



**FROM INTELLECTUAL TO ADVOCACY MOVEMENT:  
Islamic Moderation, the Conservatives and the Shift of  
Interfaith Dialogue Campaign in Indonesia**

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**Abstract:** The interfaith dialogue campaign takes a new turn after the demise of the authoritarian regime in 1998. While the previous campaign was characterized by the important role of public intellectuals, such as Gus Dur, Romo Mangunwijaya and Th. Sumartana; the new generation of campaigners adopt more community-based advocacy movement. The shift into a new turn specifically refers to two phenomena; 1) change of the modes and practices of interfaith dialogue movement at the society level and 2) the idea of recent interfaith originates more from communities rather than from prominent public intellectuals. These two phenomena basically show the opportunities and challenges for the future of interfaith dialogue campaign. The study uses two methods, namely archival and case study based on the empirical data from Makassar and Yogyakarta in the mid 2022. The findings show that advocating interfaith dialogues through communities as adopted by the new generation of campaigners apparently more effective for young generations than what is experienced before 1998. It generates the recent interfaith dialogue among young people to be intimate. The findings also implies that the religious moderation discourse and campaign recently propagated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs need to be critically assessed. These two findings interestingly show the conservatives' involvement that eager to join interfaith campaign in order to curb hardliner stigma.

**Keywords:** Interfaith dialogue, intellectual movement, advocative movement, Makassar, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

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## Introduction

THIS ARTICLE is written based on the first year of a three-year research project aims to search for an alternative to the interfaith dialogue campaign in Indonesia mostly conducted by the civil society organizations (CSO) that seems stagnated. Apart from review literatures and using secondary data, empirical data has been collected through observation, interview with resource persons and focus group discussions with the CSO leaders and activists in Yogyakarta and Makassar in mid 2022. The interfaith dialogue in this research study means as an equal and inclusive interaction between people of different religions, faiths, and spiritual beliefs to find common ground. It also aims to achieve understandings and acceptance among different believers so that they can learn through productive social interactions in a pluralistic society.<sup>1</sup> These two purposes are the main substance of interfaith dialogue activities commonly found within a plural environment.

It has been established within the existing literatures that socio- economic injustice provides the major causes of intolerant attitudes. The human insecurity often shapes that grievance.<sup>2</sup> This resulted in the religious crisis for some people because they accuse of the economic gap due to domination of different believers. This accusation surely sparked the polarisation that affected significantly in Indonesian society. Consequently, it makes social segregation between Muslims and non-Muslim in Indonesia, thus harming the country's spirit of pluralism that has been existing for decades.<sup>3</sup> This research is becoming more urgent as current hardliner thoughts among the adherent of religions increasingly threaten the peaceful and harmonious relationships in plural societies. It has been reported in the media as it causes the large

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<sup>1</sup> Achmad Munjid, "Building a Shared Home for Everyone–Interreligious Dialogue at the Grass Roots in Indonesia," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 43, no. 2 (2008): 109–119.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Newman, "Exploring the 'Root Causes' of Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 29, no. 8 (December 1, 2006): 751.

<sup>3</sup> Robert W. Hefner, "Islam and Covenantal Pluralism in Indonesia: A Critical Juncture Analysis," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 18, no. 2 (April 2, 2020): 5–7.

number of phobia expressions like islamophobia, antisemitism, Christian phobia, and others. These represent religious sentiments that could trigger inter and intra-religious conflict that in turn encouraging intolerant attitudes within society.<sup>4</sup>

Previous studies on interreligious relationships show that the current hardening polarisation among different religious communities is due to, among other factors, the stagnant and declining advocacy of interfaith dialogue. This decline refers to the absence of leading figures, the lack of orientation, and the likely stagnant discourse of interfaith dialogues. These three factors represent the challenges of current interfaith dialogue campaign in Indonesia. By taking case study and archival research, this article is therefore focused on answering two main questions: *first*, how does the effectiveness of interfaith dialogue campaign promoted by communities could reduce the interreligious tensions within the society? *Second*, how do the challenges they met during the interfaith dialogue campaign actually managed? Yogyakarta and Makassar were chosen to be ideal fieldwork. The former is praised for the continuing intellectual and advocacy networking in promoting interfaith dialogues. Meanwhile, the latter shows how conservatives' eagerness to involve interfaith campaign.

The findings of this research show the communitarian interfaith campaigners able to attract those conservatives and minorities finding the common grounds. It basically shows the effectiveness interfaith dialogue through informal approaches than formal ones. Another finding reveals the main challenges of current interfaith dialogue is the polarization. More precisely, the stigma of conservatism that associated with the hardliners impedes public to accept their thoughts on pluralism. Likewise, the absence of leading interfaith promoters causes the current interfaith dialogue movements rely on peer-to-peer movement / small circle rather mass populist movement. Consequently, the current interfaith dialogue campaign needs some time to affect larger public space.

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<sup>4</sup> Maykel Verkuyten, Levi Adelman, and Kumar Yogeeswaran, "The Psychology of Intolerance: Unpacking Diverse Understandings of Intolerance," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 29, no. 5 (October 1, 2020): 468–469.

## The Religious Moderation Discourse: An Islamic Perspective Discourse

The discussion on religious Islamic moderation basically is a beacon to the issue of interfaith dialogue. More specifically, the principles of Wasatiya have resulted in balanced attitude norms for Muslims to be self-control and tolerant with the differences. These two principals have inspired other believers to have dialogues without any barriers, which is the understanding of difference allows universalism and moderation

The Ministry of Religious Affairs during Minister Mukti Ali's tenure proposed the initial religious moderation under the Project for the Development of Harmony among Religious People.<sup>5</sup> The program included three core programs, namely interfaith conferences, collaborative research, and student camps. In a nutshell, interfaith dialogue is the practical version of religious moderation according to the Islamic perspective.

