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Role of the Christian Women in the Minahasa Evangelical Christian Church to Guarding Harmony in Manado

Suzy Azeharie^{1,*} Wulan Purnama Sari¹

¹*Faculty of Communication, Universitas Tarumanagara, Jakarta, Indonesia*

^{*}*Corresponding author. Email: suzya@fikom.untar.ac.id*

ABSTRACT

North Sulawesi is a province where the religion of the majority of the population is Christianity and the second largest religion is Islam. Interaction with various nations has occurred for a long time ago, as a result the Minahasa community tends to have practiced the equality values of gender, racial, ethnic and cultural equality. Women have tremendous potential to foster a culture of religious harmony. The Minahasa Evangelical Christian Church (GMIM) is a Protestant Christian church with the largest congregation about 35% of the total population of North Sulawesi Province. The research purpose aims to determine the role of Christian women of the Minahasa Evangelical Christian Church in guarding harmony in Manado. And to find out the obstacles that the Christian women of the Minahasa Evangelical Christian Church in guarding harmony in Indonesia. In this research the researchers used the case study research method. This research used several data collection methods of interviews, library research and online data tracking. The conclusion is there are no specific activities for the GMIM Christian women in carrying out concrete activities to maintain harmony. They generally join in other women's organizations such as PKK (family empowerment and welfare program). Several GMIM Christian women activists are sent to organize the School of Pluralism. In each class the participants learn briefly to get to know the teachings of Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Confucianism and Hinduism. The concept the program put forward is peace in differences and differences in brotherhood.

Keywords: *Christian women of GMIM, GMIM, Minahasa*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian nation is a diverse nation. Its diversity is unique with diverse tribes, races and cultures spread over an archipelago of more than 17,000 islands. This nation's uniqueness makes Indonesia a country of pluralism. Therefore, the Indonesian society is frequently called a plural and multicultural society [1].

Moreover, there are six official religions recognized by the government namely Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism as well as hundreds of traditional beliefs [2]. Various community groups continue to maintain their traditional beliefs. For example, people in Cigugur Kuningan Village continue to practice the traditional belief of Sunda Wiwitan or Dayak tribes hold Kaharingan.

North Sulawesi is a province where the religion of the majority of the population is Christianity and the second largest religion is Islam. Data from Central Bureau of Statistics in 2010 showed that the Christian population was 63.60% and Muslims were 30.9%, Hindus were 0.58% and Buddhists were 0.14% consecutively [3].

According to DP Salim, Islam entered the region for the influence of Gowa Tallo Sultanate from the 15th century to

16th century and Buddhism was brought in when trading activities were intense in the Sriwijaya era; moreover, Portuguese traders brought Catholicism in the 16th century. Salim noted that Protestant Christianity developed around 1905 after Dutch missionaries brought it to the region [4]. The people of North Sulawesi hold the value of Torang Samua Basudara which means that we are all brothers. According to Manti in Rumondor and Tumiwa, the philosophy behind the value is openness, mutual respect, mutual help and help each other. It is because in general there are many people in North Sulawesi Province who work in the sector of agriculture, so this value is usually applied when there are people working in their agricultural field [5].

It is also known the philosophy of Sitou Timou Tumou Tou which according to Priscilla F. Rampengan means "human life to humanize other people" [6]. It is expected that Minahasa tribe will increase tolerance, respect all kinds of difference and maintain the cultural diversity that exists in the Minahasa land.

In addition to the mapalus or mutual cooperation tradition, the Minahasa community also knows the friendship tradition. And despite it is heterogeneous and Christians community dominated the activities, tolerant, equal and non-exclusive communication patterns are introduced

through various traditional values. For example, in Tondano North Sulawesi, Tondano Javanese people or Jaton are a minority group. They come from Java Island and their religion is Islam, however, they live in harmony in Christian community and when the Jaton people hold a religious event they always invite other religious groups and vice versa [7].

Interaction with various nations has occurred for a long time ago, as a result the Minahasa community tends to have practiced the equality values of gender, racial, ethnic and cultural equality. One of Indonesian National Heroes from Minahasa is a woman, Maria Walanda Maramis founding a household school known as Huishoudschool [8]. It indicates that women in Minahasa generally have the opportunity to develop themselves since a long time ago.

According to Rosnika Kusuma in Hamdan Daulay, women have tremendous potential to foster a culture of religious harmony. They have patience, smooth language and can be accepted in the midst of differences. However, cultural issues and political realities in Minahasa have not provided maximum support to women [9].

