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We Do Not Worship Buddha Images: Buddhist Response to Religious Bullying in Online Media

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Abstract

The stereotyping view of radical Islamic groups manifested in verbal violence against other religious groups is increasingly growing freely along with the expansion of public communication spaces in cyberspace. This has made it even more frustrating for people of other religions to respond to this bullying. Religious minorities, such as Buddhists, also use information technology to express responses to negative stereotypes. In Indonesia, Buddhism often gets a negative impression because it is considered as "idol worship", something which for Muslims, as the majority group, is the biggest sin. This mistaken view of Buddhists has not only resulted in a bad view of Buddhists, but has led to violence as evidenced by the case of lowering the Buddha statue in Tanjung Balai. Buddhists who are based on the moral teachings of selfcontrol try not to give a negative response that is reactive, but they appear increasingly progressive in spreading the "right view" of their teaching principles so that they are no longer misunderstood and become objects of discrimination. Apart from being in the form of lectures disseminated in online media, efforts to provide religious literacy education are also conveyed through short stories and popular songs. Through content analysis, this paper will describe various ways of public communication of Buddhists to overcome negative stereotyping about them, especially the perception of being "idolaters". Also see to what extent the effectiveness of this monologue-impressed communication is conveyed to those who bully.

Keywords: counter radicalism, digital Buddhism, public communication, religious literacy.

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Introduction

As a Muslim teaching in a Buddhist institution, being between two religious institutions is a plus for me because I can be a bridge between the two. Personnel and institutional cooperation in the fields of research, education, and community service can be established because both Islam and Buddhism interreligious dialogue can be implemented in a real way. However, it must be admitted, the psychological pressure felt by being at the two poles. This pressure comes from outside because of a misunderstanding between the two poles. This misunderstanding brings negative stereotyping of one party to another.

Often times I get online bullying from friends I know and people I don't know regarding the Buddha's view of idolatry. They openly attacked Buddhism through me. I am worried that this will further trigger prejudice on both sides. I am also worried that this bullying could adversely affect the psychology of my Buddhist students. Therefore, to anticipate this I try to monitor my social media more often and filter the circle of friends there.

Verbal bullying against other religions outside one's own circle is not new and is not unique to the customs of certain religious communities. In the daily practice of my religion, for example, on various recitation occasions in my childhood until now, the "accusation" that Hinduism and Buddhism are idolatrous religions were not foreign. What used to be called participating in "recitation" in mosques, in today's language, is really an "internal study" because it was conveyed in the room and not voiced out through outside speakers. Certainly, there was no sophisticated communication media technology like smartphones like today, which makes it easier for a "content" to spread widely beyond the internal congregation. The term "internal study" is once again not foreign to the practice of preaching each religion, which believes that their religion is The Truest, so it is not strange to see others are wrong or even heretical. It is clear that

47 | RCS : Religion, Culture and State Journal

1

¹ The term "internal study" became viral when Ustad Abdul Somad was charged with blasphemy of Christianity because of his lecture in 2019 but escaped because it was categorized as an internal study (Saputra, 2019). This case caused this term to become popular and led to criticism over as if it were "permissible" to utter insults, blasphemy, and hatred of other religions when carried out in a limited forum among their own, homogeneous circles.

not many religious people always cross-check when criticizing other beliefs or religions with their adherents directly or looking carefully for references in representative books. Moreover, there are psychological barriers in any religious adherents because they have to believe that their faith and religion are the most correct adamantly. Second, later the knowledge they preach is knowledge that is continuously constructed and obtained from their seniors, and their seniors get from their seniors, and so on with the same psychological situations and conditions as themselves. However, this kind of "monologue" dakwah now easily breaks through the walls of this "internal study", especially if there are adherents who have a passionate dakwah spirit and have and take advantage of new social media in their hands.

The continuous exposure to 'invalid knowledge or hoaxes' from their religious leaders is what bombards the consciousness of their followers creating post-truth awareness. It is accelerated and auxcelarated by the revolution in digital media technology. It is this monologue that floods the flow of digital information that breaks down the walls of private spaces with its post-truth paradigm. This situation creates an inevitable [un-]intended verbal bullying mode of communication. Hoaxes also easily develop in line with truth-oriented personal beliefs rather than facts, thus reconstructing religious life, both for those who bully and those who are bullied. On the other hand, the opening of a digital space also opens opportunities for bullied parties to present themselves, thereby opening the understanding of people who do not know and interact "directly" through this digital media. There are those who try to answer the accusation of something from the bully monologue through various media, but nowadays they often answer it with more interactive media, although they still don't meet face to face. Digital media is the third space for 'dialogue' and creating new understandings. Computer algorithms help many people to get a more comprehensive understanding from various perspectives on something that is being debated from one side.