The idea of Mukti Ali, unfortunately, was unable to get high supports, especially Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah. Regardless of having minor response, two prominent Islamic scholars, Nurcholish Madjid and Abdurrahman Wahid developed different ways of expanding inter-religious dialogue. Both of them even showed a different approach from their previous intellectual mentor, Mukti Ali. Madjid emphasised pluralism as the main core of religious moderation teaching and promoted tolerance as the real example of interfaith dialogue.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, Abdurrahman Wahid colloquially known as Gus Dur emphasised indigenization of Islam as the main core of religious moderation teaching. It is always in dialogue with the local context. Inter-religious dialogue is the real example of interfaith dialogue in order to concern for human dignity and equality.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Achmad Munjid, "Building a Shared Home: Investigating the Intellectual Legacy of the Key Thinkers of Inter-Religious Dialogue in Indonesia" (Temple University, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> Budhi Munawar-Rachman, "Titik Temu Agama-Agama, Analisis Atas Islam Inklusif Nurcholish Madjid" (Driyarkara School of Philosophy, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Mujiburrahman, "Islam and Politics in Indonesia: The Political Thought of Abdurrahman Wahid," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 10, no. 3 (October 1, 1999): 339–352.

It is also important to note that both religious moderation and interfaith dialogue derives from Qur'an such as Surah al-Mumtahanah (60: 7-8) which emphasizes the creation of an atmosphere of harmony and peace in relations with Christians and Jews, idea of pluralism is based on the recitation of the Qur'an Surah al-Māidah (5:48), and Surah al-Ḥujurāt (49:13) on human equality.<sup>8</sup> These three mentioned sources, therefore, legitimize that religious moderation and interfaith dialogue is the Islamic thought.

In line with the above, the discourse of religious moderation is therefore strongly related to the Islamic perspective. It is also has been established within the literature that religious moderation basically preaches modest and reasonable way of life. More precisely, it also needs consistency and not interfering others. When it comes to the interfaith communication, it emphasises to not cross the line and exaggerating the certain identities. In sum, the religious moderation technically provides the framework for interfaith dialogue that promoting tolerance and pluralism because everyone is unique in their own way, especially religious perspective. Therefore, it needs to respect for that diversity in both community and cultural life as the important pillar of a plural society.

Some prominent Islamic scholars have been long engaged in the discussion on religious moderation discourses. For example, Sayyid Qutub, Fachruddin al-Razi, al-Qurtubi. It also inspires prominent domestic scholars Quraish Shihab, and Achmad Sidiq to involve into religious moderation discourse. Sayyid Qutub itself emphasised "istiqāmah" that means to act faithfully in a particular way.<sup>9</sup> This value teaches Muslims to focus on their deeds and prays without intervening in other business. When it comes to da'wah or the practice or policy of conveying the message of Islam

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<sup>8</sup> Mohamad Latief, "Islam Dan Sekularisasi Politik Di Indonesia," *Tsaqafah* 13, no. 1 (2017): 1–24; Windarti, "Kerukunan Antar Umat Bergama Dalam Perspektif Al Quran" (UIN Sunan Ampel, 1998); Munjid, "Building a Shared Home: Investigating the Intellectual Legacy of the Key Thinkers of Inter-Religious Dialogue in Indonesia."

<sup>9</sup> Sayyid Qutb, *Tafsir Fi Zilalil Qur'an: Dibawah Naungan Al-Qur'an* (Jakarta: Robbani Press, 2006).

to non-Muslims. It should not hurt their belief. It ensures Islam promotes the benefit for all Muslims and non-Muslims.

In line with Qutub's, Fachruddin al-Razi develops *istiqama* concept to be *wasatiya* (Islamic moderation). It basically adopts three main values, such as justice, tolerance and balance.<sup>10</sup> Justice itself means an ability to give or protect individual or collectives' rights according to rules. Tolerance means how to respect the diversity and pluralism. Meanwhile, balance means the how-to self-control and maintains the harmonious life. This *wasatiya* concept inspires the other scholars to develop *wasatiya*. For instance, Muhammad al-Shalabī, in his writings *al-wasatiya fi al-Qurān al-Karīm*, stated that scholars, including later ones such as 'Abdurrahman Assa'dī and Rashid Rida, built this concept of *wasatiya* not only in terms of balance but also justice, goodness. This justice and goodness is not only for Muslims but also at other people.<sup>11</sup> The alternative argument derived from Yusuf Qardawi. He has written many books about *wasathiya* including "*Fiqh al-Wasatiyah wa al-tajdid, Ma'lim wa Manarāt*". For Qardhawi *wasatiya* is the main core of Islamic teachings. *Wasatiya* encourages Muslims to be people who are modest, can maintain balance, are tolerant, and act fairly. These number of characters lead Muslims will become the best people (*ummatah wasatan*).<sup>12</sup>

Domestic prominent Islamic scholars Quraish Shihab and Ahmad Sidiq. For the former scholar, he conceptualizes *wasatiya* to be *as-saddad*, *al-qasha* and *al-istiqamah*.<sup>13</sup> *Al-saddad* means a process of breaking down something and then fixing it so that it is right on target. This kind of understanding of moderation indicates a process of maintaining equilibrium. The meaning of *al-qasha* is a consistent attitude to achieve something. From Shihab, the *wasatiya* has narrowed down to be how to be equal dan

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<sup>10</sup> Fachruddin al-Razi, *Tafsir Mafātīḥ Al-Ghayb* (Cairo: Maṭba'ah al-Bahiyah al-Miṣriyyah, n.d.).