UNESCO believes the significant role of women in the peace movement. This was revealed by Daimah who studied the involvement of women in peacebuilding is potentially believed to increase the violence termination around 24%. According to UNESCO, the feminine nature and spirituality which generally belongs to women is one of the important factors in anticipating conflict and violence in any name. The nature of femininity is a necessary thing in creating peace between people [10].

As sectarian conflicts broke out in Ambon in the period of 1999-2004, Sumanto Al Qurtubi revealed that Christian and Catholic women in Ambon in August 1999 founded the 'Care Women' Movement. Furthermore, they recruited Muslim women. This movement aimed to drive up the peace movement to break the conflicts that occurred in Ambon [11].

According to Rachel Iwamony-Tiwery, the consistent involvement of women to encourage the conflict termination and undertake peace efforts and determination to teach people to live in peace shows women' step beyond the "boundary" of impossibility labeled on them generally. Women enter the 'territory' controlled by men and they perform the roles that society needs. As women step beyond the limits of the impossibility, they change the way of thinking of society in general [12].

Despite it is known as the "the province of 1000 churches", the Minahasa Evangelical Christian Church (GMIM) is a Protestant Christian church with the largest congregation of 795,809 people or about 35% of the total population of North Sulawesi Province number 2,461,028 people [13]. The Calvinist tradition is one of the oldest Christian schools in Indonesia. According to Batlajery, this Calvinist sect was part of the Dutch church or the Netherlands Hervomd Kerk brought by VOC. Calvinists based on a sinodal tendency from top to bottom. The synod governs all decisions and the church leader is not a single person but the elders gather together [14].

Based on the background at above, the researchers are interested in studying the role of the Christian women of the

Minahasa Evangelical Christian Church in Minahasa Manado in guarding harmony in Manado: (1) The research purpose aims to determine the role of Christian women of the Minahasa Evangelical Christian Church in guarding harmony in Manado; (2) To find out the obstacles that the Christian women of the Minahasa Evangelical Christian Church in guarding harmony in Indonesia?

1.1. Related Work

There are several researches that discuss the role of women in multicultural societies and conflict resolution. Firstly, the research came from Patricia Ehrkamp with the title of *The Limits of Multiculturalism Tolerance? Liberal Democracy and Media Portrayals of Muslim Migrant Women in Germany* [15]. The research conducted in 2010 discussed on how the sexuality of Muslim migrant women was used as an instrument to enforce gender and cultural restrictions on citizenship and liberal democracy.

Secondly, it was the research from Helmia Asyathri et.al entitled *Hybrid Diplomacy: Women in Conflict Resolution* [16]. This descriptive qualitative research conducted in 2014 aimed to explore the activities of women in non-formal areas as a form of hybrid diplomacy that influences conflict resolution in Ambon.

Thirdly, Daimah studied the *Role of Women in Building Religious Harmony: A Comparative Study of Indonesia and Malaysia*. This research conducted in 2018 compared the role of women in two countries, i.e. Indonesia and Malaysia in maintaining religious harmony in each country [10]. However, there is no research conducted on the GMIM Christian women in Manado.

In this research the researchers used the case study research method. According to Robert K. Yin, the case study is generally a research strategy that is suitable for answering research questions regarding how or why if the researchers have little opportunity to control the events to be investigated and the focus of research on current phenomena [17].

This research used several data collection methods of interviews, library research and online data tracking. In this research there was one resource person interviewed in a semi-structured manner, i.e. Ms. Deeby RS Momongan. She was a female activist from the GMIM and born in Manado on December 27, 1969. Previously the researchers planned to interview other activists of the Peace Love Movement and representatives of the Religious Harmony Forum in North Sulawesi. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic the questions sent via WhatsApp didn't get a response. Direct observations to Manado also could not be carried out because there were no flights from Jakarta to the City of Manado.

1.2. Our Contribution

This paper presents some improvements about the role of Christian women of the Minahasa Evangelical Christian

Church in guarding harmony in Manado, and the obstacles that the Christian women of the Minahasa Evangelical Christian Church faced in guarding harmony in Indonesia.

1.3. Paper Structure

This paper will be written in several parts. The first part is the introduction that will reveal the diversity of culture in Indonesia. Also the important role of women in resolving conflicts. The second part is related work which contains the previous researches on the role of women and the tolerance in cultural diversity. It also stated the research method used in this paper.

