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Hilman Latief

Symbolic and Ideological Contestation over Humanitarian Emblems: The Red Crescent in Islamizing Indonesia

Abstrak: *Di kalangan masyarakat Muslim Indonesia, kesadaran baru akan peran penting lembaga swadaya masyarakat di bidang tanggap darurat bencana yang dikelola secara profesional meningkat seiring dengan revitalisasi dan pelembagaan budaya filantropi. Hal itu setidaknya ditandai dengan menjamurnya lembaga-lembaga pengelola zakat, infak, sedekah dan wakaf yang dalam banyak kasus juga kerap terlibat dalam kerja-kerja kemanusiaan di lokasi bencana. Dapat dikatakan bahwa kesadaran tersebut adalah buah dari kerangka berpikir yang lebih luas di kalangan aktivis sosial bahwa ajaran-ajaran Islam harus diterjemahkan secara lebih luas dan masyarakat Muslim melalui organisasi-organisasi yang mereka dirikan, juga harus mampu memasuki ruang publik yang lebih luas. Di balik semakin intensifnya keterlibatan organisasi-organisasi Islam dalam kerja-kerja pengentasan kemiskinan di perkotaan dan dalam memberikan bantuan di lokasi-lokasi bencana, 'politik identitas' muncul ke permukaan, dan kontestasi ideologis-politis antarorganisasi kemanusiaan pun tak terhindari. Salah satunya tercermin dari kontroversi penggunaan lambang atau bendera yang digunakan organisasi kemanusiaan, seperti penggunaan lambang palang merah, bulan sabit merah, dan sebagainya.*

Artikel ini membahas pertarungan simbolik, religius, dan ideologis dalam organisasi kemanusiaan di Indonesia atas masalah lambang kemanusiaan. Ini menunjukkan bagaimana organisasi kemanusiaan Islam semakin membentuk pola baru dalam politik kemanusiaan di Indonesia. Sementara pemberian bantuan tetap menjadi perhatian menyeluruh dari banyak asosiasi

kemanusiaan itu, masalah identitas diri, baik agama atau politik, yang sebagian disematkan pada simbol, tetap tertanam dalam misi mereka dan dengan demikian, dalam ruang publik, simbol-simbol kemanusiaan menjadi diperebutkan.

Di dunia internasional, keunikan lambang atau bendera organisasi kemanusiaan, seperti palang merah dan bulan sabit merah, telah diatur dalam Konvensi Jenewa. Organisasi kemanusiaan yang menggunakan salah satu dari kedua lambang tersebut pada umumnya adalah bagian dari gerakan internasional di bawah naungan Palang Merah International (ICRC-International Committee of the Red Cross) atau di bawah Federasi Palang Merah dan Bulan Sabit Merah International (IFRC-International Federation of Red Cross Society and Red Crescent Societies). Di kalangan Muslim Indonesia, penggunaan lambang tertentu oleh lembaga kemanusiaan tidak selalu dilihat dari perspektif yang sama. Berkembang pemahaman bahwa sebuah lambang tidaklah 'bebas nilai', melainkan mencerminkan karakteristik dan keunikan masyarakat.

Di Indonesia, lambang palang merah yang sudah sejak awal kemerdekaan digunakan secara resmi oleh lembaga yang saat ini bernama PMI, mulai dipertanyakan ulang. Organisasi-organisasi Islam mulai mendirikan lembaga kemanusiaan dengan menggunakan bulan sabit merah, dengan asumsi bahwa lambang bulan sabit lebih 'identik' dengan Islam, sementara palang merah dengan masyarakat Kristen. Tak heran, beberapa lembaga kemanusiaan yang didirikan oleh komunitas Muslim di Indonesia lebih cenderung menggunakan lambang bulan sabit merah. Dan, hal ini memicu ketegangan baik pada tingkat ideologis maupun politis di kalangan aktivis kemanusiaan.

Beberapa lembaga kemanusiaan di Indonesia yang menggunakan bulan sabit merah, dengan beberapa modifikasi bentuknya, antara lain BSMI (Bulan Sabit Merah Indonesia), Mer-C (Medical Emergency Rescue Unit), dan HAI (Hilal Ahmar Indonesia). Ketiga organisasi tersebut di atas didirikan oleh aktivis-aktivis Muslim untuk merespons pelbagai krisis kemanusiaan di Indonesia yang diakibatkan bencana alam maupun konflik. Dalam konteks pluralitas dan kontroversi lambang ini, konsep-konsep dasar kemanusiaan (humanitarianism), *identitas agama, solidaritas komunal, dan politik bantuan kemanusiaan menjadi bagian wacana dan gerakan Islam kontemporer di Indonesia.*

Hilman Latief

Symbolic and Ideological Contestation over Humanitarian Emblems: The Red Crescent in Islamizing Indonesia

الخلاصة: وعند بعض المسلمين الإندونيسين، الإدراك على أهمية الهيئة الاجتماعية فى الاستجابة للطوارئ خاصة بوقوع الكوارث مع كونها منظمة على احتراف جيد قد ارتقت إلى الحسن، وذلك استمرت مع تنشيطها وتنظيم العرف الخيرية الإنسانية. وذلك ظهر من تشتت الهيئات التى شرعت فى جمع الصدقة والزكاة والوقف، وفى كثير من الأحيان كانت هذه الهيئات قد تشاركت فى العملية الإنسانية فى محل النكبة. وجدير أن يقال أن هذا الادراك نتيجة من وسعة الأفكار عند الفعال الاجتماعية، وذلك بأن التعاليم الإسلامية قد طبقت فى مجال واسع، وكذلك ينبغى على المسلمين أن يدخلوا إلى الشئون الاجتماعية من طريق الهيئات التى أسسوها. ومع ذلك، ظهرت «سياسة الهوية» ولا سبيل إلى منع التنافس الإيديولوجي السياسي بين الهيئات الإنسانية. ومن هذه المنافسة مثلا، ظهر فى استعمال الشعار أو اللواء لكل هيئة، وذلك مثل استعمال الصليب الأحمر، أو الهلال الأحمر، أو غيرهما.

هذا البحث يلاحظ عن المنافسة الشعارية والدينية والإيديولوجية فى هيئات إنسانية بإندونيسيا، وذلك مبني على استعمال الشعار الإنسانية. هذا يدل على كيفية المنظمة الإنسانية الإسلامية فى تشكيل منهج جديد فى مجال سياسة إنسانية. ومع وجود إبذالها التامة، أصبحت هوية التى تتضمن فى الشعار سواء كانت دينية أو

سياسية ظهرت فى بعثتهم، ومن أجل ذلك يتخافطون الشعار الإنسانية فى المجتمع.

وفى أنحاء العالمى، مزية استعمال الشعار أو اللواء للهيئات الإنسانية —مثل الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر– منظومة فى مؤتمر جنيف (Jenewa). والهيئات الإنسانية التى استعملت هذين الشعارين كانت فرعة من حركة عالمية التى تحت ظلال الصليب الأحمر العالمى (ICRC-International Committee of the Red Cross) أو تحت ظلال الهلال الأحمر العالمى (IFRC-International Federation of Red Cross Society and Red Crescent Societies). وعند المسلمين فى إندونيسيا، استعمال الشعار المعين للهيئة الإنسانية لا يظهر عادة من منظورة واحدة. بل نشأت المنظورة أن الشعار لم يكن بارئا من القيمة، إلا أنها تعكس عن مزية المجتمع.

وفى إندونيسيا، استعمال الصليب الأحمر الذي استعمله هيئة الصليب الأحمر الإندونيسي أصبح مبحوثا. فشكلت الهيئات الإسلامية منظمة للإنسانية باستعمال الهلال الأحمر، وذلك بناء على منظورهم أن الهلال الأحمر مشتبه بالإسلام وأما الصليب الأحمر مشتبه بالنصارى. ولا عجب من تأسيس الهيئة الإنسانية للمسلمين مع ميلهم إلى استعمال الهلال الأحمر يومئذ. وهذا الموقف يؤدى إلى التنافس عند الفعال الإنسانية سواء كانت إيديوليجية أو سياسية.

