacerbated by the involvement of (local) government in the Ahmadiyya case in Indonesia. One of A'an Suryana's studies shows that the practice of vigilantism in Indonesia that commits violence against Muslim minority groups in Indonesia

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was tolerated and even supports the practice of vigilantism (Suryana, 2019). Ahnaf and Salim further explained that the practice of vigilantism seeks to emphasize the supremacy of majoritarianism in the public sphere (Ahnaf & Salim, 2017). This is what makes the Ahmadiyya case in Indonesia more complicated, because there are economic and political issues that contribute to exacerbating the conflict.

In relation to the above, Indonesian society, especially the government, has taken several preventive steps to respond to the problem. However, often the Indonesians provide conflict resolution only limited to dialogue. Likewise, in the Ahmadiyya conflict, some studies only focus on dialogue as a solution for the conflict (Khumayah, 2014; Pamungkas, 2018; Santiawan & Warta, 2021; Utami, 2016). Dialogue in that context is a form of communication and exchange of ideas and theological reflection. But if we look further, the conflict resolution model is not enough to solve the problem of religious conflict in Indonesia. As stated by Leonard Swidler, dialogue in this era is no longer limited to theological reflection (Swidler, 2013). Swidler further explained that dialogue must be brought to touch aspects of human life, such as; economics, politics, the environment, and so on. This is also emphasized by Izzak Lattu who explains that "Interreligious dialogue has expanded out of textual discussion into social action" (Lattu, 2019). Thus, in Indonesia, the model of interreligious dialogue must continue to move and find new forms.

It is important to consider that a model of inter-religious dialogue in Indonesia is urgently needed and that the model must find a new form. This is based on the increasingly complex issues and problems faced by Indonesia. Especially for the Ahmadiyya community in Indonesia, as a group that has experienced persecutions and stigma, especially getting several times labeled heretical by fellow Indonesian Muslims (Burhani, 2016), we can ask several questions; is there a possibility for the Ahmadiyya community to find a space for dialogue and space to engage in the midst of the stigma and treatment they have received in society? Related to the complexity of the

problems also faced by Indonesian society, is there a special strategy carried out by the Ahmadiyya to engage in interreligious dialogue?

From this, we can start by looking at how the condition of the Ahmadiyya in Indonesia is still experiencing a lot of injustice and discrimination until now, but in recent years the Ahmadiyya has begun to be involved in several social activities. This was reported by the official website of Ahmadiyya Indonesia regarding the involvement of the Ahmadiyya community in commemorating Earth Day (Ahmadiyah, 2022). The involvement of the Ahmadiyya in environmental issues is indeed very significant and several times carried out by them both internally Ahmadiyya and intersectoral collaboration. This article will explore the environmental practices carried out by the Ahmadiyya community in Indonesia and their involvement with other religious communities in responding to environmental issues. This article argues that "mutual collaboration in public issues" can be an encounter space for interfaith dialogue for religious groups, especially for minorities.

Research Method

To help answer the research questions that have been stated earlier, this research will use qualitative research methods. Furthermore, this research will take data through the interview and literature obtained from Ahmadiyya online media. The data is analyzed through McKim's interfaith environmentalism and Knitter's dialogue of social engagement as interreligious dialogue cooperation and social action. It is then analyzed using descriptive and interpretative analysis techniques (Craswell, 2003).

Results and Discussion

Interrelated Issues and Common Interest

In some cases, problems that threaten human existence on earth can be one of the reasons that trigger humans to meet and cooperate. For example, the atrocities caused by world wars encouraged humans to work together to declare Human Rights (Scharffs, 2022). In the Indonesian context, the problem of

colonialism can be a reason for Indonesians to negotiate their different identities and work together (Latif, 2012, 2020). Nowadays, the issue of world wars and colonization may no longer be the main problem of humanity. There are many declarations and inter-state agreements that have been made by countries to keep the above problems from recurring, although in practice we may still find these two problems.

Currently, one of the issues that threaten human existence is ecological issues. A study explains how environmental problems can lead humans to extinction (Tsing et al., 2017). Furthermore, it is explained that the damage is also contributed by religious narratives that place humans as if they have the right to do anything on earth. This is also conveyed by Robert McKim that religious communities have a responsibility on religious environmental issues because their economic, political, and cultural activities contribute greatly to our current environmental conditions (McKim, 2023). This was also conveyed by Whitney Bauman explaining that the issue of the environmental crisis is not only the work of scientists but also religion (Bauman et al., 2020). In the issue of the environmental crisis, there are ethical aspects that are also closely related to religion.