<sup>11</sup> Ali Muhammad As-Shalabi, *Al-Wasathiyah Fil Qur'an Al-Karim* (Cairo: Mu'assasah Iqra' Linasyri watauzi wattarjamah, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> Yusuf Al-Qardhawi, *Fiqh Al-Wasathiyah Wa al-Tajdid, Ma'lim wa Manaraat* (Doha: Markaz Al-Qardhawi Lilwashathiyah Al-Islamiyah wa At-Tajdid, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> Quraish Shihab, *Wasathiyah; Wawasan Islam Tentang Moderasi Beragama* (Tangerang: Lentera Hati, 2019).

determined. This concept subsequently followed up by traditionalist ulamas. Achmad Sidiq in his book “*Khittah Nahdliyyah*” described the concept of Islamic moderation values within Nahdlatul Ulama by mentioning four values such as, *tawāsuṭ*, *tasāmuh*, *tawāzun* and *i’tidal*. *Tawasuṭuh* is a moderate attitude which will be implemented later by being *tasāmuh* (tolerant), *tawāzun* (balanced in life) and *al-i’tidal* (justice).<sup>14</sup>

Gus Dur then developed these values. For example, the question of *tasāmuh* is referred to as a person's attitude and ability to accept differences, including those with different beliefs. Gus Dur also enhanced the concept of indigenization to implement the four values of moderation, in which he explained indigenization: “Indigenization of Islam is not Javanization (Buginization, Makassarization, etc.) or syncretism, because indigenization of Islam only considers local needs in formulating religious laws, without revising to the law itself. More importantly, it was an attempt not to leave the culture on behalf of of Islam, but how accommodates cultural needs by taking advantage of the opportunities provided by variations in the understanding of the texts while still giving a role to *ushul fiqh* and *qaedah fiqh*.<sup>15</sup> In another word, Islam should put those whom different believers in both equal and proportional manners.<sup>16</sup>

From these above explanations, it seems that Islam strongly advocates moderation as the way of life for Muslims. It primarily teaches how to be tolerant and peaceful person in maintaining the life balance. Regarding the interfaith dialogue, Gus Dur basically promotes this Islamic moderation to be religious moderation, as he believed this applicable in Indonesia. As the predominantly Muslim country, Indonesia is also a home for the large number of Christian believers in Eastern Indonesia and Hindu. It also includes the number of minorities in several regions. This envisioned Gus Dur to promote religious moderation in order to

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<sup>14</sup> Achmad Shidiq, *Khittah Nahdliyyah* (Surabaya: Balai Buku, 1980).

<sup>15</sup> Abdurahman Wahid, “Pribumisasi Islam,” in *Islam Indonesia Menatap Masa Depan*, ed. Muntaha Azhari and Abdul Saleh (Jakarta: P3M, 1989), 45.

<sup>16</sup> Tim Penyusun Kementerian Agama, *Moderasi Beragama* (Jakarta: Badan Litbang dan Diklat Kementerian Agama RI, 2019).

keep diversity in Indonesia. He believed that humanism and pluralism are the main essence of religious moderation.<sup>17</sup>

Along with his fellow leading religious leaders from various backgrounds, Gus Dur used interfaith dialogue as a way to promote religious moderation.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, his idea of inter-religious dialogue lies in the interrelationship between the three things, namely universalism, cosmopolitan and indigenization.<sup>19</sup> The idea surfaced precisely when government policies became increasingly exclusive throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Along with different religious figures who are outside the religious organizations formed by the government such as T.H. Sumartana (Protestant Christian), Gedong Bagus Oka (Balinese Hindus), YB. Mangunwijaya (Catholics) and Sri Panavarro Mahathera (Buddhists), their movements were able to create discursive and become an important part of the international interfaith dialogue movement. For him, before going to be a moderate and peaceful person, it is important to understand different religious perspectives. Prejudice sometimes appears as people could not have much time to learn differentiations. This condition actually encouraged Gu Dur emphasised dialogue is the first step to achieve religious moderate society.

Following up this brief theoretical debate, this study uses the framework of inter-religious dialogue put forward by the above figures to see the current shift in the movement. The shift here is not meant to replace but to continue thinking, especially Abdurrahman Wahid, to see the movement (interreligious dialogue) at the grassroots level. The renewal of Islamic thought does not mark the current interfaith dialogue movement as before,

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<sup>17</sup> Media Bahri, "Abdurrahman Wahid, Depth Islam, and Religious Pluralism," *Uloomuna* 19, no. 2 (December 7, 2015): 303–304, accessed October 11, 2022, <https://ulumuna.or.id/index.php/ujs/article/view/216>.

<sup>18</sup> Muhammad Ridho Syabibi, "Communicative Cultural Dakwah of Abdurrahman Wahid in Pluralistic Society," *Karsa: Journal of Social and Islamic Culture* 29, no. 2 (n.d.): 269–270.

<sup>19</sup> Mujiburrahman, "Islam and politics in Indonesia: the political thought of Abdurrahman Wahid" in *Islam and Muslim-Christian Relations*, vol. 10 no. 3, 1999.



but continues on a practical level. This does not mean that the movement stagnates, but that it enriches it by filling that thought through practical activities.

### **The Past Interfaith Dialogue Movement: Learning from Previous Campaigners.**

The recent interfaith dialogue movement basically has put different paths with prior interfaith campaigners. Previously, the interfaith campaign relied on the intellectual movement by populist leading religious leaders. Nowadays, it has been changed to be communitarian movements. This shift, consequently, faces challenges in persuading people to join. Besides, the current narration on interfaith dialogue that emphasises mutual interfaith understandings within small circles seems inadequate. This is different with the previous generation whom initiate empowerment and peacebuilding behind the interfaith campaign. Consequently, it makes the previous generation could attract many people involving interfaith dialogue.

The above brief explanation explains the challenges for revitalisation of recent interfaith dialogue. As previously mentioned, the heated identities turbulence is the major obstacle to overcome. Therefore, it needs to revitalise the interfaith campaign in order to make Indonesia still in intact condition. The revitalisation also means to encourage Indonesians acknowledging pluralism spirit. This section will be further exploring those challenges thoroughly.