وأما بعض الهيئات الإنسانية فى إندونيسيا التى استعملت شعار الهلال الأحمر مع بعض تغييرات وتعديلات، منها هيئة الهلال الأحمر الإندونيسي (BSMI) ووحدة إنقاذ الطوارئ للطي (Merc-C) ومنظمة الهلال الأحمر الإندونيسي (HAI). هذه الهيئة الثلاثة أسسها الفعال الإسلامية استجابة على الأزمات الإنسانية فى إندونيسيا التى صدرت من الكوارث الطبيعية والصوارع الاجتماعية. وفى سياق الجمع والصراع عن هذا الشعار، أصبحت قضية أساسية –عن الإنسانية وهوية الدين والتضامن الاجتماعية والسياسية فى مساعدة إنسانية– إشاعة وحركة إسلامية عصرية فى إندونيسيا.

Humanitarian emblems can represent symbolic meaning and ideological values held and promoted by aid associations. The involvement of religious associations in humanitarian and charitable works is often linked to insignia signifying the distinctiveness of an association from others. In a country such as Indonesia which has increasingly witnessed tremendous humanitarian crises caused by both natural disasters and communal conflicts over the past few decades, the number of new humanitarian associations with their unique emblems has increased rapidly and these have shaped dynamic contestations in the public sphere. The similarities and common-ground between humanitarian agencies have resulted in a plurality of symbols which may enrich humanitarian actions in the country, but which have also intensified tension among humanitarian agencies.

This paper addresses the plurality of humanitarian emblems in Indonesia by analyzing symbolic, religious and political contestations that are concealed behind Humanitarian NGO's public appearances, especially during the course of mobilization of public support and relief in disaster-affected areas. In particular, it analyses political controversy of the use of humanitarian symbols, notably the Red Cross, Red Crescent, and other religiously-inspired humanitarian emblems in contemporary Indonesia.

There have been many religiously-inspired aid agencies operating in Indonesia which have played considerable roles in relieving small-, medium- and large-scale humanitarian crises. During the course of mobilization of domestic funds and for the period of carrying out humanitarian actions in the field various kinds of humanitarian agencies with their distinctive symbols are visible. Multiple symbols, banners and flags have coloured the public sphere more extensively in recent times than ever before.[1] Faith-based agencies in general, and the newly formed Islamic relief NGOs in particular, have grown in number significantly over the past two decades. They have noticeably coloured humanitarian activism and have been able to compete with other long-established secular or non-religiously affiliated aid agencies.

In the Indonesian nation-state, humanitarian agencies with distinct religious symbols and sectarian identities were considered secondary actors until the mid 1990s. During the New Order era, especially from the early 1970s until the end of the 1990s, Islamic symbols in humanitarian affairs were not so important. Unlike in the post-

New Order era. Muslim engagement in numerous humanitarian associations was not yet accompanied with an eagerness to set up Islamic humanitarian agencies. This is partly because 'symbolizing' humanitarian action with religious distinctiveness was not considered important at that time, and because Muslim discourse on welfare issues concentrated on normative dimensions of Islamic precepts. A legal approach by authoritative ulama (Muslim scholars) was very dominant, and Muslim social activism was restricted to conventional charity, such as delivering aid directly to the poor and the needy in the surrounding neighbourhood. This situation rapidly changed at the end of the 1990s, especially after monetary crises, and these changes were marked by an increasing enthusiasm within Islamic associations to engage in current humanitarian movements. This fortunately coincided with a growing current of support from the public for humanitarian actions.[2]

One of the most striking cases of humanitarian issues in Indonesia that scholars of political sciences and religious studies may have overlooked is the emergence of numerous Islamic associations that pay attention to humanitarian affairs. Interestingly, some aid agencies have employed a particular symbol, such as the crescent, to mark their associations. We may assume that in addition to the increasing trend of employing a humanitarian emblem, along with the growth in humanitarian actions organized by religious institutions, there has been an ideologically sectarian interpretation evolving within societies which attaches religious and even political views to emblems. This can be seen in the tension between the Indonesian Red Cross Society (PMI), which is officially recognized and supported by international communities such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and the Indonesian Red Crescent Society (BSMI), which is intended to 'represent' Muslim communities.

The tension and rivalry between the Red Cross (PMI) and the Red Crescent (BSMI) has been expressed not only in the public sphere during the course of humanitarian action, but also in the House Representative Council (DPR) of the Republic of Indonesia. Compared with other Muslim countries, such as Turkey, Jordan, Egypt, Pakistan and Malaysia, the use of the Red Crescent rather than the Red Cross in Indonesia remains controversial, not religiously, but more symbolically and legally. Despite a deep historical experience of

colonialism, humanitarian societies under the protection of the ICRC and the IFRC that operate in many Muslim countries mainly use the Red Crescent instead of the Red Cross.[3] Indonesia and Nigeria, two Muslim countries that still utilize the Red Cross symbol, to borrow Jonathan Benthall's expression, are "countries with no popular memory of the Crusade".[4] The historical encounters with Dutch colonials led to the introduction of international humanitarian societies in Indonesia in the 1940s, and as a result the Red Cross has been widely used to symbolize humanitarian associations. Meanwhile, since the 1970s and 1980s, a number of humanitarian societies, especially those affiliated with both the ICRC and IFRC, in many Muslim countries including Malaysia changed their emblem from the Red Cross to the Red Crescent.[5]

Observers have suggested that in Muslim countries, the idea of a humanitarian emblem has increasingly become an intriguing subject engaging various parties, from social activists and religious groups to politicians and government officials. Religion, although important, is apparently not the only factor triggering the rise of new humanitarian associations. Globally speaking, in its long history the ICRC has in fact been challenged by other humanitarian movements that emerged to express different working strategies in implementing humanitarian principles, or to accommodate domestic or local interests, including the matter of an emblem. Faced with the Ottoman Empire's objection to the use of the Red Cross, the ICRC accepted the Red Crescent as a new neutral emblem. The ICRC was also constrained by the Israelis' rejection of the Red Cross, as the Israelis prefer to utilize the 'star', also known as the 'Red Shield of David', and their humanitarian association is known as Magen David Adom (MDA).[6] Having experienced exclusion for decades from international humanitarian societies such as the ICRC, the MDA with its Red Shield of David was finally officially accepted in June 2006 by the ICRC. As a result, the Red Cross, followed by the Red Crescent and the Red Shield, are regarded as representing the 'neutrality' of humanitarian emblems. Moreover, due to divergent strategies in the implementation of humanitarian principles and the concept of neutrality during the course of humanitarian works in conflict zones, 'Doctors Without Borders'/*Médecins Sans Frontières* (*MSF*) was set up as a new independent international humanitarian association which is officially detached from the ICRC.[7] In response to

2009 conflict between Palestinians and Israelis, which resulted in the increase of insecurity and devastation of public facilities, the MSF, for example, had publicly resonated its voices; calling for end demolition public facilities in Gaza.[8]

Jonathan Benthall's examination of the relationship between the ICRC and Islamic associations in Jordan reveals the dynamic tensions between international and domestic humanitarian associations in Muslim countries. Although from the beginning Jordan chose to use the Red Crescent to represent their national humanitarian society, the effectiveness of the use of the Red Crescent symbol in practice relies on the political context in which it operates. In particular, in a conflict zone, especially when Jordanians and Palestinians, two conflicting countries that both employ the Red Crescent, clashed in the 1970s, the Red Cross apparently worked effectively. This is because the Red Cross symbol in that situation was not a subject of suspicion for either of these Muslim majority countries. Even in Muslim countries, however, the Red Crescent does not always effectively unite all humanitarian associations. New aid agencies with their respective emblems are mushrooming and proposing various emblems that, to varying degrees, resemble the existing ones. It is worth emphasizing that not all humanitarian associations that use the crescent are ideological in character. In this paper, I argue that the spawning of the Red Crescent emblems in the Indonesian context is because of the commonness and 'popularity' of the symbol in public life. People recognize the Red Crescent as a representative symbol of Islamic societies, but, as we shall see in the next section, they do not always attach a particular ideological interpretation to that symbol. Therefore, the Red Crescent symbol can be used not only by Muslim humanitarian agencies, but also by clinics and hospitals that are not specifically part of international humanitarian societies.

