

Investigating the Motive of Religious Violence / Conflict in Sociological Perspective

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Abstract:

Connecting the word "religion" and "violence / conflict is a contradictory terminology, because the true religion is a divine teaching that implies goodness. But on the other hand religion is often used as a tool of legitimacy against acts of violence and even conflicts in the name of religion. The phenomenon of violence and conflict in the name of religion is a religious-social phenomenon often associated with the construction of understanding of religious teachings. Understanding of ritual or deductive-textual-scripturalistic teachings of religion raises influence to individuals or groups. In the sociological realm, such religious practices often lead to a fundamentalistic pattern of religious reasoning, which can turn into radicalism. The consequence is the emergence of acts of violence and even conflicts in the name of religion.

Keywords- religion, conflict and violence, legitimacy

I. INTRODUCTION

In a simple way, religion can be interpreted as a system of belief toward God and there are many regulations in it, which are believed that they came from the God directly. Religion takes an important role in both individual and group life within society. Through religion, the manner and behavior of individual and group is moved by a power which is based on the religious teachings. In its development, religion is not only as a believed truth, but as much as possible to be practiced in daily life, through manner, behavior, or actions.

However, a problem appears when religion is used as a justification tool to do violent actions. Religion is often used as an ideological basis and symbolic justification for a violent actions being done by some part of religious people. It is still fresh in our mind about some conflicts and violences with the name of religion happen in our Earth, especially in Indonesia. Factors of violent actions or even conflicts are so diverse, starting from justice, economy, and poverty aspects.

If it relates to religion, another aspect which can be a trigger for violent actions is the reason

(tendency) of different religious view. This is happened when some people in the society who have different belief and religious view, hence a group of people who have been provoked will do anarchist actions such as attacking, destroying building, burning, and even taking the lives of people. Apart from the motivation, condition, and either right or wrong those violent actions are done, it is clear that those actions should not be happened, by considering that religion essentially teaches kindness.

II. DISCUSSION

Events including war, violence, and conflict that bring the religion symbols, both implicitly and explicitly makes religion that is full of peace missions, seems to be disappeared. Violence and even conflict that arise on the surface show that some people consider violence or aggressiveness schemes as a common thing, and even to be considered as a manner and a behavior to solve problems being faced. Actually, in any method, violence cannot be justified, because violence is aggression acts and infringement that may cause or be intended to hurt others. Every person and groups have different aggression attitude and it is expressed based on their personality. According to its definition, aggression is destruction and disturbance addressed to others with planned intention. So, aggression is really close to violent behavior.

Violent pattern has been a research subject of many scientists, such as social scientists, psychologists, lawyers, and religionists in many perspectives. Referring to the field of psychology, for example, aggression is attributed to various causative factors, namely: *first* is the instinct theory, according to this theory, aggression comes from the encouragement of human biological natural tendency to be destructive; *second* is encouragement theory, aggression is caused by external condition such as: frustration, and the shame of losing image. Those conditions then encourage people to hurt others; *third* is cognitive neo-association theory, according to this theory, aggression comes from negative reaction toward experience, memory, and unpleasant cognition; *fourth* is social learning theory, this theory states that aggression is formed because environmental learning,

both from direct experience and others behavior observation.¹

Violence basically is classified into two forms; random violence which includes small scale or unplanned violence, and coordinated violence, which is done by groups both those who are given the authority and those who are not – just like what is happened in a war (violence among the society), and terrorism.

Johan Galtung, a sociologist from University of Oslo, classified the violence culture which is grown among society into three types of connected violence: *direct* violence, *structured* violence, and *cultural* violence. Direct violence is a violence which is happened directly, structured violence is a process which has the up and down period, and cultural violence tends to be invariant, permanent, and stable, following the slow transformation of culture. Those theories of violence can be imaged as the violence triangle that supports one to another. The way that violence triangle works is according to chained causal current from one point to another, where the connecting cycle of those three violence can start from any point².