A major factor causing the decline in interfaith dialogue is the insufficient regeneration of leading proponents of interfaith dialogue today. These results in the minor public acceptance to learn interfaith dialogues recently. These insufficient regeneration makes long interfaith campaigners for a while. It is important to note that these proponents are generally famous religious scholars cum activists who had focused on interfaith communications. In the past, these included figures such as Abdurrahman Wahid (colloquially known as Gus Dur), Yusuf Bilyarta Mangunwijaya (popularly known as Romo Mangun), Gedong Bagus Oka (also

known as Ibu Gedong) and Dr. Th. Sumartana.<sup>20</sup> These four figures actually had strong desires in promoting tolerance values through interfaith dialogue. It related to Indonesia situation that was fragile in early 2000s due to local conflicts. As a result, interfaith movement was increasingly attracting many people to join on behalf of democracy.

These four figures also represented the major religions in Indonesia: Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism. As the state-recognised religions, three major religions make up over 50 percent population in Indonesia. Geographically, these religions represent Indonesia as a whole country. While Islam concentrates much on the western part, Christianity occupies significantly on the eastern side. Meanwhile, Hinduism is largely in the middle part, with Bali as the centre. These spread of each religion shows the balance religion position in Indonesia. Therefore, it needs an inclusive narration to bridge in these three.

Despite their different stance on religious beliefs, these three shared the same principles that prioritize humanity and the spirit of peace. These two aims are the main core religious values to advocate. Most importantly, the ability of two principles to across religious lines is crucial for interfaith dialogue in Indonesia. The humanity would like to encourage people to see each other as the human at the first place before going to be a believer. Meanwhile, the spirit of peace basically teaches that harmonious life among people is the best things to do.

These four pluralist activists also had specific ways to campaign interfaith dialogue in Indonesia. While Gus Dur and Th Sumartana were more concerned with minority issues, Ibu Gedong and Romo Mangun focused on peacebuilding activities and developments for the poor, especially in slum area.<sup>21</sup> This different method of reaching out to people is basically the same. It eventually addressed the inequality that might be the reason for hardening identities. By approaching those suppressed in society,

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<sup>20</sup> Elga Sarapung, "Generasi Pendiri Dialog Antar Iman Di Indonesia," May 18, 2022.

<sup>21</sup> Syamsu Maarif, "Peran Advokasi Para Pejuang Dialog Antar Iman," May 17, 2022.

these past four pluralist activities would like to bridge in between minority and majority in society.

Furthermore, the four figures engaged in intellectual discussions that attracted large-scale youth participation, especially students. It is important to note that those past leading interfaith campaigners also were a scholar. They often wrote the large number of articles on interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding movements. Taken together, these factors were arguments for interfaith dialogue in Indonesia to be operationalised in the sphere of intellectual activism and movement. Regardless of having the proponents' different religious affiliations, people at that time were enthusiastic to not only listen to their views, but committed to interfaith movement. Besides their individual efforts, these four leading actors were also the patrons of various interfaith dialogue movement in Indonesia, especially during the reformasi era in early 2000s.

The intellectual movement of past interfaith dialogues relied on two main model ways. First, it conducted top-down approaches through campus, while the second was bottom-up through society empowerments. These two depended on the personal capacity of each campaigner. For example, Gus Dur and Th. Sumartana chose to take intellectual activism to nurture tolerance seeds through workshops, short courses, and seminars. Starting from their internal religion communities, it then reached out other communities within different backgrounds. By contrast, Ibu Gedong and Romo Mangun took different method by empowering grass root levels.<sup>22</sup> More importantly, they spread tolerance and interfaith dialogue within voluntary public services. For example, empowering the poor and promoting non-violence action. These two remarkable values basically encourage people to avoid violence and spread loving spirit. These brief explanations will be explained thoroughly in the next section.

For the intellectual movement by Gus Dur and Th Sumartana, it had been focusing on the series of workshop and short courses on tolerance. It aimed to target open-minded people, such as academia, students, and activists. They would be expected to

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<sup>22</sup> Zainal Bagir, "Aktivisme Gus Dur Dan Mangunwijaya," May 17, 2022.

agent of changes in their respective environments. Gus Dur itself, together with another prominent Islamic scholar Nurcholish Madjid, actively promoted pluralism values that also affect many followers. Meanwhile, Th Sumarmata founded DIAN-Interfidei to spread interfaith dialogue in Indonesia. After finishing his study abroad, Th Sumarmata realised that how to preserve diversity in Indonesia through equality and justice within interfaith dialogue movement. Although Sumarmata is a Christian, it did not hamper him from preaching dialogue to others. Gus Dur itself also occasionally gave lectures in DIAN-Interfidei. This duet showed the harmonious two big religion relationships in promoting tolerance and peace in Indonesia.

For the intellectual movement by Ibu Gedong and Rama Mangun, both focused on how to engage with the minorities. This is important to understand because the feeling of inequality and injustice could nurture hardliner thoughts. This condition would be a threat for interfaith dialogue movements. Rama Mangun itself renovates the slum area in Yogyakarta as the way to improve standard of life. He did not lecture interfaith dialogue for the poor people, but showed how he provide public service voluntarily. This is actually intellectual activism from the grass-root level. By helping others, Rama Mangun would like to teach people that kindness and sincerity are the true way to underlay interfaith dialogue.

In a similar vein, Ibu Gedong also did the same things. She adopted the Gandhian spirit like non-violent struggle and insistence as the way to embrace other people. Ibu Gedong believed that the non-violent attitudes would lead to eternal peace building in society. More importantly, she started it through her spiritual centre ashram in Bali. She was also keen to dialogue with other believers in order to understand each other. As a result, Ibu Gedong had acknowledgement, not only in Indonesia but also abroad.

In a nutshell, the intellectual activism within interfaith dialogue took populist style to attract people. The four leading interfaith campaigners had scholarly capacity to express interfaith dialogue not only academic discourses but also empirical attitudes. In another word, the intellectual activism itself became

the intellectual organic.<sup>23</sup> Through promoting interfaith dialogue, they tried to make changes in order to nurture interfaith communication.