The Plurality of Humanitarian Emblems

How important is the crescent symbol, and what sort of meaning is attached to it by Indonesian humanitarian associations? Traditionally, the Crescent is often associated with Islamic society, while the Cross is associated with the Christian (Western) world. The Crusades of the Middle Ages has to a certain degree lead both Muslims and Christians to attach themselves symbolically to either Crescent or Cross.[9] The

Red Cross symbol on a white background as a humanitarian symbol was introduced to respect the country where the ICRC was founded, Switzerland, whose national flag bears a resemblance to the Red Cross. Although Henry Dunant, a major historic figure and one of the founders of the ICRC, was religiously motivated during the course of humanitarian action at the Battle of Solferino in 1859, and many volunteers active in the ICRC were also motivated by religious notions, the ICRC was eventually transformed into a non-sectarian humanitarian society and upholds universal humanitarian principles as formulated by the Geneva Convention on the Protection of Victims of Wars in 1949. Despite the status of the ICRC as a private humanitarian movement based in Switzerland, it has developed rapidly and many countries around the globe, ranging from America to China, from Africa to Southeast Asia and the Middle East, have joined this movement.

Although the Red Cross has been declared a symbol of neutrality, not all countries can easily employ the Red Cross. In practice, psychologically many Muslim countries are reluctant to use the Red Cross as it is reminiscent of a Christian symbol. The birth of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent (IFRC) can be regarded as an attempt to diminish this psychological, historical or even ideological barrier, while at the same time expanding the engagement of other national humanitarian societies in Muslim countries. Based on the Geneva Conventions, there are distinctive symbols which have been admitted, registered and recognized by the international community, such as the Red Cross (in Western and non-Islamic countries), the Red Crescent (mainly in Arab and Islamic countries), the Red Lion and Sun (in Persia before its national movement began using the Red Crescent) and the Red Crystal (in Israel).[10] Apart from the historical origins of the Red Crescent, which are more political in character, there is no distinction in terms of the value or prestige between the Red Cross and Red Crescent. Both, according to the international humanitarian movement, are considered alike. However, according to the rules of Geneva-based humanitarian movements such as the ICRC and the IFRC, every country should have only one national emblem: either Red Cross or Red Crescent.

Since a decade ago, new humanitarian associations have appeared publicly in Indonesia with the Red Crescent symbol. Some associations, such as health centers and hospitals, utilize the Crescent to emblemize their institutions. Meanwhile, a new Islam-based humanitarian association has named itself the "Indonesian Red Crescent Society", linking it by name, by not officially, to the ICRC and IFRC. Disputes have erupted between the long-established Indonesian Red Cross Society and New Indonesian Red Crescent Society over whether or not new humanitarian associations, which are not affiliated to an international society, should be allowed to employ the Red Crescent.

The Red Cross and Red Crescent in Indonesia

The Indonesian Red Cross Society (PMI) has operated in the country officially since 1945, soon after national independence, as a continuation of the *Het Nederlands-Indische Rode Kruis* (NIRK). Before this association was officially transformed into PMI, it was named *Het Neterlandsche Rode Kruis Afdeling Indonesia* (NERKAI). The inauguration of the first committee of the Central Office of the Indonesian Red Cross (*Pengurus Besar* PMI) took place on September 17, 1945. The Vice-President Mohammad Hatta was appointed as the First Chair. During the Japanese Occupation, the PMI became one of the major actors in providing medical supplies and health provision for the war victims. The objective of the PMI at that time was to assist European soldiers who had been captives of Japanese troops.[11] From June 15, 1950 the PMI has been recognised as a part of, and official partner to, both the ICRS and IFRC. Until now, the PMI has been chaired by figures coming from various social and political backgrounds.[12] The former Vice President Jusuf Kalla was elected in 2009 as a new president of Indonesian Red Cross to replace former Minister of Finance Mar'ie Muhammad (1999-2009). The PMI's headquarter offices are spread across the regions of Indonesia, from Banda Aceh to Papua. This national humanitarian society has up until now produced health cadres (trained personnel) by disseminating its mission through education institutions at a variety of levels, from high schools to higher education institutions.[13] For many humanitarian activists, the Red Cross (*Palang Merah*) signifies a 'meeting point' or 'intersection' rather than a religious symbol, and there has so far been little controversy surrounding the use of the symbol by the PMI.

It was difficult to see any specific Islamic association during the New Order era that could grow to become a national humanitarian agency, despite the growing number of Islamic foundations working in social works. Although people recognized the Red Crescent as a humanitarian symbol linked to Islamic societies, efforts to bring that symbol to the public sphere remained rare, probably because the political environment at that juncture was not as open as it would become in the final years of the New Order and afterwards, in the Reformasi era. Attributing religious values to humanitarian symbols in the Reformasi Era, including the Red Cross and Red Crescent, became more obvious than ever before. In this respect, the emergence of a new association, namely the Indonesian Red Crescent Society BSMI, which was launched on June 8, 2002 by Muslim medical doctors supported by vibrant young volunteers, was a historic moment that has had an impact on the dynamics of humanitarian activism in Indonesia at both discursive and practical levels.

The BSMI identifies itself as an Islamic humanitarian association whose projects focus on health and social affairs. The inauguration of the BSMI in the Al-Azhar Mosque was attended by numerous Muslim figures and social activists, including Indonesian 'Ulama Councils (MUI), students activists, and representatives of 15 BSMI branches. The association selected as its main emblem the Red Crescent on a white background, circled by green script in three languages: Arabic (middle), Bahasa Indonesia (upper side), and English (bottom). The use of these three languages aims at popularizing this association in Indonesia, within international societies, and notably in Middle Eastern countries. Some suggest that the BSMI has strong ties to, but no direct or formal affiliation with, the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), an Islamic political party. On many occasions, this new national humanitarian movement has cooperated with various national and humanitarian associations, notably those under the support of the PKS.

The BSMI conducts widespread social activism. It has provided disaster relief in times of natural calamity and has carried out social activities to help poverty relief in urban areas throughout Indonesia and even overseas.[14] Within five years, the BSMI gained popular public support, especially from Islamic institutions. From an Islamic movement point of view, the BSMI represents an effort by Indonesian Muslims to promote a more 'Islamic' symbol, the Crescent. This

means that a new propensity to interpret the meaning of the Cross by attributing religious values to it has significantly increased. Yet we should also note that the Crescent does not clearly signify any spiritual symbol of Islam, despite the fact that it has been utilized by political parties. Meanwhile, Cross visually symbolises both the religious and political identities of Christianity. For some countries, a flag with a Red Cross on may be reminiscent of the Crusades.

It is certainly right when Jonathan Benthall points out that "a semiotic asymmetry" appears between the Cross and Crescent.[15] The memory of the Crusades, the attribution of religious values, and the identification of political distinctiveness have characterized interpretations of both the Red Cross and the Red Crescent. As mentioned previously, the national emblem employed in most Arab and Muslim countries is the Red Crescent. In Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, for example, publicizing the Red Cross symbol, even during the course of humanitarian action, can be considered 'illegal' due to the attribution of Christian religious values to the symbol of the Cross. In Indonesia, the use of the Red Cross symbol for humanitarian duties remains acceptable, despite a fondness to espouse a more 'Islamic' insignia.

Other Forms of the Crescent Symbol

The interest of Muslim societies in presenting institutions specialising in health and social welfare through Crescent symbol is prevalent. This means that the BSMI is not the only humanitarian association that uses the Red Crescent on a white background as its distinctive emblem. Other humanitarian associations whose symbols resemble the Red Crescent include Mer-C (Medical Emergency Rescue Unit), LKC, Hilal Ahmar Indonesia, and the Islamic (Muhammadiyah) Hospital of Pondok Kopi, Jakarta. Apart from the red colour Crescent, the Crescent is also used in other colours, and when incorporated with Star/s links to Muslim societies. Soon after Indonesian independence, a number of Islamic political parties and associations, such as Masyumi and Partai Syarikat Islam Indonesia (PSII) began using a Crescent and star as their core logos. This continued through the New Order and Reformasi eras, in which new Islamic political parties and such as Bulan Bintang, Neo-Masyumi, Partai Umat Islam (PUI), and even Aceh Free Movement (GAM) utilized a Crescent and stars on black, green or red backgrounds to symbolize Islamism.

