



## Symbolic Interactionist Communication of Interreligious Figures in Managing Religious Diversity

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### ABSTRACT

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This research aims to dissect interfaith figures' symbolic interactionist communication approach in managing religious diversity. Using qualitative ethnographic research, data collection methods in the research used interviews, observation, and documentation. Listed as key informants were ten interfaith figures who were members of the Pekalongan City Religious Harmony Forum (FKUB). The research results show that interfaith figures in Pekalongan City use a symbolic interactionist communication approach in managing religious diversity in Pekalongan City. Among the forms of Symbolic Interactionism are symbols, gestures, language, rituals, education, and intercultural dialogue. The symbolic interactionism approach is also used to support the process of institutionalizing multicultural values which are the foundation for realizing religious harmony in Pekalongan City.

### INTRODUCTION

The diverse condition of plurality in Indonesia is a very valuable cultural wealth of the Indonesian nation, but on the one hand, this condition can also trigger horizontal friction or conflict (Ujang Saefullah, 2019). The potential for conflict involving ethnic and religious diversity in Indonesia has been illustrated if we look at history in Indonesia. Among these conflicts are the conflict that occurred in Poso in 2000, the Sampang conflict in 2004, in 2015 in Aceh, and in 2016 in the form of the Tanjung Balai conflict.

The potential for friction or conflict related to religious differences also occurs in Java, especially in Central Java Province. This at least can be seen from the pattern in the last five years where cases related to intolerance still occur in Central Java Province. In 2017, there were cases of rejection of worship, namely the establishment of the Colomadu Karanganyar Pentecostal Messenger Church, rejection of the Chapel in Sukoharjo, rejection of GKI Mojosoongo Jebres Solo and rejection of the rehabilitation construction of the Al Arqom Mosque in Pekalongan City (Nazar Nurdin, 2018).

In Pekalongan City, the case of rejection of the construction of the rehabilitation of the Al Arqom Mosque in Pekalongan City was triggered by the actions of residents around the location where the Al Arqom Mosque was built, who suspected that the congregation of the mosque

were 'Wahabi'. This is in contrast to the fact that the Al-Arqom Mosque has actually been established since 1890. As a result of the encouragement of the residents' actions, the City Government, through the intermediary of the Satpol PP, sealed the construction of the rehabilitation of the Al-Arqom Mosque.

Previously, in 2011 there was also a case of refusal to establish or grant a permit for a place of worship, namely the granting of a principle permit for the Indonesian Bethel Church (GBI) which occurred in April 2011. This incident began when GBI, which had previously been established on Manggis Street, Pekalongan City, wanted to apply for a principle permit for places of worship (churches) to the Pekalongan City Government. Even though it does not yet have a principle permit for a place of worship, since 1989 the Pekalongan City GBI has been registered with the Regional Office of the Department of Religion, Central Java Province.

Apart from cases of rejection regarding a mosque rehabilitation and construction from far back, there is a horizontal conflict in Pekalongan City involving ethnic Chinese and indigenous people (Javanese). From 23 to 25 November 1995 in Pekalongan City, there was a social conflict involving ethnic Chinese and ethnic Javanese, which was triggered by news of a Chinese person destroying the holy book Al-Quran. This vandalism case angered the Javanese ethnic community in Pekalongan City and ultimately led

to acts of vandalism at the house of the perpetrator who tore up the Koran. Furthermore, the mob went on a rampage and damaged churches, monasteries, and Islamic schools. (Nurdianto, 2004)

In connection with issues that arise regarding the practice of religious intolerance or social conflict in each region, there is a forum called the Religious Harmony Forum. Previously, the establishment of FKUB also applied nationally considering that the establishment of this forum was an implementation of the Joint Regulations stipulation by the Minister of Religion and the Minister of Home Affairs Number 9 and Number 8 of 2006. This forum, which was formed, managed by the community, and supported by the government, could be a means of maintaining tolerance and maintaining religious harmony, including in Pekalongan City, which was founded around 2008.

