

In Yogyakarta Subtle Cases of Religious Intolerance Exist as well

Increasing intolerant cases in Yogyakarta – known as the City of Tolerance – have become a threat to its long history of harmony. To tackle the increasing intolerance government officials must look beyond radical cases, and pay greater attention to more implicit cases of intolerance.

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In 2013 Yogyakarta was awarded the title of City of Tolerance by mayor Herry Zudianto. In 2016 Yogyakarta was ranked second for intolerance in Indonesia by the Wahid Institute. Two contrary statements belonging to the same province. The Special Region of Yogyakarta, located on the island of Java, has since long been praised for its unity despite being highly diverse. Over the past few years that has come under pressure. Since 2015 intolerant cases have increasingly appeared. Both the government and media acknowledge the acts of intolerance, with a noticeable focus on cases that include problems regarding radicalism. Examples are church attacks and desecration of Christian graves, predominantly performed by radical groups. But what about more implicit cases of intolerance?

From January until April 2020 I conducted anthropological research in three hamlets in Bantul, one of the districts of *Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta*. I studied how local citizens perceive and act on religious diversity in these highly diverse hamlets. The area has four religious groups, of which Muslims are the majority and Protestants, Catholics and Hindu's minorities. Questions were especially asked about the issues of harmony versus intolerance.

The rise of intolerance did not seem to transpire within the community, as participants – and especially neighbourhood chiefs –

all portrayed their community as harmonious. Participants define tolerance as respecting each other no matter what religion you have. Collective practices, such as neighbourhood events and charities, were given as example of how the community maintains the tolerance. The situation sounded ideal and somewhat perfect, but I assumed there was more behind the stories. And there was. Though participants were aware of radicalism in Yogyakarta, they were not so alert to inequalities evolving into smaller tensions.

I concluded that subtle intolerant cases, besides more evident radicalistic ones, actually do exist. These evolve around, for instance, gossip, generational differences and annoyances towards other religions. The government and chiefs seem to hide behind frames of tolerance, and translate these through collective practices to local perceptions. Though at first sight it appears tolerance takes the overhand, taking a closer look reveals covert cases of intolerance. It is important to note that people are often unaware of this.

Ignorance and unawareness are actually the issue. If the government wants to earn back or at least keep Yogyakarta's title of City of Tolerance, it needs to pay greater attention to those forms of intolerance that are not as evident. I do not mean to say that radicalism should not be considered as part of the problem. It is both the obvious cases and hidden ones that are a threat to Yogyakarta's long history of harmony.

Photo by author