It seems that the use and preservation of the Crescent symbol and the attachment of Islamic identity to it is continuing, and this has had a profound impact on current humanitarian activism in Indonesia. In particular, the Red Crescent has apparently become regarded as a sort of 'universal symbol' that can be employed by humanitarian organizations without necessarily being attached to the Geneva Convention. A couple of modifications have typified the recent Crescent symbols which to some degree can distinguish them from the official emblem of the Red Cross societies. MER-C (Medical Emergency Rescue Committee), a humanitarian institution set up by a number of physicians in response to the crisis in Poso and the Moluccas in 1999, has utilized the Red Crescent symbol with modification. Mer-C has added the globe in the middle of the Crescent to represent its worldwide humanitarian engagement. Likewise, Hilal Ahmar Indonesia, an Islamic *da'wah* and social institution established on January 10, 2008, has simply modified the direction of the face of its Crescent to the top-right, and so its Crescent symbol bears a resemblance to Red Crescent Societies. The phrase '*al-Hilāl al-Aḥmar*' is derived from Arabic and means 'Red Crescent'.

The modified symbol of a Red Crescent on a white background within humanitarian associations in Indonesia has also been used as an argument by the BSMI to justify its use of the symbol. There is no precise rule which prevents Islamic humanitarian agencies from using the Red Crescent symbol, as it is universally recognized as a representation of Islamic societies. Another type of modification has been made by the LKC (Layanan Kesehatan Cuma-Cuma-Free Health Services), a sister

of the largest Islamic philanthropic association in Indonesia, Dompet Dhuafa.[16] Focusing on free or cheap healthcare provision for the poor, LKC's logo has coloured the letter "C" in its name red, and thus it resembles a Red Crescent. However, this action has not been followed by all health institutions under Dompet Dhuafa supervision. For example, another sister institution of Dompet Dhuafa, RBC (Rumah Bersalin Cuma-Cuma-Free Maternity Care), which provides free maternity and child care for the poor use the letter 'C' as part of their logo, but not in red. There has been no specific discourse, at least publicly, to attribute particular religious meaning to the Red Crescent in the LKC logo, nor have they given any response to the dispute between the PMI and the BSMI. This implies that simply the popularity of the Red Crescent symbol has inspired this charitable clinic.

Legal Disputes and Struggle for Recognition

The first response to and bitter criticism of the emergence of new Islamic humanitarian agencies which use the Red Crescent symbol was raised by the PMI as a national humanitarian society and an official member of the ICRC. The PMI believes that humanitarian symbols, notably the Red Cross and Red Crescent are under protection of the Geneva Convention and thus cannot be freely imitated. From a legal perspective, the illegal imitation of humanitarian symbols can be interpreted as a violation of international law. From a practical perspective, an imitated symbol can confuse other humanitarian societies as well as activists and beneficiaries, especially in conflict zones where members of the ICRC and IFRC operate. In conflict zones, the operation of humanitarian agencies that unofficially use a symbol (Red Cross or Red Crescent) that belongs to the ICRC and IFRC can put the official ICRC partners in danger. This is because the competing parties in conflict zones may not trust certain humanitarian societies with distinctive emblems, and thus their impartiality is contested.

Vincent Nicod, head of the ICRC Delegation to Indonesia has stated that "the only official emblem of our partner is the Red Cross",[17] and in the Indonesian context his statement points to the PMI, the ICRC's

partner since 1975. Accordingly, all national movements associated with the ICRS and IFRC are required to use one of the registered and recognized symbols (i.e. Red Cross, Red Crescent, or Red Crystal), and they also should follow the rules formulated in the Geneva Conventions. To sum up, the use of the Red Crescent in Indonesia, according to the statutes of the ICRC and IFRC, is considered 'illegal' and will be officially unrecognized by the international community, unless the Indonesian government and its national movement officially changes their Red Cross into a Red Crescent. Vincent Nicod's insistence on the legal rights of the PMI arose in response to the active participation of the BSMI in various humanitarian activities, both nationally and internationally. This shows that the emergence of the BSMI seems to have caused competition with the PMI. The privilege that the BSMI has gained from the government[18] has even prompted a psychological barrier between the two competing groups. The PMI could not cooperate with the BSMI because the PMI considers that the BSMI is 'illegal' according to the roles adopted from the Geneva Conventions. It has been reported that soon after the appearance of the BSMI, the PMI suggested that the BSMI should change its emblem and name using, for instance, Green Crescent Society, Yellow Crescent Society, or similar.[19]

The above PMI's argument is challenged by a new interpretation formulated by BSMI activists who believe that there is no precise rule which binds a state to have only one emblem. Based on the opinion of Sri Setianingsih, a professor of international law at the University of Indonesia, members of the BSMI argue that the notion of one national emblem can only be applied in a particular context, such as the relation between national movements and international community (ICRC and IFRC). According to the advocates of BSMI, in the national context, Indonesia is able to create its own policy by which the existing humanitarian organizations using a distinctive symbol (Red Crescent) can be accommodated. Again, although the status of national emblem has been regulated in Protocol III of the Geneva Convention on "The Adoption of an Additional Distinctive Emblem",[20] the BSMI's continues to defend its arguments, to preserve its status, to use its emblem, and to operate in disaster and conflict zones.

Another argument of BSMI to operate is that the BSMI is legally registered with the Ministry of Law and Human Rights of the Republic

of Indonesia (*Depkumham*). Therefore, seen from a legal perspective, the BSMI is able to operate and use its current organizational name and emblem. According to them, there is no convincing reason to dismiss this, thanks to the protection of domestic law. The BSMI also believe that if the Indonesian government were to bow to the pressure of the international community (ICRC and IFRC) and eliminate domestic aid agencies that use the Red Crescent symbol, or force the BSMI to change its symbol within Indonesia, this would have a widespread impact on the future of, and would result in serious political repercussions for, domestic humanitarian associations. Accordingly, the policy of restricting the operation of NGOs that use the crescent symbol will, in the future, sacrifice numerous humanitarian agencies such as Mer-C, LKC, BSMI and Hilal Ahmar Indonesia (HAI)[21] which in fact have gained strong support from communities throughout Indonesia.

Beyond legal opinion, another argument deals with the socio-religious background of Indonesia as the world's largest Muslim country and as a member of the OIC (Organization of the Islamic Conference) that consist of 56 Islamic states. Almost all countries with an affiliation to the OIC use the Red Crescent symbol as their national emblem. Although Indonesia is far from the cradle of the Crusades, Muslims make up the majority of the population. According to the BSMI, Indonesian Muslims might feel hesitant about holding cross symbol in their hands during humanitarian missions. This is because the symbol of a Red Cross on white background cannot be detached from religious and political attributes. Despite the fact that this symbol resembles the national flag of Switzerland where the ICRC was founded, it was also used by the Knights Templar during the Crusade era. Therefore, preserving the Red Crescent symbol in a Muslim country like Indonesia is, according to the advocates of the BSMI, sociologically acceptable. As a matter of fact, those using the Red Crescent symbol, such as the BSMI, LKC DD and Mer-C, have met with positive encouragement from people socially, financially and politically.