In the context of the misunderstanding the view that Buddhists are idol worshipers, Buddhists not only provide explanations in the form of lectures or Dhamma talk which may be avoided by non-Buddhist parties, but also creative responses in the form of songs and musicalizations of poem. This paper describes the Buddhist way of expressing its diversity through creative art works to provide religious literacy to society that Buddhists are not idolaters. Thus, digital media literacy can redirect inter-religious relations and can continue to run constructively, especially if religious adherents are able to develop a Response Reader Criticism approach to information obtained from their own or other parties (Zaluchu, 2020).

Research Method

This study uses content analysis to describe and explain characteristics of messages embedded in Buddhist cultural texts as religious expressions. Art works, in this case Buddhist songs and poets, manifest religious faith, not only describe, but radiate a deep appreciation of saddha (belief in Buddhadhamma) (Arweck & Keenan, 2006, p. 3). In this case, the first researcher as a worker in a Buddhist institution and the second researcher as a religious anthropologist occupies an outsider position trying to understand the beliefs of other people through their cultural expressions. In this study, content analysis serves to identify and understand a direction of a communication phenomenon with the steps suggested by Nelson & Woods Jr. (2013, pp. 112–114).

The first step in this research is to choose a text that fits the research question, namely how the creative response of Indonesian Buddhists in responding to the mistaken notion that Buddhists are idolaters. In this regard, the subject of this research is the songs entitled "Buddha Bukan Berhala" played by Shalut Band and "Kami Memuja" written by Antono H.T. Second, the researcher identifies the embedded messages in texts according to categories. Appropriate units of analysis can reveal the Buddhist view of Buddha statues which argues that they do not worship Buddha images. Fourth, the researcher assesses the reliability of the codings. The last, qualitative data by coding units' categories are used to describe the message content.

Discussion

On Buddha Images

Public media spaces exacerbate interfaith disparities. Conflict views and beliefs are no longer discussed internally in closed spaces, but also in open spaces, which can lead to latent and frontal conflicts. The forced decline of the Buddha statue in Tanjung Balai did not happen suddenly, but there was a series of prejudices that fueled the outbreak of conflict.² The euphoria of the Post-reformation era also provides a sense of freedom to speak so that speeches delivered orally or written material about efforts to foster faith by assuming other beliefs are wrong can easily be accessed by anyone with different levels of spiritual and intellectual maturity. In this post-truth era, the truth is not that important because the mass media plays a role in fulfilling the desire of their audience to seek comfort by confirming what they believe. One example of hoax content about religion which consequently defames other religions can be seen in the popular book Islam and Buddhism published by Harun Yahya or Adnan Oktar which is still used for "apologetic" preaching by quite a number of Indonesian Muslims with other foreign idol figures. Like Ahmad Deedat and also Zakir Naik, Harun Yahya's books is published and in demand in Indonesia and can be downloaded for free at https://id.harunyahya.com. One of the discussions in the book entitled "Buddha: A Religion of Idols" is very relevant to this research.

This misunderstanding of views on other religions tends to spread easily because of the positive labeling of any religious content that matches the subjective tendencies of self and group. Where it is always considered noble and honorable on behalf of and based on the spirit of preaching for truth and goodness. Positive prejudice has eroded critical attitudes towards efforts to discredit other religions. This attitude is also supported by the weak religious literacy of the community because of the monoreligious religious education system. Each religious group only studies its own religion and is not

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² The case of the TanjungBalai Buddha Statue is still a big homework for the nationality of this Pancasila country, especially the issue of interreligious relations between the majority and minorities, which often has the final impression that the solution is that minorities like them always have to give in (sees BBC Indonesia, 2016) and it is the minority who must be sensitive and respect for what the majority wants and feels (sees Syahputra, 2016).

encouraged to study other religions. This is exacerbated by an increasingly integrated education system that makes students only associate with one another, one religion. Therefore, it can be understood that the community will find it difficult to understand, even difficult to accept the views of other community groups. In responding to this misunderstanding, Buddhist religious figures no longer only conveyed the teachings of The Great Teacher, Buddha Gautama, internally to his Buddhist followers, but also conveyed his views to other interested people who wanted to know more deeply. Media channels allow dhammadesana or dhamma lectures to penetrate the walls of the monastery so that the target audience is no longer limited to the people in the monastery. For example, the lecture entitled "Buddhists worship idols, really?" broadcast by the **Taste** of Truth channel on 21 May 2018 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gq9-K56TBEs). In the description of this post it says:

Message to Buddhists for Buddhists after listening to what is on this channel Don't easily believe in something just: - because it's rumors, - because of mere opinion, - because of mere appearance, - because of your understanding, - because of the words of a holy person, - because it is based on tradition, - because it is written in your holy book. However, if after you have analyzed the truth, and after carefully investigating, you find something that is compatible with you, which is good for the benefit of one and all, then accept it in your life according to that teaching (kalamasutta). "The Buddha" [said] -According to the seed that is sown, so will the fruit be reaped. "Do not do evil, add virtue, purify your heart and mind." -There is no one in this world who has never been blamed, no matter how good that person is,...