If it is connected to religion, then the condition and motivation that may cause violation can be intersected with religion in ideology, tradition, comprehension, passion, and many more. In this framework, G. Bailie stated that violence and the sacred can come together at the same time. He saw religion is implicitly able to support a kind of violence with a moral monopoly. This kind of violence is called the sacred violence or veiled violence, a violence that receives justifications from a religion and history. From the perspective of a person or group who do a violence based on a sacred violence, it is legitimate in religion, morality, and history because the target of violence are wrong people and became a part of mistake in the past history. Different from the common violence, this kind of violence has an honorary or glorious aura as well as moral and religious monopoly. There are sacred duties believed in those violent actions³. Therefore, violence done by particular groups is not without any reason; their reason is clearly hinted to religion regulations that they wish or religious motive.

According to Charles Kimball⁴, there are five situations where a religion is potentially integrated with violent actions. *First*, a religion claims that the truth of religion is absolute and the only truth. *Second*, a religion can cause violent actions when it comes together with blind faith to the leader of religion. *Third*, a religion can be integrated with violence when the people started to miss their ideal era in the past and then try to actualize in the current era. *Fourth*, religion can be integrated with violence when a particular

objective justifies any means possible. This objective, according to Kimball, can be motivated by many things such as (a) to protect a sacred place; (b) to protect religious teachings that they feel are in danger; (c) to emphasize group identity from the inside, and (d) to emphasize group identity against outsiders. *Fifth*, a religion can be integrated with violence when the holy war has been declared.

Meanwhile, according to Haryatmoko, there are at least three reasons why a religion has a possibility to be a basis for and justification for a violent action. *First*, religion functions an ideology. The function of religion is to tighten a society because it gives a framework of interpretation in the meaning of relationship among people; how far a social order is considered as religious interpretation desired by the God. On the other side, it can create many contradictions, especially related to injustice and the gap which always becomes a hot topic and frequently causes violent actions. *Second*, religion functions as a factor of identity. Religion specifically can identify its ownership on a particular person or a group of people. This ownership gives stability, status, perspective of life, way of thinking, ethos, and many more. Those things can be more crystalized if they are connected with other identities such as sex (gender), ethnic, nationality, and many more. Ethical contradiction of group, nationality, and so on, is able to create violence and here, religion is possible to be included as well. *Third*, religion functions as ethical legitimization of relationship among people. Different to religion as a basis of interpretation, this mechanism is not a sanctification of relationship among human, but as a relationship among human that gains support and legitimization from a religion.⁵

If we see backward to human race history, violence, torture, and even murder had appeared in line with the time human civilization came, and on the contrary, the basis of life which is oriented to peace, security, and toleration had fulfilled the human race history. Violence that brings the name of religion which is happened in the society recently, needs our attention. “Why a religion always becomes a basis to do violent actions?”

According to Mark Juergensmeyer, for the doers, violent actions or even conflict in the name of religion is not a diversion or misappropriation, but a condition which is born from a view which is called Cosmic War. Cosmic War is inspired by religious idea, is intended that human with religion always feel threatened with many kinds of crime. Therefore, human should fight against them to establish kindness and righteousness on Earth. In this view, violence has fundamental structures from all system of beliefs in major religions all around the world.⁶ Therefore, radical religious movements appear which are intended to

bring religious teachings back to righteousness and kindness though violent ways.

Oliver McTernan concluded that basically, every religion has history that leads to actions such as violence, war, persecution, and so on. McTernan tried to re-tell the history of religion which struggled around violence and war, to explain that those violence and war appeared as reactions toward injustice, oppression, evil, cruelty, and many more. On the other side, violence and war happened as a rescue of religious teachings that are considered to be in the state of diversion and those who were involved in war as a noble task that must be done as an embodiment of faith and loyalty toward religion. In this case, sacred texts as the backgrounds of violent actions and war have become the basis.⁷

Basically, the emergence of radical religious movements can be seen in various factors, such as the understanding toward their sacred text. In Islam for example, literal and partial understanding toward the Verses of Al-Qur'an and *Sunnah* of Prophets can cause someone to be trapped in a narrow insight and cannot contextualize the teachings in real life. For example in understanding verses about Jihad in Al-Qur'an, it is just limited to explicit literal meaning. They do not try to collaborate them further through historical understanding related to the concept of those verses, then only take universal values consisted inside to be applied in the current situation which has been different from the situation when those verses were delivered. This matter becomes stronger when other factors such as politic, economy, and justice are also involved in the same time.⁸