In this regard, McKim further explains that environmental issues are issues that should involve all humans, because this involves the loss of many living things and the threat to the sustainability of life (McKim, 2023). According to him, environmental issues can be a medium to bring together all different groups, because they impact everyone. Furthermore, he also explained that religion has great power to have an impact on environmental issues because religion has wealth, power, and influence to mobilize society.

Another explanation is also explained by Leonard Swidler that interfaith dialogue is important to emphasize togetherness and cooperation to heal the world (Swidler, 2014). Rather than looking at this issue individually and working individually, it would be beneficial if we emphasize collaboration for greater effect.

Mutual Recognition, Understanding, and Enrichment in Environmental Collaboration

In environmental collaboration, there are some potentials to engage in interreligious encounter or engagement. Robert McKim explains that there are several mutual aspects that can be built in interreligious environmentalism. Firstly, each group or community involved will consider that each group can make a very valuable contribution. Secondly, those involved are willing and have the desire to engage in a common issue. Thirdly, the religious communities involved indirectly also show that the religion they profess is very relevant to contemporary issues. Fourth, there is an experience of sharing identity and finding a new identity. This can be felt and realized that each group has the same identity, namely; they both reject the existence of cruel behavior towards nature, the identity of what is felt in common, and so on (McKim, 2023).

In addition, McKim also explained that in an environmental collaboration it would be possible for each religious group to actualize and practice their respective teachings related to environmental issues. In this practice, each different religious group will indirectly share teachings and show a rich religious understanding. Some may find similarities or even differences, but they will lead to each group contributing to responding and resolving environmental issues (McKim, 2023). From this, it will be very possible to have mutual understanding from each group involved in the collaboration. Indirectly, mutual understanding can also reduce prejudice between each group.

From the explanation above, McKim finally realizes that mutual recognition and mutual understanding will result mutual enrichment (McKim, 2023). The forms of mutualism mentioned earlier will enrich each other, especially on environmental issues. Every lesson and understanding that develops at the moment of collaboration will create a model of cooperation and it will also continue to grow. The same idea was also conveyed by Samsul Maarif et al. that collaboration will enrich, because in it each group will provide testimony

of their experiences related to responding to an issue, or in the cases of environmental issues (Maarif et al., 2019). In a collaboration, people will consider every possible power that can be involved to support a movement. One of those cases that we can see is the case of the reclamation of Benoa Bay. In the case of Benoa Bay, several organizations, including religious organizations cooperate in rejecting the reclamation. They use many argumentations for rejecting it and the argumentations enrich each other (Sihombing, 2021).

If we look at the model of interreligious collaboration described by McKim, unconsciously people have conducted a dialogue. Mutual recognition, understanding, and enrichment can be understood as a form of dialogue. There is an exchange of information, mutual recognition, and enrichment of each other. To see what is practiced in interreligious collaboration, especially in environmental issues, we need to look at several models of interreligious dialogue. Paul F. Knitter has explained several models of interreligious dialogue. He divides them into several models or types; first, "The Dialogue of Theology" which is a dialogue model that is doctrinal and scriptural. In this model, what is actually emphasized is to straighten and dismiss the stigma of each other, especially at the level of doctrine. Second, "The Dialogue of Spirituality" is a dialogue model that emphasizes sharing experiences and feelings when each group practices their spirituality. Third, "The Dialogue of Action" is a dialogue model that emphasizes cooperation to resolve together (Knitter, 2013).

What Knitter describes regarding the dialogue of action is closely related to what Robert McKim describes. Collaboration on environmental issues is also part of the dialogue of action, because environmental issues are common problems involving common interests as well. In addition, there are similarities between Robert McKim and Paul F. Knitter in viewing religion and its relationship with society. McKim and Knitter both see religion as having a responsibility related to what has happened on earth, especially suffering and damage. But they also both have optimism in

religion itself to solve these problems (Knitter, 2013; McKim, 2023). Religion in this case has the potential to damage and the potential to improve and bring benefits.

Ahmadiyya and Environmental Activism

What has been explained by McKim, Swidler, and Knitter regarding the role of religion in solving human problems is closely related to the practices carried out by the Ahmadiyya. In recent years, the Ahmadiyya in Indonesia has been very much involved with environmental issues, natural disasters, and also humanitarianism. As reported by "Wartaahmadiya" in 2018 the Ahmadiyya in Yogyakarta conducted disaster response training and joined the organizational alliance (Wartaahmadiyah, 2018).