Government Response

The government's attitude toward the rise of associations using names and symbols similar to the Red Crescent Societies under the Geneva Convention protection changes overtime, depending on domestic political context. In 2002, the founders of the BSMI were

ordered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to change its emblem in order to comply with the Geneva Convention. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs had apparently received complaints from both international and national humanitarian movements such as the ICRC, IFRC and PMI. At that time, the head of the PMI, the former Minister of Finance, Mar'ie Muhammad, showed his firm stand on this issue by refusing the operation of the BSMI with the crescent symbol. However these 'diplomatic' efforts were fruitless and the BSMI has remained active and has even developed rapidly as a result of widespread public support. Since then, there has not been any further official statement from the PMI publicly complaining about the appearance of the BSMI. This is partly because emblem and symbol is a sensitive issue. Critical voices against the use of the Red Crescent can be regarded by particular Islamist groups as a harmful endeavour against Islam. In his interview with an Islamic magazine, the chairperson of the BSMI, emphasises: "*Bagaimanapun juga lambang bulan sabit merah identik dengan Islam. Kalau Indonesia sampai menggunakan lambang bulan sabit merah berarti kita berada di blok Islam. Mereka takut dengan itu.*" (By some means or others, the Red Crescent symbol is identical to Islam. If Indonesia utilized the Red Crescent symbol, this would mean that we [Indonesians] are on the Islamic side. They are afraid of it.)[22]

Interestingly, in subsequent years, without many serious obstacles, the BSMI has increasingly become a close partner to certain ministries within the government, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Social Welfare. In response to the 2008 crises in Gaza-Palestine cause by the deteriorating clash between Palestinians in Gaza and Israelis, the government invited the BSMI to be involved in the government-sponsored humanitarian team sent to Gaza. At the same time and in response to the same crisis, the Indonesian Red Cross refused to become involved in the government's team, simply to show its refusal to be put together with the BSMI in the same mission. To the PMI, being part of the government's team in that mission would have meant giving recognition to the BSMI, which would have caused confusion among international humanitarian associations affiliated with the same movement. This is simply because it is uncommon for a state to have two different organizations with two distinctive emblems such as the Red Cross and the Red Crescent. In a conflict zone where suspicions between two competing and conflicting parties grows, the

appearance of two different emblems may deteriorate the situation and cause an ineffective humanitarian mission. This opinion is often raised by PMI officials. As a result, instead of joining the government team, the PMI involved itself in another humanitarian project in Gaza organized by the ICRC and IFRC.

Questions can be raised here, relating to the interplay between state and society: why does the government not formally and publicly change the Red Cross symbol of Indonesian humanitarian association (PMI) into Red Crescent symbol; how far does people's 'pressure' to attribute religious and political values to a humanitarian symbol impact government decisions on the politics of emblems? To analyze the government's ambiguous stance on the matter of emblems, the religio-political situation must be taken into consideration. The government's attitude towards the BSMI is presumably driven by an increasing tendency towards Islamization in the aftermath of the Reformation era. The roles played by some elites in Islamic political parties such as the PKS, for example, have compelled the government to accommodate Islamic aspirations. In this respect, I would suggest that the government will preserve its ambiguous attitude towards emblems, as happened in the past during the New Order regime. Despite the fact that the BSMI has not had much impact on political situations nationally or even regionally, the BSMI has provided superior programmes on health care and relief and gained strong support from people. However, the request to replace the symbol of the Red Cross would not easily be granted, as this would generate a broader controversy among society as well as cause certain political repercussions, especially at regional levels.

In addition, replacing the Red Cross with the Red Crescent would indicate that the government has surrendered to religion-inspired political pressure. Thus, the Indonesian government would certainly be accused of having attributed religious and political values to an internationally-recognized humanitarian symbol. In line with this, Vincent Nicod has said that "we regret when the government chooses BSMI, not because they are bad guys, but because it is not legally and internationally recognized."[23] According to him, when the government gives support to the BSMI, they are "against the statute of which they are part," and this policy is "considered a violation of statute of the movement."[24]

The Parliament

Jonathan Benthall has pointed out that "visual symbols are tools of political persuasion—tools of humanitarian politics."[25] Debates and political disputes over the visual symbols of Indonesian humanitarian societies in Indonesia have apparently justified Benthall's supposition. At the end of 2008, through the Ministry of Law and Human Rights, the government proposed a Bill Draft to be discussed and examined in parliament, called RUU PMI (Bill Draft on the Indonesian Red Cross Society). Under this bill, the Red Cross societies would benefit greatly, as it would officially protect the Red Cross emblem in Indonesia. On the other hand, the BSMI was apprehensive about this Bill Draft, as its passing in parliament would result in the elimination of the Red Crescent symbol in Indonesia. BSMI activists have alleged that political motives lie behind this law, and have raised concerns over the monopolization of a humanitarian symbol which would eliminate Islamic humanitarian activities in Indonesia. The activists suggest that the parliament is not supposed to govern only the Red Cross societies, in order to avoid discriminatory legislation in humanitarian activism. Therefore, the prospective humanitarian law in Indonesia would not only protect particular institutions such as the Red Cross, but also other humanitarian societies in Indonesia as a whole.[26]

Moreover, according to the BSMI, passing the Bill Draft on Indonesian Red Cross Societies would also mean that the government and parliament had failed to notice the increasing inclination among Indonesians to use their preferred symbol, the Red Crescent. It also would restrict what the BSMI activists have termed in their campaign against this Bill Draft, 'freedom of expression'. However, the PMI along with international societies such as the ICRC consider a new law to be necessary to prevent other parties from misusing international agreements on humanitarianism, and to protect national societies from misrepresentation in conflict zones.[27] The exacerbation of the tension between these two competing parties ended up in political maneuvers, either at government or parliamentary levels. Both the PMI and BSMI have used their own resources and channels within the bureaucracy to strengthen their institutional capacities and activities in the Indonesian social and political environment. Alongside the shift in the government's attitudes toward the BSMI, this association has also gained popular recognition from the public. In response to this situation, the PMI

proposed a Bill Draft to the Indonesian Representative Council (DPR) for legislation. There was a heated debate inside and outside the parliament. In the parliament, the political parties were divided into three groups: 1) those who supported the Bill Draft in order to strengthen the Red Cross Society; 2) those who supported the existence of Red Crescent Society; 3) those who had not made a decision yet.

Most of nationalist parties, including the PDIP, Golkar, PDS (Christian-based party) and the TNI/POLRI gave support to the Red Cross, while parties such as PAN, PBB and PPP became advocates of the Red Crescent Society. It should be noted that although, as mentioned earlier, the PKS has had close ties with the BSMI, it has not formally expressed its political stance by giving support to either the Red Cross or Red Crescent. The title of the Bill Draft is among the topics compelling an intense debate. Some propose that only the Red Cross should be regulated, others have claimed that both the Red Cross and Red Crescent should be regulated, and the rest prefer to give recognition to all existing associations. Under these circumstances, interestingly, the state has behaved ambiguously, depending on the national political context and the figures who lead government institutions. For example, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs often cooperate with the Red Crescent, while the Ministry of Law and Human Rights proposed a Bill Draft that would, at least visually, prevent the existence of the Red Crescent Society.

Emblem as a Symbol of Resistance: between 'Justice' and 'Impartiality'

In line with the above discussion, resistance towards the Red Cross symbol have characterized a long debate in certain Muslim countries. In 1982, a new international movement, namely the Islamic Committee of the International Crescent (ICIC), was set up in Libya.[28] The ICIS had gained enthusiastic support from a few Muslim countries in the Middle East and North Africa. Due to the limited numbers of countries participating in this movement, the ICIC was not officially adopted by the international community. The rise of ICIC resembles that of the BSMI, to the extent that both aim to play a larger role than merely that of a humanitarian association, but also aim to act as advocates of oppressed groups in certain Muslim countries. To borrow Jonathan Benthall's framework, they are trying to replace the notion of 'unity' and that of 'universality' by 'the principle of justice'. As Benthall adds,

"justice is often considered the central ethical value of Islam, whereas the leader of the Red Cross have never deemed it to be a necessary component in their set of principles-though in recent years there has been an appreciable move towards integrating the concept of human rights with that of humanitarianism."[29]

Although, the BSMI has held similar motives as the ICIC, its organizational principals do not show an obvious concept of justice. Despite holding Islam as an organizational basis, there is no particular value upheld by this association in its organizational concept. We only see the BSMI as having redefined the term "*kesukarelaan*" (voluntary) by using a more 'Islamic' term, "*keikhlasan*" (sincerity). Moreover, both the PMI and BSMI have behaved differently in the way they organize and mobilize public resources. Despite sharing similarities in the normative concept of humanitarian principles such as 'universality' and 'impartiality', in terms of other concepts, such as 'independence' and 'neutrality', they are rather different, especially when they operate in conflict zones. In response to the crises in Gaza, to which various Islamic associations and solidarity groups in Indonesia had paid much attention, the concept of neutrality and independence are contested, and the BSMI and PMI express different paths of mobilizing domestic sources. In a 'textbook' manner, the PMI attempted to be consistent with the humanitarian principles formulated and adopted within the ICRC by not engaging in any political activism in humanitarian missions.