At the beginning of its establishment, the Pekalongan City FKUB faced the problem of rejection by a social organization that had a fairly militant mass base at that time, namely the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI). This form of rejection was conveyed through Friday sermons held at FPI bases. This sermon contains the rejection of FPI cadres towards FKUB which was considered to be associating and collaborating with infidels and to FKUB which is considered to be protecting infidels. The first chairman of FKUB at that time, Drs. K.H. Abdul Fattah Yasran, who at that time was the Syariah Administrator of the Pekalongan City Nahdatul Ulama Branch (PCNU) and former Chair of the Pekalongan City Ministry of Religion, experienced great struggles so that in the end he resigned from his position as chairman.

After more than 20 years, the Pekalongan City FKUB was formed. Currently, the diversity of Pekalongan City is in a safe and peaceful condition. After the Al Arqom Mosque case in Pekalongan City, the atmosphere of religious harmony in Pekalongan City has gradually become harmonious and peaceful. FKUB members, filled with religious leaders, have a key role as opinion leaders in the wider community and specifically for congregations of each religion. In this case, communication between religious leaders in Pekalongan City has a big influence on managing diversity and building religious harmony.

Based on this explanation, the researcher argues that the communication of religious leaders in Pekalongan City has a big influence in managing religious diversity, and in this case the

communication is built using a symbolic interactionism approach. Symbolic interactionism describes that there is dependence between individuals and society and humans behave because they are based on symbolic meanings that are built together (Richard & West, 2009). Previously, Pekalongan City was synonymous with a city that was rife with cases of religious intolerance, but looking at the latest developments, these cases are very minimal and in general the condition of diversity in Pekalongan City continues safely.

In the Symbolic Interactionism approach, individuals, in this case interfaith figures under the Pekalongan City FKUB, interact with each other using certain symbols that contain various multicultural values and meanings. Religious leaders are also actively making efforts to spread multicultural values in society to support the goal of tolerance between religious communities.

On this basis, this research is interested in examining how the Symbolic Interactionist communication approach is used by interfaith leaders at FKUB Pekalongan City in managing religious diversity in Pekalongan City. This research will elaborate on how to manage religious diversity by looking at the use of symbolic interactionism in supporting the process of forming multicultural values. It is important to find a conception of the relationship between the formation of multicultural values and how they are implemented in the formation of religious harmony in Pekalongan City.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is field research with a focus on ethnographic research methods. The aim of using ethnography is to elaborate and understand the behavior, culture, and experiences of every human being in society. This method focuses on direct and in-depth observation of a particular group or community to gain a rich and in-depth understanding of the way of life, values, norms, social interactions, and meanings associated with that group.

The research procedure uses a participatory research procedure with stages, namely: a) selecting a research topic; b) creating a question outline; c) identifying research locations and groups; d) participating and observing the research group; e) conducting interviews; f) collection of other data through secondary data; g) data analysis; h) reflection and interpretation; i) writing

the manuscript, and j) verifying and validating the research results.

The data collection method was carried out through three main activities, namely observation, in-depth interviews, and Focus Group Discussions with ten interfaith figures in Pekalongan City. Determining sources in in-depth interviews uses a non-probability sampling technique where the selection of sources revolves around informants who are considered to have the capacity and in-depth understanding of the research problem. In this case, the selection of informants refers to religious figures or leaders in Pekalongan City, such as Christian religious figures namely Pastors, Islamic religious figures (*Kyai/ustad*), Catholic religious figures namely Pastors, Buddhist religious figures, Hindu religious figures and Kong Hu Cu religious figures.

This research uses the Spradley Model qualitative data analysis technique. This approach helps researchers organize and understand data collected from interviews, observations, and other qualitative sources. Spradley's model focuses on identifying the cultural components underlying the behavior and practices of the group being studied. There are four steps to analyzing qualitative research data, namely domain analysis, category analysis and composition analysis, and cultural theme analysis (Sugiyono, 2014).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Religious harmony often refers to living conditions between religious communities that prioritize attitudes of tolerance and mutual respect. In another sense, religious harmony can be explained as living conditions between adherents of various religions that reflect a peaceful, harmonious life and respect for the freedom of each individual (M. Zainul Bahri, 2016). To achieve this, Djohan Effendi said there are two things that can support efforts to realize conditions of religious harmony, namely dialogue (communication) and the existence of regulations (Ahmad Gaus, 2009). Religious harmony is also interpreted as an ideal condition for inter-religious communities that prioritizes an attitude of tolerance, an attitude of cooperation, amidst the diversity of Indonesian society (Ibnu Rusydi & Siti Zolehah 2018).