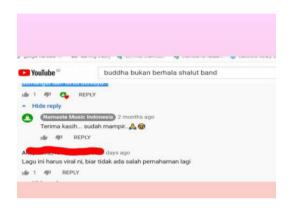
Thus, even though the theme of these lectures appears to be a response to a common assumption of Buddhism, they do not want to appear reactive and rather direct the message of the Dhamma inward, directing how Buddhists should view that view with right views. However, from the comments room, it can be seen that a lot of attention was also given from non-Buddhist parties who appreciated Bhante

Khemadharo's explanation of the Buddha Gautama's position, the meaning of divinity, and respect in Buddhism. Undeniably, there are also comments aimed at avoiding knowledge of other religions and comments that highlight the different attitudes to visualization in Islam and Buddhism. However, posts of this kind on Youtube open up inter-religious dialogue in the public sphere.

A more reactive response can be seen in the lyrics of the Shalut Band song entitled "Buddha Bukan Berhala", which is claimed to voice the hearts of young Buddhists from North Lombok:

Buddha bukan Berhala (1)	Buddha is not an Idol (1)
Memujabukan meminta (2)	Worshiping not asking (2)
Menghormat bukan menyembah (3)	honor not worship (3)
Berbakti bukanlah pasrah, (4)	filial piety is not surrender, (4)
Hanya menghormati, (5)	just respect, (5)
hanyameneladani Buddha (6)	just imitating the Buddha (6)
bukan berhalakar'na Buddha bukan tempat	not idols because Buddha is not
meminta,(7)	a place to ask, (7)
Buddha bukan Sang Penciptakar'na Buddha	Buddha is not the Creator
berarti Bodhi (8)	because Buddha means Bodhi
Tak tega menyakiti selalu mengasihi ikhlas	(8)
dan rendah hati menjadi insan berbudi itulah	Do not have the heart to hurt,
jalan kami itulah tujuan kami (9)	always love sincerely and be
	humble, being virtuous people,
	that is our way, that is our goal
	(9)

The video posted by Namaste Music Indonesia (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CxaAhPVCCXA) on 21 May 2020 received many responses appreciating this music as an effort to provide understanding so that there are no more misunderstandings.



Commentary on the Song "Buddha is Not an Idol"

The audience can immediately catch the main point of this song as a rejection of the notion that Buddhists are idolatrous because this song uses the word negation a lot, not to denote denial. Of the 9 lines of the lyrics of the song "Buddha BukanBerhala" above, 6 lines contain the word not. Thus, it seems clear that this song aims to reject the general view of Buddhists as worshipers of Buddha statues. This song wants to convey the message that they are not using Buddha statues (Buddharupa) as objects of worship because the attitude of Buddhists towards the Buddha in pujabakti is not asking in "prayer". Buddhists value the Buddha as the Great Theacher, not as The Creator. The word 'we' at the end of the line underlines the message this song shows to non-Buddhists rather than to Buddhists themselves. In Indonesian the word we (kami) and our (kita) have a different meaning. We are used when the person being spoken to is included. Thus, this song implies that the speakers of this song are speaking from the perspective of a young Buddhist who is conveying his message to non-Buddhist people.

A more "official" version of the religious elders about the Buddha image is on youtube which goes straight to the point answering whether "Buddhists Worship Idols? Buddha Statues Not Idols \parallel Pannadika Channel (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2SdE-xzXabg)". If you pay attention to Buddhism this is basically a minority and a new "thing", although history leaves traces of this religion from the 7-8 centuries. This fundamental understanding of the feeling of devotion in front of this image will inevitably always arise, both from outside and from within. What is from outside this is due to the perception of the majority that Muslims generally only know from the beginning and refer to their own internal sources. Meanwhile, those from within, namely lay Buddhists and those who have just embraced Buddhism, still have a psychological attitude which is derived from the cultural perceptions of the majority of Muslims who strongly reject this idolatry. It is interesting to see the notes of the small responses that appear in the interactive column of this YouTube show, there are those present as "Muslim women" who want to learn the Dhamma and there are also young Buddhist converts who are passionately vilifying their past religions. The reality that is not much different from this can be found in the media of preaching other religions.