This can be seen during the course of mobilization of domestic funds to support the PMI's humanitarian projects in Gaza. Like other aid agencies, both the PMI and BSMI with their resources have attempted to attract wider domestic benefactors. The PMI has appeared modest, and its discourse on Palestinian issues is not as dynamic as that of the BSMI. The PMI has reluctantly touched a sensitive political issue of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as it rarely utilises Islamic sensitivities to justify its support for Palestinians not only as war victims but also entities that need self-determination now and in the future. Meanwhile, during the course of mobilization, BSMI activists, like other Islamic solidarity groups, have been able to attract wider public attention, especially from Muslim communities, as they have obviously shown their political stance against Israel's occupation of Palestinian land. Despite an enduring campaign for Palestinian freedom, the BSMI

have also publicly called on Indonesian Muslims, in general, and BSMI sympathizers, in particular, to boycott all Israel-related products because they consider that Palestinians have simply become the victims of well-equipped Israeli troops.

In a nutshell, the rationale behind humanitarian works by relief associations and charitable institutions may vary, from universal humanitarian values derived from moral principles or those that emanate from religious tenets. Modern humanitarian principles to be applied during humanitarian works in disaster-affected spots or conflict zones have been officially defined and formulated by international humanitarian societies, as can be found in the Geneva Convention on international humanitarian law. Yet, in practice, symbolic, religious, ideological, and even political contestations have often characterized the patterns of relief action. The normative concept of 'impartiality', which is held by almost all humanitarian societies, has in fact often been constrained by the social, cultural and political complexities in the field where relief associations operate. The profound involvement of faith-based NGOs together with 'secular'-based relief associations and solidarity groups in relieving disaster or protecting both combatant and commoners in time of conflict, for example, have resulted in dynamic relations among NGOs themselves and between NGOs and the civilian victims, as well as between NGOs and the combatants.

Between Formal and Informal Networks

At the time the conflict between Hamas and Israel deteriorated in 2008, which in turn resulted in a humanitarian crisis in Gaza, various humanitarian associations from all over the world came to deliver help for the victims in Gaza. Indonesia, in particular, took part by sending humanitarian teams organized by, among other things, solidarity groups, humanitarian NGOs, *zakat* agencies and charitable institutions, and by government agencies through, for example, the Ministry of Health in cooperation with the Ministry of International Affairs. In order to participate in the process of humanitarian missions during and after the crisis, and to show solidarity with the Palestinians, the Indonesian government also engaged domestic humanitarian associations. At that juncture, the government cooperated with Muslim NGOs specializing in humanitarian and Islamic associations, such as MER-C (Medical Emergency Rescue Committee), the Indonesian

Red-Crescent Society (Bulan Sabit Merah Indonesia-BSMI) and the Muhammadiyah (Muhammadiyah Disaster Management Centre-MDMC). This organised cooperation was unfortunately not followed by the government engaging the oldest and largest humanitarian society in Indonesia, the Indonesian Red Cross Society (Palang Merah Indonesia-PMI). This is partly because, according to the PMI, the government had already embraced the Indonesian Red-Crescent Society.

During the crisis in Gaza, the two competing entities, the BSMI and PMI, worked separately by engaging different partners. The PMI, one the one hand, benefited from the international community affiliated with the ICRC, IFRC, Palestinian Red Crescent Society, Jordanian Red Crescent Society, and the like. On the other hand, the BSMI gained support mainly from national associations, including those inheriting the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwān al-Muslimīn) as well as Islam-based humanitarian organizations. Therefore, although the BSMI has the same emblem as the existing associations in Palestine and Jordan, it could not officially cooperate with other Red Crescent Societies in the given regions due to the legal issue of the emblem. In contrast, the PMI with its Red Cross symbol could work together with the Palestine Crescent Society and Jordan Red Crescent Society in order to bring medical assistance, send supplies and show the solidarity of the Indonesian people.[30]

It has also been reported that along with 158 national movements from all over the world, including the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, Egyptian Red Crescent Society, Jordanian Red Crescent Society, and Israel Red Crystal Society, the Indonesian Red Crescent Society was invited to a Geneva-based meeting on January 28-29, 2009 in order to formulate a reconstruction programme for Gaza.[31] Nevertheless, recognition from the international community can be achieved through different ways. In this case, although the BSMI is officially not recognized by the ICRC of IFRC, another network can be played, enabling them to be involved in humanitarian missions in Gaza. As matter of fact, in the third mission to Gaza, the BSMI could cooperate with other Indonesian humanitarian associations such as Mer-C and KNRP as well as some hospitals located in Gaza. In this respect, medical doctors involved in humanitarian missions seem to have their own capacity and networks to be able to work together with local (Gaza) hospitals. Interestingly, Egyptian Red Crescent Societies had facilitated

the arrival of Indonesian humanitarian associations and solidarity groups. The Indonesian Embassy in Cairo has also been instrumental in engaging the Egyptian Red Crescent and linking Egyptian Red Crescent to Indonesian Islamic solidarity groups. This means that, despite formal and official networks, informal networks are apparently quite effective during humanitarian missions. Although emblem, in this context, is still important, intrinsic values and shared-interests among aid agencies, such as the Red Crescents, Muslim NGOs, and solidarity groups have functioned quite effectively.

Controversy of Humanitarian Symbols of 'the Others'

Other cases revealing controversy over humanitarian and religious symbols can be found during the course of humanitarian actions. The very long and ambiguous relations between Muslims and Christians and perhaps other religious groups in Indonesia and probably in other parts of the world, coupled with suspicion, have apparently perpetuated tension among them. Suspicion and evidence to some extent cannot easily be reconciled, and in the field, humanitarian activism organized by particular religious institution in conflict zones and disaster affected areas is also not immune from suspicion. For example, when the communal conflict between Muslims and Christians in Ambon in the Moluccas took place in 1998, resulting in tragic fatalities on both sides, faith-based NGOs specialising in medical relief and solidarity groups, either Muslim or Christian in origin, landed in the conflict area for various purposes, such as peace-keeping, helping the wounded civilians, or even 'supporting' combatants. Soon after, when a powerful and devastating earthquake struck the coast of Aceh in 2004, hundreds of relief missions supervised by 'secular' and faith-based NGOs began to operate in this area which is also known as the 'Veranda of Mecca'. World Vision, one of the world's largest Christianity-based relief and aid associations, for example, organized extensive relief projects and reconstruction and rehabilitation programmes in Aceh. The success of this America-based Christian NGO in Aceh has depended on its ability to negotiate with local Muslim people in Aceh by, among other things, engaging local counterparts and volunteers and redesigning its visibly Christian humanitarian emblem with a more 'neutral' one as a means of avoiding any controversy among local people. This suggests that in recent times, humanitarian emblems have remained an essential issue

to current humanitarian projects carried out by faith-based NGOs.

While the previous sections of this paper have discussed the tension between the PMI and BSMI, this next section will take a closer look at interfaith issues and the attitudes of faith-based humanitarian NGOs. It is widely acknowledged that places of worship (i.e. mosques, churches, synagogues, and temples) as well as working places (companies and government offices) can be the target of faith-based NGOs to mobilize funds and volunteers. The visibility of banners and religious signs in the public space is also common, as it may attract particular benefactors. In short, religious congregations have underpinned social activism by faith-based NGOs and even secular NGOs. Nevertheless, during the course of redistribution of aid in disaster and conflict-affected areas, tension and suspicion often surpass partnership among NGOs.