In 2019, the Ahmadiyya community was involved in several other environmental issues such as; providing assistance to victims of the effects of the haze disaster in Riau (Wartaahmadiyah, 2019b), dialogue with environmental and religious organizations related to environmental issues (Wartaahmadiyah, 2019a), and the involvement of Ahmadiyya women in the process of reforestation or tree planting in Banyumas, Central Java (Wartaahmadiyah, 2019c). In 2019, activities and collaborations related to environmental issues carried out by the Ahmadiyya community did not only involve Ahmadiyya men but also women. These activities also involve other religious communities that are different from Ahmadiyya and also involve the government. In addition, the Ahmadiyya was involved in several environmental activities and several activities involved Ahmadiyya leaders to provide Islamic views on environmental issues (Lukman, 2022).

In 2023, there were many activities of the Ahmadiyya community in several cities related to environmental issues. Some of them are: environmental clean-up actions such as beaches (Lukman, 2023a; Noor, 2023b; Wartaahmadiyah, 2023), tree planting or reforestation actions (Lukman, 2023c), and dialog activities about the environment (Noor, 2023a). These activities are carried out in several places in Indonesia such

as Kalimantan, Denpasar, Bengkulu, Semarang, and Banyumas. The activities carried out by the Ahmadiyya community do not seem to concentrate only in one point, for example on the island of Java, but almost all places in Indonesia.

Clean The City as Interreligious Environmentalism

As a tourism place that is one of the main destinations for tourists both local and foreign, Yogyakarta will certainly be visited by many tourists. That brings the consequence that there will be many waste. According to Nadijh, Yogyakarta is indeed the largest contributor of waste in the province of Yogyakarta Special Region (Nadijh et al., 2020). It is further explained that community participation is still lacking. In contrast to this, the Ahmadiyya community in Yogyakarta has made a movement that responds to the existing waste problem.

As explained earlier, the Ahmadiyya in general in Indonesia is massively conducting "Clean the City" activity as a form of concern for the environment. Specifically in the city of Yogyakarta, "Clean the City" was initiated in 2016 (Shakeel, 2023). Another informant also explained that the "Clean the City" activity in the city of Yogyakarta was initially only initiated and involved the internal Ahmadiyya itself (Umay, 2023). Furthermore, the interviewee explained that from year to year the "Clean the City" activity began to get a lot of attention from other communities or organizations to be involved and take part in the activity.

In early 2017, there were 40 communities that joined this activity to be equally involved with the Ahmadiyya Yogyakarta community to clean up garbage at several points in the city of Yogyakarta (Setiawan, 2017). Furthermore, Setiawan explained that some of the communities involved also have a background in religious organizations that are concerned with peace issues.

In 2018, this activity continued. In that year, there were several well-known communities that were also involved in the activity, such as; Gusdurian, Sehati, Forum Jogja Damai, Srikandi

Lintas Iman, etc (Apriani, 2018). The same was true for the following years. However, according to the interviewee from Ahmadiyya, he explained that

Tahun 2022 sebenarnya cukup menarik, karena kegiatan tersebut (Clean the City) terus berlanjut, walaupun komunitas Ahmadiyya di Yogyakarta tidak terlibat pada tahun tersebut. Hal yang menurut saya juga menarik adalah keterlibatan salah satu organisasi kepemudaan dari Muhammadiyah yang juga turut terlibat dalam kegiatan "Clean the City". Menurut saya keberlanjutan ini tentu dapat berlangsung karena adanya rasa kepemilikan dalam kegiatan "Clean the City" atau dalam artian kegiatan ini bukan hanya milik Ahmadiyya (Shakeel, 2023).

I translated his explanation into English: "The year 2022 was actually quite interesting, because the activity still (Clean the City) continued, even though the Ahmadiyya in Yogyakarta was not involved in that year. What I think is also interesting is the involvement of one of the youth organizations from Muhammadiyah which is also involved in "Clean the City" activities. I think this sustainability can certainly take place because there is a sense of ownership in the "Clean the City" activity or in the sense that this activity does not only belong to Ahmadiyya."

One of the representatives from the Young Interfaith Peacemaker Community (YIPC) explained that:

Kegiatan "Clean the City" memang pertamakali diinisiasikan oleh teman-teman Ahmadiyya, kemudian mereka mengundang kita untuk dapat terlibat. Kegiatan ini sebenarnya terus berkembang dan melibatkan banyak komunitas lainnya. Jika kita lihat dari tahun 2016, kegiatan ini terus melibatkan komunitas atau organisasi baru untuk dapat bersama-sama merespons isu lingkungan. Salah satu komunitas yang baru-baru ini terlibat dalam kegiatan ini adalah teman-teman Rausyanfikir. Dari kegiatan ini, sebenarnya ada beberapa komunitas akhirnya mengetahui jika sebenarnya terdapat komunitas Ahmadiyya di Yogyakarta, salah satunya teman-teman Rausyanfikir (Ahmad, 2023).