With different cultural tastes, Buddhists express their devotion to the great teacher through various Buddhist images. In Buddhism, Buddha statues are also a reminder of the human dimension in Buddhist teachings, as well as factual evidence that Buddhism is a teaching about humans not about God, where reflective and meditative practice looks inward for perfection and understanding rather than looking outside of itself. A Buddhist does not perform worship like those who praise and worship God, make offerings and ask God to have all his wishes fulfilled, while fully believing that God will hear their praise, accept their offerings and answer their prayers. The relationship with this attitude of worship in Buddha images is likened by Buddhists to an analogy of worship, a kind of expression showing respect for someone or something we admire. This is not much different from standing up when the teacher walks into the room to show respect; when we meet honorable people we shake hands; and when the national anthem is played we are respectful too. In addition, expressions of gratitude for the help of life through his teachings are the main expressions for Buddhists. This statement of the basics of Buddhism is part of the Q&A Good Questions Good Answers (https://dhammacitta.org/buku/pert Questions-baik- Answersan-baik.html)

What Buddhists are doing by providing this online explanation leads us to a discussion of what expressions of their devotion to the Buddha are always done in front of Buddha images. Reading the chanting while praying, offering flowers, incense, and lamps in front of this Buddhist image certainly creates questions for non-Buddhists, especially Muslims. The practice of gazing solemnly (pious gaze) at an object that is respected and loved is an act of sacred expression. This is actually not much different from Muslims who always yearn for the Kaaba which is seen as a symbol of God's house and the etheric space which is always filled with a pulse of longing and hope to always come to worship and worship God as if meeting face to face with intimacy. Staring at the Kaaba touching the hijrismail, kissing hajaraswad drinking zam-zam water walking around the Kaaba and various bodily sensory expressions sublime and transcend to the sacred. The expressive sensory religious visual practice in the study of religious visual culture is known as darsan, a sacred gaze. "'Sacred gaze' denotes any way of seeing that invests its object — an image, a person, a time, a place — with spiritual significance" (Morgan, 2005). But in the Islamic tradition, an appropriate analogy to the expression of Buddhist devotion in this image it could be an expression in the shalawatan tradition commemorating the birth of the Prophet, a practice that has also received opposition from more puritanical parties because it is considered deifying the Prophet (Katz, 2007).

Berikut ini akan digambarkan bagaimana ungkapan devosi ummat Buddha millennial dalam syair-syair baik dalam bentuk lagu maupun puisi yang sering mudah disalahartikan sebagai bentuk pemujaan yang berlebihan. Ekspresi alamiah dan manusiawi bila seseorang mengungkapkan kekaguman, merindukan, menghormati, mencintai, dan penuh rasa terimakasih maka ungkapan syair dan lagu tercipta untuk mengingatinya. Sifat dari ekspresi darsanicini adalah reflektif dan meditative penuh keintiman yang sacral. Lebih dari pada itu, ekspresi-ekspresi yang ada berikut ini sebenarnya adalah ungkapan keintiman umat pada "idolanya.

Lagu entitled "Kami Memuja" written by Antono H.T. berikut ini mengingatkan pada syair-syair shalawat Burdah di tradisi Islam Sunni. Meskipun Islam dan Buddha (khususnya aliran Theravada) pada umumnya tidak menyukai music, dalam taraf-taraf tertentu praktiknya tidak alergi dengan musikalitas. Lagu karya Antono ini cukup popular dipakai dalam pembukaan puja bakti maupun acara pembukaan di vihara-vihara buddhis bahkan di Vihara Theravada dan menjadi lagu yang paling banyak dicover di Youtube. Sementara puisi karya Bhante Girirakkhito juga menjadi lebih popular dengan musikalisasinya di media youtube dengan 9,417 views semenjak Nov 27, 2016 dan sering menjadi lagu wajib lomba menyanyi buddhis.

Kami Memuja (Cipt: Antono H.T.)

We Adore (by Antono H.T.)