Faith-based Humanitarian Symbols in Post-tsunami Aceh

Symbolic and religious contestation among societies and NGOs during relief operations have coloured humanitarian action post-tsunami in Banda Aceh in 2004. Both secular and faith-based NGOs, domestic and international, arrived in Aceh to relieve the victims during the course of the emergency and to run rehabilitation and reconstruction projects afterwards. Aceh is a special region in Indonesia that is able to implement what is called 'Syariat Islam' on a regional constitutional basis.[32] Unlike other regions in Indonesia, the local constitutions and law in Aceh have been Islamized so that the local Government is able to issue their distinct Islam-inspired laws, including family law and criminal law. In short, the Islamic factor, at least symbolically and formally, is placed in many aspects of social life. Nonetheless, the flow of faith-based NGOs to conduct disaster relief in Aceh resulted in dynamic interfaith relations between domestic and international faith-based NGOs and local people. The central government has installed the BRR (Badan Rekonstruksi dan Rehabilitasi NAD-Nias) as a government-sponsored special agency, responsible for regulating aid distribution and reviving the social and economic life of people in Aceh and Nias. Apart from organizing all foreign funding, the BRR also draws attention to inter-religious relations and social harmony in disaster-affected areas.

It is widely acknowledged that humanitarian affairs relate not only to the provision of aid by humanitarian agencies, but also

with the relationships among NGOs whose religious and cultural backgrounds vary. Disharmony, tension and conflicts occurred in many places, resulting in unfavourable situations for humanitarian works. Interestingly, unpleasant situations for humanitarian assistance in disaster areas have been caused by misunderstandings or even misuse of humanitarian symbols that in one way or another represent or can be affiliated to particular religious or political groups. Some cases in Aceh reveal another form of resistance to the cross symbol used by Christian NGOs. In Yogyakarta, there were also a lot of complaints by humanitarian volunteers about the massive appearance of flags of political parties while their scope of work is far from adequate. Therefore, a slogan grumbling about "more flags and less work" is often jokingly resounded by volunteers. Beyond this, it is very common for faith-based humanitarian NGOs to emblemize their institution with a particular sign, including Crescents and Crosses. Despite this, many Christian NGOs appear more secular in public, and visibly disengage their institutions from religious signs. Their banners can no longer even be clearly identified and associated with particular religions, neither their types of activities. Nevertheless, some Christian NGOs prefer using their 'traditional' religious symbols, like many Islamic NGOs, and the distributed aid are also inevitably identified by religious symbols. In some places, cultural proximity remains important and instrumental in bridging the gap between NGOs as providers and people as recipients, and thus a cultural gap can also cause an asymmetrical flow of information, resulting in miscommunication. Therefore, cultural negotiation, in terms of the use of religious symbols, between providers and recipients often characterize charity practice in disaster prone areas.

In Aceh, the spread of symbols of the cross has become the concern of a special team against religious proselytizing, called *Tim Pembinaan dan Pengawasan Pendangkalan Aqidah* (P3A). Established in 2006, P3A is a special agency sponsored by the BRR. Its major aim is to collect and investigate any information pointing to the use or misuse of religious symbols and proselytizing during humanitarian actions. In 2007, P3A was chaired by Prof. Dr. H. Warul Walidin AK, MA, a vice rector of IAIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh and head of *Majelis Pendidikan Daerah* Aceh (Board of Education in Aceh Region). The World Vision is one of institutions that is often mentioned in P3A reports. Known as the world's largest Christian humanitarian NGO, World Vision has

provided wide-ranging humanitarian assistance for disaster victims around the globe, including in Aceh. It provided assistance to Aceh by distributing supplies to refugees, from clean water and clothes to school kits for children and health provision. Like other NGOs whose logos usually appear on the distributed supplies World Vision's logo also marks their distributed aid. It is within these circumstances that local people in Aceh had a misunderstanding regarding this aid NGO and other faith-based NGOs. There were Christian evangelist organizations who attempted to benefit from the situation by spreading their Christian symbols and precepts to Muslim communities by any means possible. Trihadi Saptoadi, the director of the World Vision Indonesia, acknowledges:

> As a Christian organization, we are often seen as either a church or missionary organization instead of being a Christian humanitarian agency, and this sometimes creates tension. It raises a lot of suspicion and many questions. We are therefore always open about our Christian identity; we never hide it...Our mission clearly mentions that we work with the poor and oppressed regardless of their religion, ethnicity, race and gender... Yes, we are motivated by our Christian values and calling. We do what we do because we follow Jesus Christ's message to love and care for our neighbors, and that is why we work with other faiths as well...We let them know our identity as a Christian organization, and our clear position and policy that we neither do proselytizing nor work with organizations and individuals that do proselytizing. We will not use our resources or money to proselytize people with whom we work.[33]

There have been cases when some of the aid distributed by Christian NGOs, in which the Cross and other Christian-related symbols appear, have caused quarrels among societies which have resulted in the withdrawal of aid or the abolition of NGO symbols. In order to deal with this situation, some NGOs, including World Vision, have attempted to cover up their symbols or even remove them, in order to make it as easy as possible to deliver aid in certain regions. This policy has been taken by this humanitarian NGO in order to reduce the tension with the recipients, or notably some elites within society who are very critical about this matter. Yet, afterwards, having evaluated their policy, World Vision has suggested that this is not supposed to happen because the symbol is private matter, and as a Christian NGO, World Vision is also not supposed to cover up it symbol, even while working in a Muslim-populated region like Aceh. This is simply because World Vision believes

that (Muslim) people would not change their religion simply because of the aid they receive from an NGO.[34] P3A's findings and conclusions suggesting that the appearance of Cross symbol in the distributed aid as part of missionary activities should be cautiously watched is not always understood from the same standpoint. Other associations, including the Muhammadiyah and local NGOs, have paid more attention to the emergency and development programmes to be executed in Aceh by NGOs, by becoming partners to Christian and secular NGOs formally and informally, instead of acting as watchdogs.[35]

In spite of researching and preventing Christian missionaries, P3A also attempted to combat secular and non-Islamic traditionalist influences, including what is to be called 'liberal' and 'deviant' Islam. Wide-ranging activities, such as trauma healing for children and training for refugees through informal education, carried out by NGOs could not escape its surveillance. These relief activities are often accused by P3A as having deviated from Islamic precepts, representing the liberal voices of Islam, and fostering Western secular values which, according to P3A, can be serious threat for Acehnese and Muslims as a whole, religiously and culturally. In its report, P3A seems to draw generalizations about these activities by using the word 'suspicion' in assessment of many kinds of social activities in which Islamic symbols disappear. My informant, who was active in the Children Center, a project under supervision of the Muhammadiyah and AUSAID, during the rehabilitation process in some regions of Aceh considers that P3A's allegations seem to be too damning an indictment. The Children Center, in which my informant worked, represents Muslim social activism despite the fact that it does use much Islamic diction publicly during the course of conducting social activities such as trauma healing projects. Although foreign funding is instrumental in supporting the Children Center, all activities are initiated and created by local Muslim activists.

Troubling Humanitarian Symbols: the Elites or Grassroots?

Information asymmetry seems to have characterized disputes among Indonesian humanitarian activities and volunteers with regards to humanitarian symbols and associated meanings, interpretations, and legal status. The matter of humanitarian symbols is also contextual, very much depending upon the region where the symbols are publicized

as well as on the composition of the population. In Aceh, which has adopted Islamic shari'a as foundation of public law, and has a long historical background as an Islamic area, religious symbols of 'the others', such as Christian symbols, may to a certain degree generate tension. However this is not always the case, as evidenced by the wide-ranging operations of the PMI in Aceh which have not faced great barriers from local Muslim communities. Likewise, a Catholic NGO, the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), which has been involved in Aceh over the years, especially during the course of conflict in the 1990s, in giving assistance to refugees, notably widows and children, is evidence that a symbol held by a religious group and NGO with a similar religious affiliation (i.e. Christian) can be tolerated by society.[36] This means that the commonness of a humanitarian symbol is also an essential factor which determines people's reception or rejection of that symbol, and more importantly how well faith NGOs gain people's trust.