In line with above-mentioned discussions, having promoted on the values of humanity and the spirit of peace, previous interfaith dialogues had showed the importance of respecting human existence rather than being judgemental on a different way of life. Acknowledgement of diverse different human existence is basically the main values of interfaith dialogue through intellectual activism. It makes people evaluate others in their own way rather than following the crowd. This humanity perspective is important to put someone at ease. This also avoid people to not think black and white based on certain indoctrinated values in viewing others. Adopting such attitudes facilitates the curbing of religious views which are tinged with chauvinistic sentiments. These latter would be a challenge for current interfaith campaigners. Unfortunately, such tendencies have been growing increasingly daily issue with some becoming extremely inward-looking.<sup>24</sup>

This previously mentioned problems are clearly observed in the stark political polarisation during the 2019 Indonesian General Election. Obviously, one driver for this polarisation is the lack of mutual dialogue to bridge different identities and assisting them in finding common ground. There are many misunderstandings between believers to believe each other. This condition makes the two values that were echoed by the four proponents became more silent in current social interactions. It is the crucial moment for current interfaith dialogues to re-instil these values into the community today.

### **The Current of Interfaith Dialogue Condition**

The current of interfaith dialogue campaign basically shows declining condition. It shows how the interfaith dialogue faces the strong Islamisation wave in society. As mentioned earlier, the

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<sup>23</sup> Focused Group Discussion Moderasi Beragama, May 20, 2022.

<sup>24</sup> Zainal Bagir, *Kerukunan Dan Penodaan Agama* (Yogyakarta: CRCS Press, 2017).

effect of polarisation remains here. It makes the interfaith dialogue facing the challenging processes. Besides, there is an urgent need to stimulate the regeneration of proponents and introduce contextually relevant narratives and discourses into the interfaith dynamic. It is important to note that today's context in Indonesia differs from authoritarian to democracy. Previously, the challenge of interfaith dialogue was divided society after the fallacy of the Suharto regime. In this meantime, there is a growing influence of religious fanaticism in the public sphere that threatens the good inroads made by past and ongoing interfaith dialogues. It affects significantly people to be intolerant at some point. When it comes to the minority's rights, it seems to normalise discrimination to defend majority's position. As a result, people normalise the inferiority condition for the minority condition and accepting the majoritarian rule.

The above-mentioned condition affects how young people to promote interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding efforts. To be more precise, there is insufficient regeneration of proponents, which suggests the youth's lack of enthusiasm for this good fight. This means the past key peacebuilders figures had an influential role in persuading people in diverse society. It is something the current generation could not reach that level. More importantly, there is a public reluctance to accept interfaith dialogue, especially from young people. In another words, there are two issues to address in Indonesia: 1) regeneration of proponents and 2) development of contextually relevant narratives. To sum up, these two represent the current interfaith dialogue conditions.

These two problems above also actually show difficulty of becoming a prominent proponent in interfaith dialogue is gaining public acceptance widely. Especially, when Indonesian society leans in the conservative direction, it is challenging to accept and hear people who are from different identities. This consequently makes the interfaith campaign could not reach out people across the religion border. These hardening identities tone makes people stay in their current affiliation. Another difficulty is the influential power. Previously, the interfaith campaign led by key figures always attracted people to join and involve in interfaith dialogue. It has been changed since the social media comes to appear. This

makes everyone can be a centre of attention when it comes to viral issues. Particularly in today's context, it has become harder for a proponent to gain prominence when it is now easier for anyone to gain attention via social media. In such competition for attention, however, the personal charisma and intellectual capacity are two important qualities for potential proponents to gain prominence. These two prerequisites make the current young peacemakers to be same par with previous generations.

Previously, possessing both qualities would also have a higher chance of influencing audiences to accept their narratives and emphasizing the need for continued interfaith dialogues. For example, Gus Dur was a charismatic Islamic scholar with immense following in rural areas. His pulling factor was so robust that his followers nurtured Gus Dur's pluralistic vision into Gusdurian, a civil society movement focusing on equality, peacebuilding and tolerance across the archipelago. Combined with pro-poor and pro-peace approaches, figures like Gus Dur were extremely successful in drawing the attention of the people to the importance of pluralism in a multicultural society.

The popularity of Gus Dur made the current interfaith campaigner to rethink peacebuilding movement. More importantly, the current generation realised that they could not achieve the level as Gus Dur did. It eventually makes the movement shift for the current interfaith campaigners to promote tolerance building. In addition, current and previous proponents of interfaith dialogues have adopted different approaches. While previous proponents adopted a populist style that ensured a mass grass-root following, the current ones seem to focus on empowering the community. This new paradigm lacks a mass-scale appeal and an organic identity, and merely functions as a movement based on interests. It especially happens since the declining public interest committed to the interfaith dialogue. This condition, consequently, makes the current interfaith dialogues operate in small circles. In words, there is a paradigm shift from intellectual to empowerment movements.

Focusing narrowly on the small circle basically made the current interfaith dialogue movement to be more embedded within the small social groups. Compared with the previous

generations, this shift may cause the interfaith dialogue to be a loosening movement since there is absence of leading figure. Regardless of boundless movement, the current interfaith dialogue might be more indoctrinated than before. This makes the unique selling point of current interfaith dialogue. The more and more small circles could be a snowballing movement that could be larger interfaith dialogue movements.

The above condition, consequently, makes people's understanding of interfaith principles is now localised according to their groups. It may make the different interfaith understandings between previous and current generations. As a result, people's attachment to the interfaith process is not as strongly committed as in the past. This current condition surely signals the bad thing because people could no longer be open-minded to accept other people in a larger setting.