In order to create conditions for religious harmony, dialogue or communication becomes a horizontal element that involves relations between religious communities themselves. Harmonious and peaceful life between religious communities

can emerge along with the intensity of dialogue that is built. This is often referred to as interfaith communication. Interfaith communication refers to the process of communication between individuals or groups representing different religions or beliefs. This involves the exchange of messages, understanding, and dialogue between members of different religious communities in an effort to understand each other, build harmonious relationships, and reach agreement or cooperation on issues that influence each other (Asep S. Muhtadi, 2019).

This interfaith communication is also often referred to as inter-religious communication. Interfaith communication along with gender communication, international communication and interethnic communication is part of cross-cultural communication studies (Ujang Saefullah, 2019). In practice, interfaith communication can be used for individuals of different religions to carry out dialogue in daily life and communicate to carry out cooperation (Hakis, 2015). This dialogue is not only a daily routine but is more an effort to build an attitude of tolerance, mutual respect, and mutual understanding. Apart from dialogue, interfaith communication can also be established through friendship between religious followers which is usually carried out during religious holidays, including through security cooperation during religious holidays (Masmuddin, 2017).

Interfaith communication aims to overcome religious differences, encourage mutual respect, and promote harmony between religious communities. This involves an open attitude, tolerance, and increased understanding between the parties involved (Ali Nurdin et al, 2020). Interfaith communication plays an important role in building religious harmony, encouraging interfaith dialogue, and creating an inclusive society based on multicultural values (M. Ikhwan, 2020). This helps strengthen tolerance, understanding, and mutual respect between individuals or groups representing different religions or beliefs. The key figures in realizing effective interfaith communication depend on the role of each religious figure in encouraging the spread of multicultural values in society.

The role of religious figures in realizing multicultural values is crucial in creating a society that is inclusive, harmonious and respects diversity (Rezki Aulia, 2020). In Pekalongan City, interfaith leaders have three main roles in managing religious diversity and supporting the realization of religious harmony. The first role, is

interfaith leaders as mediators and go-betweens. Religious leaders act as mediators to resolve conflicts and differences between groups with different religious or ethnic backgrounds. As mediators, religious leaders try to understand each party's point of view and find friendly solutions that respect the interests and values of all parties.

The second role is education and cross-cultural understanding. Pekalongan City interfaith figures have an important role in educating their followers about the importance of cross-cultural values and how to apply these values in everyday life. Among the steps taken are providing keynote lectures, sermons and educational programs to increase understanding of the importance of multiculturalism. The third role is to carry a multicultural message. Religious figures can be conveyers of important messages of multicultural values to religious adherents and the wider community. Pekalongan City interfaith leaders teach and encourage respect for cultural, religious and ethnic diversity as part of the messages and teachings of each religion.

The role of religious figures cannot be separated from how to implement multicultural values. Multicultural implementation is an effort to encourage cultural understanding which explains that a community consists of people who are different in terms of background, ethnicity, culture, and including religion but can respect and appreciate each other (Ranny et al, 2019). These cultural differences are unique from one region to another and are not inherited genetically (Ainul Yaqin, 2005). In a multicultural perspective, people from different cultures interact with each other and build social identities together. Multiculturalism can also be considered as a relationship between people from different regions and cultures who can synergize well in everyday life. There are at least five implementations of multicultural values as a form of translation of the multicultural concept itself. The five values are the value of equality, the value of unity, the value of justice, the value of tolerance and the value of kinship (Murzal, 2019).

Based on the results of interviews and Focus Group Discussions, it was found how multicultural values were understood and implemented by interfaith leaders in Pekalongan City. These five multicultural values are the basis and guidelines for interfaith leaders in managing diversity in Pekalongan City. The explanation of these five values is:

*a) Similarity Value*

Equality is a value that includes equality in fulfilling the rights and obligations of each religious follower as Indonesian citizens. The values understood by Pekalongan City interfaith leaders are the value of equality, meaning that all people have the same human rights, are worthy of respect, and are treated with equality in all areas of life. Pekalongan City interfaith leaders believe that the value of equality means refusing to reject all forms of discrimination, such as discrimination based on race, gender, and especially because of religious differences. This behavior is also demonstrated through providing and supporting the enforcement of the rights of each religious community to carry out worship calmly and without interference. Apart from carrying out worship calmly, interfaith leaders also believe that every religious community has the right to build a house of worship which, based on the Joint Ministerial Regulation, requires the support of a minimum of 60 signatures and ID cards from the community around the establishment of the house of worship. Apart from that, there was additional support from 90 signatures and ID cards from congregations of houses of worship.