Di sini kami memuja nama Mu Sang Buddha

Bersama air dan bunga pelita dan dupa

Kami bersujud padaMu Yang Maha Suci dan

Sempurna

Kami memuja duduk bernama skara

Terpujilah nama Mu

Terpujilah Sang Buddha

Here we worship Your name the

Buddha

With water and a lamp and incense

We bow down to You Most Holy and

Perfect

We adore sitting on behalf of Praise

Your name

Praise the Buddha

Triratna Puja (Cipt: B. Girirakkhito)

Triratna Puja (by B. Girirakkhito)

Oh Buddha pimpinlah kami kepantai

bahagia

Oh Buddha lead us to the happy shore

We Do Not Worship Buddha Images: Buddhist Response to Religious Bullying in Online Media

Pancarkan mettakarunamuditaupekkha Radiate mettakarunamuditaupekkha Oh Dharma tuntunlah kami kejalan nan Oh Dharma, guide us to the real path nyata Towards the melting of avidya the Menuju leburnya avidya lenyapnya cessation of suffering dukkha Only in the Buddha Dharma Sangha Hanya pada Buddha Dharma Sangha I protect and adore Kuberlindung dan memuja Hopefully with this reality Smoga dengan kenyataan ini Ku mencapai kebebasan I attained freedom

Oh Sangha persaudaraan suci nan mulia
Padanya ku selalu nantikan bimbingan
Oh Sangha, a noble and holy brotherhood
Dharma
I always look forward to Dharma

The deep spiritual impression generated from the Buddhaharupa image can also be seen in the lyrics of the above songs, although it does not mention the word Buddharupang. "Here we worship your name the Buddha / Together with water and a lamp and incense" refers to the visual image of Buddharupa (any images of Buddha especially the statue or *rupang*) because water, lamp-flower and incense are usually placed side by side with Buddharupang and also represented the symbols of his teaching. These lyrics convey spiritual experiences and messages about the magnitude of the mental image a Buddhist gets of the Buddha through the existence of the Buddharupa. In front of the altar and buddharupang, a Buddhist namaskara, put his hands together in front of his chest as a sign of respect for the Buddha, "Kami bersujud pada Mu Yang Maha Suci dan Sempurna/ Kami memuja duduk Bernama skara/

guidance

Terpujilah nama Mu/ Terpujilah Sang Buddha". Thus, it appears that Buddharupa is an object of visualization of the Buddhist respect for Their Great an Noble Teacher. In the lyrics of "Triratna Puja" the meaning of worshiping the Buddha is revealed more deeply. Buddhists worship the Buddha because of the dharma path shown by the Buddha to be free from suffering and attain enlightenment, "Oh Buddha pimpinlah kami kepantai bahagia/ Pancarkan mettakarunamuditaupekkha/ Oh Dharma tuntunlah kami kejalan nan nyata/ Menujuleburnya avidya lenyapnya dukkha". The two poetic lyrics of these song are religious expressions that show the meaning of buddharupa to buddhists. Now this meaning is not only shown within themselves, but also outside themselves to provide a true understanding for society.

Concluding remarks

Syahputra & Hafiar in their study "Activities of Netizens on Social Media and Religious Spirituality of Indonesian Millennials in The Era of New Media (Syahputra & Hafiar, 2019) explained that religious spirituality in the era of new media in Indonesia is tinged with hoaxes and hate speech in the religious field. Various hoaxes and hate speech found in the religious field then spread to various social media channels. This can be seen clearly with the existence of Muslim da'wah media that directly attack Buddhist teachings, especially regarding the relationship between followers of this religion and Buddha images. Even though dakwah is an internal study intended for their own circles, in fact it is publicly mediated in various digital media. The content of this da'wah provides a variety of responses that are more reactive, mainly from the expressions of the youth and the expressions that are wiser from their religious elders. Meanwhile, content that is more aggressive is in the comments rooms both on internal and external links. However, our observations show something that is somewhat different from the results of Syahputra & Hafiar's study, especially on the Buddhist media side, where religious authority is still strongly represented by the visualization of religious leaders. Thus, there does not appear to be any reduction in religious authority especially the sangha. The preaching of Buddha in new media public shows that there is no reduction in people's interest in the spirituality of Buddhism.

Even though in the current era of new media, spirituality and spirituality can be debated, tested, and openly disputed by netizens from the millennial generation, we agree with Syahputra & Hafiar that it does not mean that there are no reverse practices to ridicule, discredit, abuse, and even hate spirituality. other religions. And this is tucked away in interactive spaces, a show on a YouTube exposure that seems to come from millennial circles. However, it is different from Syahputra & Hafiar's hypothesis, especially among the Buddhist millennial generation, in the current era of new media, the expression of religious spirituality is getting richer and more real and clear in order to answer the bullying accusations of their beliefs from outside. This phenomenon is getting stronger with the emergence of Buddhist netizen activities that are more "aggressive" in providing explanations with flavors and communication styles but it is very polite and not outburst, typical of Buddhism.

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