In English: "The "Clean the City" activity was first initiated by Ahmadiyya friends, then

they invited us to get involved. This activity continues to grow and involve many other communities. If we look at 2016, this activity continues to involve new communities or organizations to be able to jointly respond to environmental issues. One of the communities recently involved in this activity is Rausyanfikir. From this activity, there are several communities finally knowing that there is an Ahmadiyya community in Yogyakarta, one of which is Rausyanfikir's friends." What's interesting about this is because Rausyanfikir is often affiliated with the Shia community in Yogyakarta (Aini & Ahnaf, 2017).

The environmental services carried out by Ahmadiyya are a space for interfaith communities to meet and collaborate. As explained earlier related to mutual recognition, the Ahmadiyya, other religious groups, and other non-religious organizations are able to do "mutual recognition." As explained earlier, in mutual recognition, each group is able to make a very valuable contribution to the issue being fought for (McKim, 2023). This is also confirmed by several religious groups in seeing the contribution of the Ahmadiyya community in responding to environmental issues. It can be seen from the response shown by the people who really appreciate what is done by the Ahmadiyya. Several communities which were involved in Clean the City appreciated Ahmadiyya because of the initiation for realizing the environmental issues. Another activity related to environmental issues done by Ahmadiyya was appreciated as conveyed by LBH Riau which praised the concern and real action of the Ahmadiyya in easing the burden of victims affected by the smoke disaster (Wartaahmadiyah, 2019b). Besides that the government also highly appreciates the Ahmadiyya community which not only involves men's groups in environmental issues but also by involving women's groups (Wartaahmadiyah, 2019c).

In another explanation, the source explained that:

Sadar atau tidak sebenarnya keberadaan Ahmadiyya di Yogyakarta yang membawa program "Clean the City" telah membuka mata

orang-orang akan keberadaannya. Selain itu, dari kegiatan tersebut ada banyak apresiasi dan pujian yang hadir (Shakeel, 2023).

In English: "Whether they are aware of it or not, the existence of Ahmadiyya in Yogyakarta, which presents the "Clean the City" program, has opened people's eyes to its existence. In addition, the activity received a lot of appreciation and praise from those involved."

Furthermore, Robert McKim also explained that in mutual recognition the groups involved are willing and eager to cooperate. It is further explained by McKim that even at the most extreme two different groups can work together on their respective parts even though they do not greet or know each other (McKim, 2023). McKim's idea needs to be a bit extreme, as some of us might argue that it should be categorized as interreligious dialogue. However, it is actually an unconscious desire to work together. This is what also exists in the environmental activities of the Ahmadiyya community. This is shown in example from the meeting of two youth/student organizations from Ahmadiyya and Nahdlatul Ulama. They are firmly committed and willing to cooperate in social-community activities including environmental service (Lukman, 2023b).

In addition to mutual recognition, in Ahmadiyya activities, there is also mutual understanding. Mutual understanding as explained by McKim aims to straighten out prejudice and stereotypes. It is important for us to understand that religion is closely related to prejudice and stereotyping. This is also conveyed by Blandine Chelini-Pont that often in society religion is associated with stereotyping and this can be influenced by the narrative formed by the majority group or those who have power (Chelini-Pont, 2013). Similar to Ahmadiyya, if we try to do a search on related search engines or with the keyword "Ahmadiyya Indonesia" we will find there are many articles that mislead Ahmadiyya.

In relation to mutual understanding, interreligious environmental collaboration can actually be a space to straighten out these prejudices and stereotypes. One of the Ahmadis said that through the event of Clean the City,

the negative view of Ahmadiyah can change because of this activity (Umay, 2023). As can be seen from one of the activities of visiting houses of worship to the Ahmadiyya community mosque. Others felt a little strange to visit the Ahmadiyya mosque, but after visiting it, some people were amazed by the cleanliness of the house of worship (Wartaahmadiyah, 2019). It is certainly interesting to see the strategy used by the Ahmadiyya community, because rather than clarifying, they are more likely to directly show with action that the prejudices and stereotypes are wrong.