There is also an urgent need to revise the narratives and discourses engendered in interfaith dialogues. Specifically, there is a need to swap abstract concepts with realistic values to facilitate the accessibility to interfaith dialogues to the people. In the past, particularly under authoritarian era, people became idealised with democracy values such as equality and justice that would be applicable in diverse society context. The transitional period of the past enabled interfaith dialogues to garner support from the people. As the Indonesian society grew, evolved and exposed to various domestic tribulations, including a period of turbulent identity politics in the last five years, interfaith dialogues today should adopt new narratives that respond to today's challenges. For example, how to revitalize the unity in diversity spirit is the first step to do so.

These table below sum up the shift of an interfaith dialogue between past and present generation. In line with the above explanation, these table would like to address the macro condition that underlays differentiation. It is important to mention here in order to understand the factors that contribute to the shift.



**Table 1: The Shift of Interfaith Dialogue**

| Indicators        | Before <i>Reformasi</i> period | After <i>Reformasi</i> period |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Period            | Authoritarian                  | Democracy                     |
| Challenges        | Nation Breakup                 | Polarization                  |
| Pattern           | Expert Dialogue                | Community Dialogue            |
| Outcome           | Discourses                     | Practices                     |
| Impact on Society | Plurality<br>Acknowledgment    | Bridging Differentiation      |

Source: elaborated by the authors

From this table, it seems that the macro condition affects the purpose of the interfaith dialogue. In the previous era, the main aim of interfaith dialogue was to save the nation from breakup. It is important to note that, after the fallacy of authoritarian, Indonesia was at the risk condition because of potency of breakup, particularly identity riots. This condition, therefore, encourages the interfaith dialogue to provide discourses for sticking inter communities' relation. Starting from the leading religious leaders, they preached about the inclusive communication to curb heated identities tensions. Especially democracy as the new system needs also strong social capital. This makes the interfaith dialogue was widely accepted in society as they realise Indonesia is a plural state. In a nutshell, the need for interfaith dialogue as the intellectual product was important to provide a macro condition in the new system.

In the meantime, the main challenge for the interfaith dialogue is the divisive society condition. As democracy provides the free public expression, unfortunately this makes the strong conservative wave in Indonesia. This condition, consequently, makes the shift in interfaith dialogue in Indonesia. Production of discourse might be not relevant as the public now get affected by pre-existing knowledges on identities affiliation. It encourages the current interfaith promoters to change the movement mode to be more practical for the common people. For example, gatherings and short courses. Both activities are the common practices in shaping inclusive communications. Although there is a reluctant

response to involve, both modes grow increasingly in the public sphere. In sum, the practices are salient to spread out interfaith dialogue spirit.

In line with the above table explanation, the lack of narration that cover big picture becomes obstacles for current interfaith promoters. Due to emphasizing the practice, the current interfaith dialogue movement sometimes does not reflect the current situation. As a result, without contextually relevant narratives, today's proponents are hindered from rising to the level of their predecessors. Past narratives emphasised pluralism and diversity, but today's context demands the expression of piety in the public sphere. This shift necessitates a similar shift in the interfaith process, one from intellectual activism to advocacy. To be more precise, the advocative work basically points out to curb misunderstandings among different believers.

In advocacy, it should focus more on intergroup dynamics and how people should approach the majority-minority rift, especially as the minorities continue to be subjected to various forms of discrimination and persecutions. More importantly, one of the main objectives should be to promote acceptance that minorities are also a part of the society. By doing so, proponents can respond to society's concerns effectively and have a lasting impact on them.

### **The Rise of Young Interfaith Campaigners in Yogyakarta and Makassar**

One main challenge for the recent interfaith campaigners is how to convince public living with differences. This becomes current major issue that affect most of Indonesians due to last elections.<sup>25</sup> It eventually results in the divided society. In general, Yogyakarta and Makassar show how stigma is still persistent. These social barrier makes public could not easily accept different people in daily social interaction. While the social exclusion remains ubiquitous, the rise of young interfaith campaigners

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<sup>25</sup> Wasisto Raharjo Jati, "Polarization of Indonesian Society during 2014-2020: Causes and Its Impacts toward Democracy," *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik*; Vol 26, No 2 (2022): November (2022), <https://jurnal.ugm.ac.id/jsp/article/view/66057>.

seems to be a silver lining. These ensures that the interfaith dialogue spirit still ongoing.

The emergence of young interfaith campaigners in both Yogyakarta and Makassar has raised the new hopes for interfaith movement. Unlike the previous generation, whom adopted the populist and academic style, the current generation is likely to adopt small circle approaches and practical method. The latter method actually shows how interfaith dialogue starting from the young people through group of conversation.

The role of young people in promoting interfaith campaigners has catalysed the closer relationship among different believers inside the communities. Currently, the membership of youth interfaith campaigners consists of various believers that make them know each other's in group. This condition, therefore, produces recent interfaith dialogues having heart-to-heart interaction. It might be more effective than previous interfaith dialogue generation whom promoted interfaith only through their internal believers.

More importantly, the current interfaith campaigners basically respond to the recent interreligious dialogue whom facilitated by the government still has a minor influence in the public sphere. The number of recent studies has showed that government-led interreligious dialogue only focuses on the social obedience based on communal tolerance approach.<sup>26</sup> Consequently, it still results in the religious sentiments that could spark intra-religion conflict that the government plays a role in its regulation.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Nurdin AR et al., "Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama In Aceh: Strategies, Roles and Barriers in Maintaining Interfaith Harmony," *Ulumuna* 25, no. 2 (December 31, 2021), accessed October 23, 2022, <https://ulumuna.or.id/index.php/ujs/article/view/457>; Dwi Wahyuni, "Gerakan Dialog Keagamaan: Ruang Perjumpaan Antar Umat Beragama Di Kota Bandung," *Religious: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama dan Lintas Budaya*; Vol 3, No 2 (2019) (2019), <https://journal.uinsgd.ac.id/index.php/Religious/article/view/5095>; Stephanus Turibius Rahmat, "Dialog Antropologis Antaragama Dengan Spiritualitas Passing Over," *Wawasan: Jurnal Ilmiah Agama dan Sosial Budaya*; Vol 2, No 2 (2017) (2017), <https://journal.uinsgd.ac.id/index.php/jw/article/view/1704>.