*b) Unitary Value*

The value of unity means the existence of values that prioritize a sense of togetherness, mutual cooperation, and an attitude of mutual cooperation even though religious believers have different backgrounds. An attitude of mutual cooperation in the value of unity that is understood by religious leaders and among people of other religions. Implementation of the value of unity refers to the efforts of interfaith leaders to carry out harmony and peace through a series of programs at FKUB. These interfaith leaders worked together to make the program a success. The sense of togetherness and mutual cooperation as an implementation of the value of unity can also be found in the symbol of joint prayer through the "Night of Prayer and Gita" activity which is usually held at the end of the year and involves all religious elements. On this occasion, there was an end-of-year reflection event about harmony and previously prayers were read by representatives of each religion in Pekalongan City.

*c) Justice Value*

The value of justice means there is a balance between demands and rights and always accepting different opinions without any negative feelings. The implementation of the value of justice is understood by interfaith leaders as an attitude of impartiality, a proportional attitude, and



an attitude of prioritizing common interests in the context of relations between religious communities. This attitude is important for religious communities to understand because justice applies regardless of individual backgrounds. Religious leaders also understand the urgency of justice in terms of providing welfare to religious leaders who guard and protect their respective places of worship. The implementation of the value of justice is also reflected when there is a case involving a particular religion, the FKUB figures resolve the problem proportionally and try to resolve the problem as best as possible. It can be seen that all elements of FKUB are committed to resolving every existing religious problem regardless of whether the religion is a majority or a minority. The implementation of the value of justice is also reflected in the understanding of interfaith leaders who reveal that every religious adherent can worship in peace in their respective places of worship. Next, every religious follower can also celebrate their respective religious holidays without any disturbance.

#### *d) Tolerance Value*

The value of tolerance understood by interfaith leaders is the existence of a mutual understanding regarding mutual understanding, acceptance, and respect for every belief held by each religious leader. The implementation of this tolerance value is that each religious adherent does not interfere with the implementation of worship of adherents of other religions, either between internal religious adherents or adherents of different religions. The value of tolerance also means not forcing different opinions to become universal opinions that are mutually agreed upon. Religious leaders know the importance of understanding those differences. It is a necessity that cannot be equated is important considering that religious maturity can be achieved when each religious adherent can admit that there are differences in each existing belief or religion. Both internal to each religion, as well as different religions such as Islam and Protestant religions which have various religious sects.

#### *e) Kinship Values*

Pekalongan City interfaith leaders understand the implementation of kinship values by prioritizing a sense of brotherhood and kinship between religious communities as well as an attitude of mutual assistance between religious believers. The implementation of this attitude is based on a high sense of tolerance and prioritizing

the human element rather than opposing all existing differences. The implementation of kinship values is reflected in the high intensity of friendship between religious figures, which is intended through efforts to visit each other during each other's religious holidays. However, this is a form of respect and is not part of participating in the celebrations of these religious figures. The attitude of mutual assistance between religious followers is also reflected in efforts to pay a visit when a member is unwell and even pray for their health. Not only when a member is sick, but even when a family member of an FKUB member passes away, the other religious figures will come to the funeral home to provide prayers and support. The attitude of kinship built by interfaith leaders in Pekalongan City has gone through a long process of communication and interaction.

The five values above can be a benchmark in understanding multiculturalism and how to develop multicultural values in wider society. In the context of this research, instilling multicultural values is a process or method carried out by religious figures in the Pekalongan City FKUB organization in spreading or instilling multicultural values in the people of Pekalongan City. This is in line with Azyumardi Azra's opinion, that the cultivation of multicultural values can be considered working when society can accept the reality that in society's social life there is diversity and cultural pluralism. (Ahmad Rivai dan Harahap, 2004).