According to Arthur J.D'Adamo, there are four perspectives of religion which in modern perspective is considered as the indication of epistemological crisis. This crisis started from the knowledge about religion toward religious text which then led to rigid elements. Firstly, religious text as an axiomatic truth which is consistent, secondly, it is complete and final in nature, so another truth beside of it is not possible, thirdly, it as the only source where human get the meaning of safety, enlightenment, and liberation, fourthly, it is directly come from God so the truth is guaranteed. Epistemological crisis as stated by D'Adamo previously, if it is translated extremely, it can create a "high-risk religiousness" which endangers internal and external relationship.

In its implementation, the phenomenon of strengthening the fundamentalism and violent actions in the name of religion are the example, where the most obvious characteristic of religious understanding from absolute-fundamentalism groups are the existence of concept that reduce human independence radically and establish it on the condition of creativity stuck. Besides, religious fundamentalism is a choice of

behavior that wishes the establishment of faith "firmly" in a "perfect" form and literary; faith as one of elements inside religious belief which does not wish compromise and interpretation.

Religious behavior which is called as reductionist fundamentalism that has a belief toward perfection of the religion itself, so demolition and adaptation to the reality are not necessary, but development of this era should follow the culture and *par-excellence* value. This is what then known as fundamentalism structure of deductive religious way of thinking, a tendency from religious people to interpret and actualize their Holy Book in textual-scriptural way. Consequence of diversity and deductive-textual-scriptural way of thinking (a term from Amin Abdullah) is the weakening of sensitivity and sharpness in observing the phenomenon of nature, culture, and social that always change and move rapidly so they affect directly toward religious issues and religious experience format in this globalization era.⁹

Explanation above righteous claim which is understood in its practice allows the use of violence. Religious understanding justifies that violence can be accepted morally and can be legitimated communally with religious teachings. Religious doctrines will be a pretty strong weapon and motivation to deny the bigger escalation of violence.

Besides the different understanding of Holy Text, another factor that makes a person or group to have radical behavior and end up on violent actions is a suspicion toward religious groups or other believers. That suspicion is caused by allegation for example, a fraud in spreading *da'wah* or religious mission which is alleged as misguided teachings, and create the opportunity for communal groups to respond on that allegation with methods that tend to be violent actions. A condition full of suspicion of a radical group will see these matters from other religion in exclusive theological perspective.

The problem is when the allegation continuously exists without any religious dialog as a way to make the religious information open. That suspicion creates allegations that are negative and commonly is related to the problem of deviated or misguided religious teaching, and encourage radical groups to do violence, which is considered as a way to eradicate misguidance and misappropriation of religious teachings. It can be treated as a time bomb that when the time comes, violent actions or even war might be happened. It can be seen on violence cases which were happened in Indonesia.

Provocative actions done by other person or group can also be considered as a causative factor of violent actions. For example harassment, insult, and mockery of religious symbols which are sacred for

other religions. This phenomenon can cause high religious emotion, and make violence, riot, or turmoil as a revenge to an unfair treatment or as an effort of opposition toward something. The most common reason to cause a riot including a bad condition of living, oppression of government to people, religion or ethnic conflict, and the existence of something which is considered inappropriate with the desire of some particular groups.

III. CONCLUSION

Violent actions or conflict that brings the name of religion includes various forms, motives, motivation, and condition. The issue of emergence of religion in violent actions is based on the difference, knowledge, and understanding toward holy text, a tendency toward a particular text which is understood textually makes some groups of people legitimate violent actions. The difference of understanding toward religious text makes some believers tend to show different religious features.

Those violent actions commonly are thought as sacred violence or veiled violence, where they should be done toward people who are considered to be deviated, guilty, misguided from values of teaching given by those groups, or in other words, fighting for righteousness to fix what is wrong. It cannot be denied that there are religious holy texts that lead to violent actions, but all of them should be understood contextually so those texts can be understood universally and can be applied to solve current problems.

The phenomenon of violence can be also happened when religious symbols become mockery and harassment object, whether it is intentional or not.

Another factor is the emergence of allegation toward religious groups or other believers. These two factors allow the violence and conflict either internal or external part or religious people.

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