From the environmental collaboration in "Clean the City" activity, The Ahmadiyya and other groups actually also practice the three things described by McKim (mutual recognition, mutual understanding, and enrichment) (McKim, 2023). One of the interviewees from one of the communities who was also involved in the activity said that:

Kegiatan "Clean the City" menjadi medium untuk saling mengakui/menyadari satu sama lain. Mereka (orang yang terlibat) menyadari bahwa kesadaran untuk terlibat dalam kegiatan ini pada akhirnya menjadi medium untuk berbagi pengetahuan dan memperkuat gerakan untuk merespon isu lingkungan (Ahmad, 2023).

In English: the "Clean the City" activity became a medium for mutual recognition of each other. They realized that the awareness of involvement in this activity ultimately became a medium for mutual understanding and also strengthened the movement to respond to environmental issues.

In this case, environmental activities can also be a medium to break down prejudice and stereotypes. In relation to stereotypes, although these activities do not directly erase the "heretical" labeling of the Ahmadiyya, they allow people to meet and cooperate with the Ahmadiyya. Furthermore, the form of mutualism that has been mentioned in interreligious environmental collaboration will eventually lead to mutual enrichment. In relation to that, one of the Ahmadiyya scholars said that:

Tentu dalam beberapa kasus, kegiatan sosial-kemanusiaan yang diinisiasikan oleh Ahmadiyya mampu untuk merubah pandangan orang terhadap orang lain. Prasangka-prasangka tersebut kami tepis dengan kegiatan yang bermanfaat. Kami merespons perlakuan negatif tersebut dengan berprilaku baik (Noor, 2023).

In English: "Of course, in some cases, social-humanitarian activities initiated by Ahmadiyya are able to change people's views of other people. We brush aside these prejudices with useful activities. We respond to this negative treatment by behaving well."

Activities involving the Ahmadiyya community will ultimately enrich each other, such as enriching religious discourse related to the environment. As explained in a discussion attended by the Ahmadiyya community. One of the speakers from Ahmadiyya said that differences in identity should not limit us from being able to work together and contribute. It can also enrich and strengthen us in responding to issues (Noor, 2023a). In this case, several groups or forces will certainly join and form a new, bigger and stronger force.

In this regard, interreligious environmental collaboration can be a medium and strategy for Ahmadiyya to engage in inter or intra-religious dialogue or encounters. This is also conveyed by several sources that I have interviewed who said that

Lebih mudah untuk bertemu dengan orang-orang yang berbeda jika yang dilihat adalah kepentingan bersama. Ada banyak hal yang bisa mempertemukan kita berkaitan dengan hal tersebut, seperti isu lingkungan hingga kemanusiaan (Umay and Ghulam, 2023).

In English: "it will be easier to meet with different people if what is seen is a common interest. There are many things that can bring us together in this regard, such as environmental issues to humanity". This can be understood as a form of finding common ground. Another example is also conveyed by the coordinator of the Social Action of Ahmadiyya youth in Central Java. He said that:

Jika kita tidak bisa bertemu pada doktrin keagamaan, bukan berarti kita tidak bisa

bertemu pada isu sosial kemanusiaan (Shakeel, 2023).

In English: "if we cannot meet on religious doctrine, it does not mean we cannot meet on social-humanitarian issues."

Conclusion

Ahmadiyya in its development in Indonesia has experienced many tensions and conflicts with other religious groups, especially in the Muslim community in Indonesia. They experience a lot of discrimination, injustice, and violence. However, in recent years, the Ahmadiyya community has begun to be involved in several social, community, and religious activities. Specifically in this paper, I found that the Ahmadiyya community is very much involved in activities related to the environment. I found that in the activities carried out by Ahmadiyya with other groups, a dialogue is taking place between them. In these activities Ahmadiyya and the groups involved get several aspects such as mutual recognition, mutual understanding, and mutual enrichment. The involvement of Ahmadiyya in environmental issues is also based on a strategy to be involved in the community.

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Interview

Achmad, (the member of Young Interfaith Peacemaker Community), Yogyakarta, April 1, 2023

Nina Mariani Noor (Ahmadiyah scholars),
Interviewed by Muflih, UIN Sunan
Kalijaga Yogyakarta, March 25, 2023

Shakeel, (the Coordinator of the Social Action
of Ahmadiyah Youth in Central Java),
Interviewed by Muflih, Gadjah Mada

Univeristy, March 16, 2023.

Umay, and Ghulam (figures of youth
Ahmadiyya), interviewed by Muflih,
Fadhil Umar Centre, March 14, 2023.