### ***Symbolic interactionism approach***

Symbolic interactionism theory is a theory first developed by Herbert Mead. The initial idea about this theory is that there are interactions involving symbols that occur in society. Mead said that humans behave because they are based on the symbolic meaning conveyed in certain conditions (Richard West and Lynn Turner, 2017)). This theory describes that there is dependence between individuals and society. The essence of symbolic interactionism is the existence of activities between individuals who exchange symbols to find meaning. This perspective explains that human opinions and behavior are influenced by the expectations of other humans who are connected through interaction (Deddy Mulyana, 2000).

Based on the theory of symbolic interactionism, human relationships in social life are formed through the exchange of symbols between individuals where these symbols

represent what they want. The exchange of symbols between individuals can be interpreted differently and then have an influence on determining behavior for interacting individuals (Arthur Asa Berger, 2004). In interpreting symbols, each individual also refers to social objects (human behavior) and physical objects (objects) in the individual's environment. The interpretation of this symbol creates meaning as a result of the social interactions that occur. Meaning is agreed not only through the use of language but also based on physical objects, events or actions, and even absurd ideas (Alex Sobur, 2004).

The theory of symbolic interactionism has three important key concepts that are interconnected, namely Mind, Self, and Society. Mead compiled these three key concepts, which he said influenced one another (Elvinaro Ardianto et al, 2014). Thought is interpreted as the ability to use certain symbols in relationships/interactions with other humans through the use of language. This language relies on the use of significant symbols which are described as symbols that depict the same meaning for most people. Self is an individual's ability to reflect on himself based on the opinions or behavior of people around him. A person's attitude in this context is influenced by the social interactions around them. Then society states that the entire process of communication and interaction takes place in a social structure that is constantly changing/moving which can also be called culture. The idea of society refers to an individual's relationships with people who are considered special and relationships with other people who are general. (Richard West and Lynn Turner, 2017)

### ***Symbolic Interactionism and the Institutionalization of Multicultural Values***

The process of value institutionalization refers to efforts to uphold and strengthen certain values in a society or organization so that these values become an integral part of existing norms and culture. In the previous discussion, this process involves three aspects, namely values, norms, and attitudes. In order to see the process of institutionalization of multicultural values through a communication perspective, the institutionalization of multicultural values can also be dissected through a symbolic interactionism approach. As a result of field findings and literacy studies, researchers found that symbolic interactionism and value

institutionalization are related because these two things influence the way individuals interpret and practice values in social society.

Referring to the previous theoretical discussion, symbolic interactionism is a social process that includes the use of symbols, language, and actions to understand and give meaning to social situations, which in this case is related to the process of institutionalizing multicultural values. In symbolic interactionism, individuals interact with each other using certain symbols that contain various multicultural values and meanings. Value institutionalization, on the other hand, includes efforts to uphold and strengthen certain values in a society or organization, so that these values become an integral part of the norms and culture that are formed and developed in society.

Looking further, in the context of the institutionalization of multicultural values in Pekalongan City, symbolic interactionism plays an important role in forming and strengthening the five multicultural values. The symbols and language used by interfaith figures in communicating and interacting encourage the formation and reflection of values that are considered important by society or organizations. Symbolic interactionism also helps interfaith figures and society at large understand and internalize multicultural values as an effort to build religious harmony. If a value has become an integral part of the norms and culture of a society or organization, then the symbols and language used in social interactions will reflect these values. This will strengthen the position of these values in everyday life. Therefore, symbolic interactionism and value institutionalization influence and complement each other in forming and strengthening values in a society or organization.

In the context of symbolic interactionism, the process of institutionalizing multicultural values also involves aspects of symbolic interactionism such as thought (mind), individual identity (self), and social interaction (society). In the aspect of thought, it is important for religious communities, in this case at the start, it was demonstrated by interfaith leaders to form an open mind towards the values of diversity as well as an inclusive understanding of different beliefs and cultures. Mind is the human ability to understand and manipulate symbols in the social environment. At this level, relations between religious communities must involve a willingness to acknowledge and respect other people's

perspectives, combat prejudice and stereotypes, and include understanding other people's backgrounds and experiences. The institutionalization of multicultural values through the formation of thoughts is carried out by interfaith leaders by promoting and discussing the differences that exist in society intensely and peacefully.