<sup>27</sup> Syaifudin Zuhri, "Regimented Islamophobia : Islam, State, and Governmentality in Indonesia," *Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies* 9, no. 2 (2021): 387–422.

In general, the interfaith dialogue campaign shows the similar concerns. Particularly, how to respond to the identities expression and extremist stigma. These two problems have been ingrained since the polarisation remains. There is a prejudice that might be a barrier for the inclusive communication. More importantly, the term “radical” has been politicised that may worsen the intra-Islamic rivalry. As a result, this affects those Muslims who have been labelled “radicals” to involve in the interfaith dialogue campaign. They want to emphasise that the interfaith dialogue should promote freedom of expression for believers to pray and interact according to their faith. It basically opposes the government program that imposes the harmonious relationship between majority and minority.<sup>28</sup> In sum, the group of young people would like to define interfaith dialogue according to their own version rather than state guidance. They would like to promote interfaith dialogue based on social-humanity dialogue.<sup>29</sup>

It is also important to note that there is also a differentiation between Yogyakarta and Makassar's case. While the Yogyakarta shows how the interfaith activism is more organised and inspired by Islamic traditional thoughts and churches, Makassar case shows the interfaith dialogue runs based on forums. Compared with Yogyakarta, Makassar's case shows loose connection among the members. Also, the Makassar case could able to attract the conservatives to get into the interfaith dialogue movement. It becomes the interesting point to draw out the interfaith dialogue.

Basically, both Yogyakarta and Makassar case nurture the previous interfaith norms. Having said this, there are at least three modern organisations that inherit the spirit of their founders' activism in promoting intellectual-based interfaith dialogues. Gus Durian, Bumi Cendekia, and Dian-Interfidei inspire the birth of many interfaith dialogues among young people. These two

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<sup>28</sup> Jeremy Menchik, *Islam and Democracy in Indonesia: Tolerance without Liberalism*, Cambridge Studies in Social Theory, Religion and Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/islam-and-democracy-in-indonesia/B7C0584E5C1F121C4C561474F5B2ECE6>.

<sup>29</sup> Rahmat, “Dialog Antropologis Antaragama Dengan Spiritualitas Passing Over.”

organisations remain important in promoting interfaith dialogue because it regularly holds a series of interfaith short courses, education, and trainings for students and activists whom interested with the interfaith dialogue. This makes the interfaith dialogue norm spread out widely in Indonesia, particularly for young people.

The Gus Durian network emerged after Gus Dur's death in 2009. Coordinated by Alissa Wahid, Gus Dur's daughter, this network was formed to respond to various humanitarian problems experienced by the lower classes. In collaboration with Gus Dur's students in various regions, this network has now spread to 130 cities. They carried various activities out at the lower level, including in assisting the Shiah case in Sampang, Madura. Besides Gusdurian, the Bumi Cendekia educational institution has also emerged, which is designed as a boarding school that integrates classical and modern traditions inclusively. Founded by Imam Aziz, a young intellectual who admires the thoughts of Gus Dur and several others in Yogyakarta. Through this institution, inter-religious dialogue is built through open education. Meanwhile, it came from Gus Dur's own thoughts, while Dian-Interfidei was founded by Th Sumartana, one of the leading figures in the interfaith dialogue movement, together with Gus Dur. This institution is still being continued by the next generation. They have been active in promoting interreligious dialogue since the early 2000s until now.. Therefore, many of their followers still continue to nurture their thoughts. It also includes the conservatives that are committed to interfaith dialogue regardless of having different sides in the Makassar case. Basically, they follow up Gus Dur and Th Sumartana's thoughts.

Yogyakarta case shows how civil society organisations that affiliated with traditionalist Islam are the leading actors in nurturing interfaith dialogue. One of the communities is an interfaith women's community, Srikandi Lintas Iman (SRILI). It is mostly comprised of women coming from various backgrounds with a mission to facilitate an inclusive communication for to promote tolerance in the society. It is important to target women to be main member because they could be innovators in their neighbourhood community. It also aims to bridge the gap between

minority and majority groups, especially Muslims and non-Muslims. Both of these missions are relevant to curb intolerant views today that affect society. This organisation hopes to mould their members into agents of change in the community and their respective families. By starting from the nuclear families, religious moderation can be rooted in the small circle. Although this organisation often faces challenges from conservative groups, they persisted in their mission to promote interfaith dialogue. One of the challenges they often meet is accusation of hidden proselytism agendas because of intensive interfaith meetings. The conservatives argue that mingling with different believers could weak the upbringing's faith. Regarding this issue, there is a lack of protections are being conferred by the local government since the public officials avoid troubled with the conservatives.<sup>30</sup>

Likewise, Bumi Cendekia who inherited Gus Dur's spirit of thought in the field of education. Through an integrated curriculum and with inclusive ideas, Bumi Cendekia develops the basics of inclusiveness in interfaith dialogue at a younger age, namely junior high school students. Meanwhile, the Institute for Interfaith Dialogue (DIAN-Interfidei) also has similar concerns: to nurture the legacy of its founder Th Sumarmata in promoting interfaith dialogue. By cooperating with schools in Yogyakarta, it hopes to nurture tolerance among students who are encouraged to be agents of tolerance themselves among their peers. In a similar vein, Gusdurian also consistently promotes the interfaith dialogue through minorities' right advocacy. Nowadays, Gus Durian has vast majority networking across the archipelago that is still concerned with the minority's issues.