Then there is a discussion section. Findings from the research results are divided into two parts. The first is the role of women of GMIM and the second part is the obstacle facing by them to treat harmony. The last part is conclusion of the paper followed by the list of libraries used in this paper

2. BACKGROUND

Diversity is a condition in society where there are differences in various fields particularly ethnicity, nation, race, religion, ideology, culture or plural society. Diversity in society is a condition that shows differences in society.

According to Gabriele Weichart, the Governor of Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie or VOC, i.e. Robertus Padtbrugge signed an agreement with the chiefs of *walak* in 1679. *Walak* is a unit consisting of several villages. As the endogenous units that can meet their own needs, various *walaks* live side by side and compete with one another. This means that according to the author, the Minahasa community has been historically accustomed to interacting with other nations and other tribes for a long time ago [18]. For example, they accepted one of the Diponegoro War Commanders, Kyai Modjo exiled to Minahasa in 1828 with 63 followers. The followers were all male and Muslim. In addition, they married Minahasa women and had children in the region until right now [7]. And although there is no deeper researches, Tuanku Imam Bonjol, a great scholar who led the Bonjol War in West Sumatra, was banished by the Dutch to Lotta area, Pineleng District, about 30 minutes from Manado right now. Together with him, there was one of his guards who were descended from Ambon, Apollos Minggu.

Moreover, Apollos Minggu married the daughter of Mayor Kakaskasen named Wilhelmina Parengkuan or Mency. Wilhelmina who later became a Muslim, changed her name to Yunansi and currently has seven generations. At present around Tuanku Imam Bonjol cemetery complex there are 20 family heads who have bloodlines from Apollos Minggu. According to Yosef Ikanubun, these families have formed a Muslim community in Lotta and spread in Pineleng Sub-district [19]

The Minahasa community has long learned to respect others. According to Deeby Momongan, since elementary

school she has been friends with many students with different religion backgrounds. Brotherhood with fellow human beings is fostered from an early age and according to Ms. Momongan this becomes the cultural capital of the Minahasa community to live in harmony and peace (interview with Deeby Momongan, 9 June 2020).

However, it is a human nature if more and more people come to their territory, they will feel threatened. If in the past they felt as the first person to come to the region and fully control the resources, nonetheless with the increasing number of migrants from outside the region coming to Minahasa, the ownership of the resources has been diminishing. Moreover, religious doctrine introduces the gap with the adherents of other religions. The above factors began to trigger friction in the community. According to Ms. Momongan, this friction has become more apparent in Minahasa in the last two decades due to the growth of religious fundamentalist groups that are increasingly widening the gap. Christian groups begin to distance themselves and draw boundaries with Islamic groups and vice versa.

The research results of the General Synod of the Churches in North Sulawesi, Central Sulawesi and Gorontalo show that the growing gap occurs in a way of deliberately swiping the friction between the different, and hence, it widens the gap. According to Ms. Momongan, the seeds of conflict arise and triggered, among others, from the attitude of Christian groups who tended to feel the majority in the region. She also states that Christian groups tend to treat other religious groups relatively unfair. For example, it does not allow the establishment of a worship house from another religion in one area.

According to the studies of the General Synod of the Churches, the friction of conflict has been felt in the last twenty decades. The causes, among others, relate to differences in appearance among religious people. Moreover, the appearance between Muslims and Christians is no difference. Nevertheless, after Muslim women consciously obey religious orders to wearing the hijab, there was slowly a tendency for Muslim groups to distance themselves from the association with Christian groups that were once very close.

Meanwhile, from observations in the field conducted by the researchers when the Easter period in the area of North Sulawesi in 2018, the Christians planted high crosses in front of the houses or in a garden environment decorated with lights. By showing this religious identity, according to researchers the gap between the two groups is increasingly wide spread.

According to Ms. Momongan, if Christians want to invite Muslims to come to the celebration that they hold, right now there is little fear. In the past, Muslim guests were provided with food at the national table, a table reserving halal food. However, at present due to their worriensness Christians have to borrow the place of another Muslim home to entertain guests from Islamic groups.

More over according to her, the situation of the Minahasa community seems to be harmonious. In order to minimize frictions between religious communities, each groups respect the other groups. Therefore, religious groups guards

their respective groups to avoid friction. According to Ms. Momongan, this potential conflicts occur among the younger generation who get influenced by radical Islamic and Christian groups.