In the aspect of self or individual identity, the institutionalization of multicultural values also involves recognition and respect for diverse individual identities. This means respecting and promoting the right of every individual to maintain and realize their own culture, language, religion, and traditions. Pekalongan City itself consists of various types of culture, and religion, including traditions, so the aspect of self is important. In self, it is explained how individuals see and perceive themselves based on social interactions with other individuals in society.

In social interactions, religious people learn how other people see and evaluate them, and then reflect other people's views in their own self-concept. It is important for society to create a safe and inclusive environment for individuals to express their identities without fear of becoming victims of discrimination or marginalization. When each individual or religious community fully understands the different aspects of the identity of each religious community, this can support the institutionalization of multicultural values in society.

As for society, the institutionalization of multicultural values involves social interactions in society that are inclusive and side-by-side between individuals and community groups who have different backgrounds. Society is a social environment where individuals interact and give meaning to symbols and actions. According to Mead, society or the social environment provides a context or structure for social interactions and gives meaning or significance to the symbols and actions carried out by individuals. In the context of the institutionalization of cultural values in Pekalongan City, the societal aspect involves the promotion of intercultural dialogue, cooperation, and mutual understanding of cultural diversity, religion, and tradition.

In the previous discussion, we discussed how interfaith figures in Pekalongan City consistently build interaction in society through various synergies and work programs. Pekalongan City FKUB plays an important role in creating policies and programs that facilitate positive

interactions between groups with different backgrounds. Initiatives such as interfaith dialogue forums, religious moderation education programs for SMA/SMK/MA teachers, student and Santri greeting programs, as well as other programs that build aspects of multicultural values that can help strengthen relationships between groups and build trust between them.

### ***Forms of symbolic interactionism in the management of religious diversity***

In the process of institutionalizing multicultural values, symbolic interactionism plays an important role in building understanding, appreciation, and acceptance of religious diversity. In the context of communication between interfaith figures, Pekalongan City gives rise to forms of symbolic interactionism which continuously contribute to the process of institutionalizing multicultural values. The forms of symbolic interactionism are:

#### **1) Symbols and Gestures**

Symbolic interactionism through symbols and gestures can help strengthen relationships between different cultural groups. The symbols and gestures of interaction between Pekalongan City interfaith figures include the official greeting agreed by the Pekalongan City FKUB management, namely "*Salam Rukun, Rukun Damai*" which means "greetings of unity, united and peaceful". This greeting is a symbol used every time an event is hosted by FKUB Pekalongan City. This greeting is also a form of respect between individuals from different cultures. Based on interviews with interfaith figures, this simple symbol in the form of greetings can help reduce disparities and create a sense of openness and unity.

#### **2) Language and Communication**

Language and communication are important aspects of symbolic interactionism. In the context of institutionalizing multicultural values, the use of language that is inclusive and respectful of diversity can promote mutually understanding communication between cultural groups. In communication established by interfaith leaders in Pekalongan City, the language used is polite and peaceful, which does not promote conflicting values. For example, using words that respect and acknowledge diversity in public discussions or presentations. Based on the statements of

religious leaders, the use of language and communication, both in daily communication and communication at an activity/event, is to use language that does not offend sensitive religious teachings. For example, in Islam there is the term Kafir which means infidels to refer to non-Muslims, this word is never used.

3) **Visual symbols**

The use of visual symbols representing cultural diversity in art, media and public spaces can play an important role in the process of institutionalizing multicultural values. A visual symbol that is quite prominent in Pekalongan City is that in the Loji area, there is a church house of worship and a mosque next to each other. This condition is a display of the symbol of religious harmony in Pekalongan City. Another visual symbol displayed by Pekalongan City's interfaith figures is through film works of art which were produced jointly and directed directly by Catholic priests. This film is entitled "Friends' Glasses" which tells the story of friendship between Muslim teenagers and Christian teenagers. The visual symbols in this film show harmony between two teenagers who have different religions and backgrounds. It doesn't stop there, the Christian teenagers in the film give the young man the gift of glasses he really needs. This film is a film inspired by a true story directly experienced by the Chair of the Pekalongan City FKUB, Ahmad Marzuqi.