Moving to Makassar's case, it has an interesting description to further elaborate. In contrast to Yogyakarta, the Makassar case shows how conservatives can able to join in promoting interfaith dialogue. The main proponent conservatives, Wahdah Islamiyah, previously were part of the committee for sharia enforcement (KPSI) that encouraged sharia becoming local bills in Makassar in

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<sup>30</sup> Wiwin Siti Aminah Rohmawati, n.d.

the 2000s.<sup>31</sup> However, after joining the interfaith camp for youth in Malino in 2019, the conservative has been changed to pro-tolerance stance. The Wahdah Islamiyah itself does not oppose with diversity, but they refuse tolerance based on western liberalism value. Afterward, they actively involved in many interfaith dialogues and promoting tolerance through different social media platform.

In a similar vein, the emergence of “Cadar Garis Lucu” or niqab woman's funny path derived from the conservative background. The founder Ainun Jamilah is a niqab woman who was conservative. After joining in several interfaith training, she becomes open minded and eventually going along with tolerance campaign.<sup>32</sup> Niqab women funny officially becomes an interfaith organisation in the late February 2021. It has member whose various background from teacher, photographer, and student. They actively produce contents on inter-religious solidarity and tolerance messages on social media. When the cathedral churches got bombed by terrorist in 2021, the Niqab women funny condemned it and joined to pray together for the victims.

From the Wahdah Islamiyah and Niqab women funny path, we can learn that they would like to fight against “radical” stigma because of their Islamic religious perspectives. These two organisations basically have many followers that from Salafi and conservative background. the Niqab women funny path whom mostly its members are the niqab women, strongly advocates tolerance and gender equality.<sup>33</sup> Wearing niqab does not mean they would be exclusive and even radical. Instead, they are vocal supporters of interfaith dialogue in Makassar. Similar to Niqab women funny path, Mahabbah Institute for Peace and Goodness (MIPG) in cooperation with prominent conservative group Islamic Defenders; Front actively advocates the establishment of advent churches and also interfaith dialogue.

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<sup>31</sup> Andi Muawiyah Ramly, *Demi Ayat Tuhan: Upaya KPPSI Menegakkan Syariat Islam* (Jakarta: Open Society Institute (OPSI), 2006).

<sup>32</sup> Ainun Jamilah, “Garis Lucu Melawan Stigma,” May 17, 2022.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

The Makassar case basically shows that conservative can be also the supporter of interfaith dialogues. It is interesting to elaborate behind the conservative shift to be moderate in Makassar. Thanks to The Institute for Advocacy and Education of People's Children (LAPAR), MIPG, and Jalin Harmoni whom strongly advocate the interfaith dialogues despite their different religious perspectives. This intention actually inspired by the Institute for the Study and Empowerment of Islamic Boarding Schools (LKPM) whom initiated by local NU youth wings.<sup>34</sup> This civil society organisation actively facilitate inter-religious dialogue through friendship retreats. They would like to nurture Gus Dur's thoughts on pluralism and interfaith dialogues. Through disseminating tolerance, interfaith dialogues, and democracy within the empowerment work, they are able to reach out the conservatives and Salafis whom previously opposed to the interfaith dialogues. To wrap up discussion in this section, the table 2 below shows the comparative interfaith campaign between Yogyakarta and Makassar.

**Table 2: Interfaith Dialogues Practices in both Yogyakarta and Makassar**

| Organisations     | Mode of Dialogue                   | Content of Advocacy                             | Outcomes                         |
|-------------------|------------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|
| <b>Yogyakarta</b> |                                    |   |                                  |
| SRILI             | Gathering                          | Prejudices                                      | Interfaith Dialogue women cadres |
| Gusdurian         | Networking, Advocacy               | Minorities Issue                                | Intercommunity's strengthening   |
| Bumi Cendikia     | Teachings                          | Interfaith Understandings                       | Knowledge Production             |
| <b>Makassar</b>   |                                    |   |                                  |
| Lakpesdam NU      | Networking and Interfaith Advocacy | Radicalism, Extremism, and Religious Moderation | Research Report                  |

<sup>34</sup> FGD Moderasi Beragama Makassar, "Pemetaan Dan Peran Aktor Dialog Antar Iman," July 27, 2022.



|   |  |                                |                             |
|---|--|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Wahdah<br>Islamiah                        | Networking<br>and Interfaith<br>Gatherings | Islamic Tolerance              | Interfaith Youths<br>Cadres |
| Cadar Garis<br>Lucu / Niqab<br>Funny Path | Networking<br>and Online<br>Campaign       | Opposing the<br>Radical stigma | Public Awareness            |

**Source:** elaborated by the authors.

From this table, the current interfaith dialogue has a different platform to promote tolerance and religious moderation. The group of youth people basically makes up the largest interfaith campaigners. These different platforms basically show the various strategies to make interfaith values to be more adaptive and contextual. These peer-to-peer movements so far are effective in promoting tolerance spirit than state approaches in Yogyakarta and Makassar.

## Conclusion

The shift of interfaith dialogue campaign marks by the new turn and future agenda for strengthening religious moderation in Indonesia. Previously, the purpose of interfaith dialogue was to keep Indonesia remained united after authoritarian era. It also aimed to preserve diversity that has been ingrained for a long time within Indonesian society. These two aims, therefore, need an intellectual narration to frame the previous interfaith campaign. It had resulted in the emergence of prominence public intellectuals such as Gus Dur, Romo Mangunwijaya and Th. Sumartana to build tolerance and inclusive relationship in the society.

After the end of the New Order era, the interfaith dialogue has shifted to be small circle movement. This shift particularly responds back the heated polarisation in society. This condition surely makes people getting segregated. In responding to that situation, the group of young people would like to fix the condition by strengthening interfaith dialogue in their social circles. Interestingly, the current movement also attracts those accused of radicals actively involved in interfaith dialogue. The latter group would like be against stigma that conservative opposes with the religious moderation. The current generation

provides a new hope for one of the main defenders of Indonesia's pluralism.

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