2.1. Role of the GMIM Christian Women

After considering the circumstances, the General Synod of the Churches in North and Central Sulawesi initiated a movement in the last five years, namely the Peace Love Movement. It was an interfaith movement. In addition, this movement became a pioneer to build community awareness that despite diverse backgrounds, it is a united community. As a consequence, the School of Pluralism was born in 2014. It was a school that educated the interfaith young people through class meetings which lasted for one week. Deeby Momongan was one of the GMIM Christian women activists who organized this school. According to her, the School of Pluralism was held every year by opening three basic classes and two advanced classes. The participants of the advanced class must be graduate from the basic class. Each class was attended by 50 participants with the same gender composition between men and women and followed by young Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Kong Hu Chu and Buddhists.

In the classes each participant learned the teaching of Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Kong Hu Chu and Hinduism briefly. The concept the school put forward was peace in differences and differences in brotherhood

The school was established in cooperation with other parties, such the Yogyakarta-based Institute for Interfaith Dialogue in Indonesia or Interfidei and the Indonesian Journalists Association.

It was very disappointed after the School of Pluralism was held for five years, the school had be closed in 2020. Ms. Momongan did not explain the reasons behind the closure. However, the alumni and management actively join on the WhatsApp group. According to Ms. Momongan, the WhatsApp group not only contains the alumni of the School of Pluralism but currently also the journalists from the AJI and transgender groups.

This WhatsApp group was created to make quick coordination in overcoming problems that arise in the community. Ms. Momongan mentioned an incident that took place in Manado on June 1, 2020. At that time at the GMIM-owned Pancaran Kasih Hospital, a Muslim patient passed away under the status of Patient Under Supervision. As a result, the Hospital would carry out the body scanning in appropriate to the Covid 19 burial protocol. However, a group of people who claimed the patient's family, suddenly broke the Hospital's door down and took the body by force. The incident caused a mass of Christian groups to demonstrate in front of the North Sulawesi Regional Police Headquarter. They requested that the groups of people who broke into the hospital and damaged some of the facilities were subject to legal action. The circumstances began to heat up and could ignite sectarian conflicts. The incident were intensively discussed on the WhatsApp group.

2.2. Obstacles That the GMIM Christian Women Must Encounter in Guarding Harmony

The General Synod of The Churches in North and Central Sulawesi covers 13 other churches. These include the Minahasa Evangelical Christian Church (GMIM) in Minahasa, Sangihe Talaud Christian Church, Bolaang Mongondow Christian Church, Sangir Talaud Christian Church, Indonesian Protestant Church in Gorontalo, Indonesian Protestant Church in Buol Toli Toli. However, according to Ms. Momongan, there has never been a special program for women of the General Synod community to maintain harmony.

Generally the activities of the Christian women merge in the activities of women's organizations such as PKK (Family Empowerment and Welfare) or RT (neighborhood association) / RW (citizens association). During the Covid 19 pandemic, however, there were a number of obstacles for the women's participation in helping and carrying out concrete things.

One obstacle that the Christian Women of the Minahasa Evangelical Christian Church (GMIM) must encounter is the attitude of regional governments in the province which relatively remain primordial tendency. The government should overshadow all groups in the society. However, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the regional governments make policies considered unfair. For example, social assistance should be given to the wider community, and one of the leaders allocated the aid to GMIM. It was because the related leader came from the GMIM. As a result, other elements in the society such as NU, Muhammadiyah, other Christian denominations and other social groups were disappointed and made protests.

The regional government which should moderately treat and protect all elements of the society is the causes of casting seeds of dislikes to other groups. According to the researchers, it partly relates to the upcoming 2020 regional head elections planned in December 2020 and the candidacies utilize the GMIM as the church with the most influence and followers in North Sulawesi Province. Therefore, it is expected that the community re-elects them. However, what it is not realized that the primordial actions become time bombs that can explode at any time. These widen the differences in the society.

In facts women in Minahasa relatively do not experience gender inequality. It is inaccurate with the reference to the meaning of feminism that describes gender inequality, subordination and oppression of women [20]. If one look at the history before the independence, a Minahasa woman, Maria Walanda Maramis has succeeded in establishing a household school known as Huishoudschool [8]. It shows among others that women in Minahasa have relatively had the opportunity to develop themselves since long time ago. This was confirmed by Karolina Augustien Kaunang who wrote that there were 6,056 Minahasa female students attending schools in Java since 1908. Moreover, the first Indonesian physician who graduated from STOVIA (the School of Training of Native Doctors), a medical school that

educated native physicians in Jakarta was Marie Thomas, a Minahasa woman.