4) **Ceremonies and Rituals**

Ceremonies and rituals involving different cultural groups can strengthen awareness of multicultural values and promote unity. For example, religious events attended by representatives of various religions, closing ceremonies featuring traditional dance and music from various cultures, or joint celebrations celebrating religious celebrations from various religions. In this context, a ceremony that is often carried out by interfaith figures and also involves religious communities is the end-of-year prayer which is usually held every December. With the title, Gita Night and Prayer, at this event all religious representatives displayed their works of art in the form of music, theater, poetry, and so on. At the beginning of the event, a symbol of

religious harmony was also displayed through the ritual of reading prayers for all religions (five religions) represented by each religion. This alternating prayer reading is a culture built by the Pekalongan City FKUB with the aim of presenting messages of harmony and messages of peace to the people of Pekalongan City at large.

5) **Education and Intercultural Dialogue**

Education that involves symbolic interactionism, such as discussions, and visits to places of worship or different cultures, can help build understanding, appreciation, and constructive dialogue between cultural groups. This can help in the process of institutionalizing multicultural values among the younger generation. Since 2022, the Pekalongan City FKUB has visited at least 14 places of worship spread across all religions/beliefs in Pekalongan City. Among the places of worship are mosques, temples, and churches. Likewise, intercultural dialogue was built by visiting six different schools, Bernardus High School, Pius Middle School, Islamic High School, and Muhammadiyah Vocational School in Pekalongan City. On this occasion, intercultural dialogue was built as well as the explanation of the values of religious moderation that can be applied to teenagers in the school environment.

Symbolic interactionism in the process of institutionalizing multicultural values can help change perceptions, build understanding, and stimulate actions that promote diversity and inclusion. By using appropriate symbols and communication, symbolic interactionism can play an important role in shaping attitudes, norms, and values that support a harmonious multicultural society. For Pekalongan City FKUB, the toughest challenge in efforts to build care for religious diversity is the overstrengthening of the role of religious figures in the process of institutionalizing values as well as in their implementation. So, to build long-lasting religious harmony, it is necessary to build a value institutionalization scheme that does not only focus on religious leaders but can refer to the congregation or members of the religious community directly. To achieve this, we need to provide more opportunities for congregations or members of religious communities to be involved in the process of education and intercultural dialogue. Members of religious communities are



not only positioned as communicants but also as communicators.

## Conclusion

Based on the description and data analysis, it can be concluded that communication between interfaith leaders using a symbolic interactionism approach is useful and effective in managing religious diversity in Pekalongan City. This religious management begins through the process of institutionalizing multicultural values carried out by Pekalongan City interfaith leaders both to fellow figures and to the wider community. Through the institutionalization of multicultural values, religious communities can understand the basic essence of managing religious diversity, namely the recognition of religious diversity itself so that multicultural values emerge, such as the value of equality, the value of unity, the value of justice, the value of tolerance, and the value of kinship. The main multicultural value refers to the value of tolerance where interfaith leaders state that the religious affairs of each religious community are purely internal affairs of that religion so that other religions have no right to interfere in the affairs of followers of other religions. The main key in the process of institutionalizing multicultural values is through the societal aspect where interfaith leaders understand each other's individual roles and roles in society by prioritizing the promotion of intercultural dialogue, cooperation, and the values of religious diversity.

In connection with the use of symbolic interactionism, interfaith leaders use symbols, gestures, language, rituals, education, and intercultural dialogue as capital to build communication for managing religious diversity. From the results of the study, researchers see that the use of various kinds of symbolic interactions has proven to be effective in building mutual understanding regarding efforts to build religious harmony. Efforts to build religious harmony cannot be achieved only with verbal jargon, but more than that the use of symbolic interactionism which is built interactively and through real attitudes and behavior has proven to be effective. This has been proven by interfaith leaders in Pekalongan City. Even though in the future there will be ripples or conflicts between religious adherents, symbolic interactionism which has been built for quite a long time by interfaith leaders, it encourages efforts to resolve conflicts more quickly and peacefully. This supports

conditions of harmony that are in line with the conditions of a safe and stable society and country (Weinata Sairin, 2006).

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