In the academic field, Annie Manoppo was the first female Dean of the Faculty of Law, University of North Sumatra. Moreover, there was Nona Politon who served as the founder and first rector of the University of Manado. In the political field, it was recorded Tinneke Waworuntu Kandow as the Mayor of Manado in the period 1950 - 1952.

In the religious field, it was recorded Pastor Agustina Lumentut became the Chairperson of the Central Sulawesi Christian Church Synod. There was also Pastor Detty Kani who served as Chairman of the Luwuk Banggai Christian Synod [21].

However, there is no literature that states that the GMIM established a special association for women. For example, the social organization of Muhammadiyah has established Aisyiyah coined by KH Ahmad Dahlan's wife, Siti Walidah since 1914. Moreover, Nahdathul Ulama (NU) founded the

3. CONCLUSION

1. North Sulawesi is a Province with a diverse society. The religion of the majority of the society in the province is Christianity and Islam becomes the second biggest religion.

2. Minahasa Evangelical Christian Church is the oldest Christian church with the biggest followers of 35%. The GMIM adheres Calvinism and it includes a part of Nedertland Hervomd Kerk and the VOC had important role for the introduction in the province.

3. There are no specific activities for the GMIM Christian women in carrying out concrete activities to maintain harmony. They generally join in other women's organizations such as PKK (family empowerment and welfare program).

4. The gap between Islam and Christianity has been widening in the last two decades. On the one hand, fundamentalist religious groups emerge on both sides. On the other hand, the increasing number of migrants in North Sulawesi Province makes the Minahasa people as "indigenous people" threatened. The economic pie has to be shared with many parties. And there are groups who continue to swipe the gap between the differences in society and therefore, it has the potential to trigger sectarian conflicts.

5. For a sense of concern that rises when watching the circumstances, the General Synod of Churches in North and Central Sulawesi which is the association of 13 Protestant Churches located in three provinces, i.e. Gorontalo, Central Sulawesi and North Sulawesi, has established Pluralism School, a school to educate young generations of Interfaith through the one-week class meetings since five years ago.

NU Muslimat and Hinduism has established the Hindu Dharma Woman since 15 years ago.

Therefore, the patriarchy which Judith Barnett [22] calls the main problem in women's history is definitely the biggest problem in human history which seems relatively unproblematic for Christian women in Minahasa. However, it needs further researches. It is because patriarchy as a construction can change and influence with the times.

As one of the regions that have recognized figures and cultures from the outside for centuries due to trade influence and the establishment of a kingdom, the Minahasa people have cultural capital to respect and live in harmony with people with different cultural backgrounds. The Sultanate of Gowa and Tallo provided Islamic elements. Moreover, Portuguese and Dutch VOC traders initially only traded spices, and finally they colored the lives of the people of the region with Catholicism and Protestant Christianity. Therefore, the Minahasa community has been long used to interacting and tolerating different cultures.

7. Several GMIM Christian women activists are sent to organize the School of Pluralism. The school is held every year by opening three basic classes and two advanced classes. The advanced class participants are those who are graduates from the basic classes. There are 50 participants in each class with the same gender composition between men and women. The participants are young Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Kong Hu Chu and Buddhists. In each class the participants learn briefly to get to know the teachings of Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Confucianism and Hinduism. The concept the program put forward is peace in differences and differences in brotherhood.

8. The alumni and organizers of the School of Pluralism are still intensively coordinating to discuss various issues in society including obstacles arising from the partisan distribution of social assistance leading to be used as political vehicles for some state administrators during the Covid 19 pandemic.

3.1 Suggestion

1. The GMIM Christian women must have the courage to show their works as the GMIM followers to participate in the real manifestation of harmony in North Sulawesi. However, they can act as "watch dog groups". It is not like this all the time when they have been active in the umbrella of other organizations.

2. The School of Pluralism activities must carried out continuously and it will reach as many young people as possible who will become future leaders.

3. Primordial regional leaders should terminate thir social activities as their political vehicle. Aside from being unethical practices, the activities are like planting bombs when conflicts can break out at any time.

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