Because of its symbol and emblem, an NGO can gain privileges and be warmly welcomed by communities. The experiences of Muslim Aid and Islamic Relief with their extensive relief and charity projects in Aceh suggest that they benefit because of their gracious reception by society, thanks partly to their Islamic emblem. Shared cultural affinities between national or international NGOs and beneficiaries among societies may result in the establishment of better partnerships between NGOs and society. The matter of emblem is also contextual, depending upon the socio-religio-political setting. While it has increasingly generated a heated issue in Aceh, this was unlikely in Yogyakarta, a city which is culturally rich and religiously diverse. The presence of religious institutions other than Islam in Yogyakarta, notably Christian, is quite pervasive. Some villages in certain district of Yogyakarta can be seen as having particularly Christian or Muslim root, while other villages are religiously and culturally varied. Many religious institutions exist and various inter-faith forums are carried out by NGOs, academia, or religion institutions. Under strong influence of the Sultanate of Yogyakarta, with its Javanese culture and values, the people of Yogyakarta, regardless of their religious and cultural backgrounds, still consider the notion of harmony to be essential to community.

Following the 2006 earthquake in Central Java and Yogyakarta, international and national aid agencies as well as local NGOs delivered humanitarian aid and operated either emergency rescue actions or

medium and short-term humanitarian missions (reconstruction and rehabilitation). Thousands of dwellings, especially in some villages of Bantul District (Yogyakarta) and Klaten district (Central Java) disappeared, ruined by the devastating earthquake. Some humanitarian actors working in Yogyakarta, including faith-based NGOs, were former Aceh relief volunteers. In the field, tension and disharmony between (inter)national NGOs and local communities may occur, and rumours whether certain religious groups would Christianize and Islamize particular villages in Klaten and Bantul have also circulated among the public. Villagers and local leaders seem to have often been quite familiar with this issue, even though they may not have witnessed it first-hand. The appearance of religious symbols and institutions during humanitarian missions is also negotiable, depending upon the ability and the way in which faith-based NGOs approach society. One Muslim leader in a village of Bantul, for example, told me that in his neighbouring villages, some Christian and Buddhist NGOs with their distinctive symbols have carried out humanitarian work, and people in his village have never shown their objection. Budi Setiawan, the person who was in charge as a coordinator of the Muhammadiyah disaster response in Yogyakarta revealed that there are often rumours about interfaith issues, including the matter of religious and humanitarian symbols. Some may be true, he said, but most are hoaxes.[37]

A further question is do humanitarian emblems really matter for grassroots activities, or it is simply part of the elite's concerns? Symbols represent symbolic meaning, whether cultural, political, or religious. They are created to contain values and philosophy, and identify an association. The Cross and Crescent symbols, which in recent times have largely been accepted by humanitarian societies as universal images of humanitarianism, seem to have been challenged in particular parts of the world along with the changing nature of geo-political and cultural contexts. Humanitarian symbols have increasingly been open for redefinition, and their meanings can also be reconstructed. In a nutshell, requisitioning and reassessment of the symbolic meaning of humanitarian emblems requires intellectual reflection, and this apparently is not a major concern for grassroots, commoners or even ordinary humanitarian volunteers. With regards to whether Indonesia should employ the Red Cross or Red Crescent, a staff who works in the ICRC, for example, told me that the use of the Crescent symbol is

possible in Indonesia because the majority of the population is Muslim.

Likewise, one PMI volunteer who worked in Aceh also shared a similar opinion, pointing to the necessity of having fair and open competition between the PMI and BSMI instead of debating legal aspects of the use of the two emblems in Indonesia. Simply, he emphasised, both the PMI and BSMI with their distinct Red Cross and Red Crescent symbols work for humanitarian goals. Likewise, thousands of Muslim students studying in high schools, and even in Islamic universities throughout Indonesia are recruited annually by the PMI to become humanitarian activist cadres. There has so far not been any strong resistance to the PMI simply because of its Red Cross emblem. Instead, the Red Cross symbol is considered a common form of emblem with not much to with a particular religion. In coherence with this development of humanitarian emblems, we may also consider that any dispute regarding humanitarian emblems belongs to elites and intellectuals, or more precisely, to the politicized middle class and elites who pay particular attention to the matters of identity, dignity and public recognition.

Conclusion

This paper has identified symbolic, religious, and ideological contestations within humanitarian societies in Indonesia over the issue of humanitarian emblems. It has shown how Islamic humanitarian organizations have increasingly shaped a new pattern of the politics of humanitarianism in Indonesia. While the provision of aid remains the overarching concern of many humanitarian associations, the matter of self-identity, whether religious or political, which is partly attributed to the symbol, remains embedded in their mission and thus, in the public sphere, humanitarian symbols are often contested. Both newly founded and long-established faith-based aid agencies in Indonesia which appear publicly and play crucial roles in providing assistance during crises apparently cannot escape from this contestation. There are levels in which disputes over humanitarian symbols occur. The first level is between humanitarian agencies which share different values or a symbolically clashing philosophical basis and approach, such as between religious and secular, between Muslim and Christian NGOs, between international and local aid agencies. Secondly, tension can be caused by misunderstanding about symbols, and this frequently takes place

between aid NGOs and communities, especially in certain areas which are predominantly inhabited by a particular religious or ethnic group. The experiences of NGOs in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Palestine, and Indonesia (Aceh and the Moluccas) suggest that the ability of NGOs to adjust their visual appearance in disaster and especially conflict areas apparently shapes the pattern of people's reception of NGOs. In areas which are rich in culture, ethnicity and religion, people's reactions toward particular humanitarian symbols are not as strong as in those with a monolithic culture.

In the context of the modern nation-state, disputes over humanitarian symbols have also interfered not only in the public sphere, but also in the political domain of local government and international societies. The tension between the Red Cross and Red Crescent in Indonesia reveal that despite the increasing propensity within Muslim NGOs to appear more visibly in the public sphere by utilizing the Red Crescent symbol, claimed as part of international societies and governed by international humanitarian law, the attitude of local governments toward this issue is also essential to characterizing the tension. Careless bureaucratic systems which offer a permit to utilize particular symbols for newly-formed associations, and other related laws, such as international humanitarian law, have profoundly contributed to the heated controversy surrounding the use of the Red Crescent symbol among humanitarian activists in Indonesia. Interestingly, both conflicting parties, the Red Cross (PMI) and Red Crescent (BSMI), have come to believe that this controversy surrounding humanitarian emblems is politicized by the other.

Finally, one may also say that the controversy surrounding humanitarian symbols is related to the international humanitarian societies and international humanitarian law to which domestic humanitarian NGOs in many countries may refer in formulating their humanitarian principles and networking. While international humanitarian principles are essential in shaping the characteristics of many humanitarian NGOs, one should also realize that the dynamics of domestic political contexts has also determined the attitudes of faith-based NGOs in establishing partnerships. To some extent, acting pragmatically by disregarding international law may lead to opportunities and strategic partnerships in the field. Therefore, it is unsurprising that the Indonesian Red Crescent society (BSMI), which is officially unrecognized by the ICRC and IFRC, is able to build

partnerships with other Red Crescent societies, especially those based in Middle Eastern countries, thanks to their intrinsic cultural and religious resemblances.

Endnotes

1. A worthy study on symbols and banners to mobilize domestic funds in Indonesia see Dick van der Meij, "Evoking greater support for Islamic Philanthropy: the *Spanduk* and other Visual Signs of Modern Indonesian Islam," *Kultur*, vol. 1 (2009), 89-106.
2. For philanthropic activism in Indonesia see PIRAC, Investing in Ourselves: Giving and Fund Raising in Indonesia (Jakarta: PIRAC, ADB, Japan Foundation, and USAID, 2002); PIRAC, *Muslim Philanthropy: Potential and Reality of Zakat in Indonesia, Survey Results in Ten Cities* (Depok: Piramedia & Ford Foundation, 2005); Zaim Saidi, *Kedermawanan untuk Keadilan Sosial* (Depok: Piramedia 2006).
3. David Forsythe and Barbara Ann J. Rieffer-Flanagan, *The International Committee of the Red Cross: A neutral humanitarian actor* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 11; see also Peter Macalister-Smith, *International humanitarian assistance : disaster relief actions in international law and organization* (Dordrecht [etc.] : Nijhoff, 1985).
4. Jonathan Benthall, "The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Islamic Societies, with Special Reference to Jordan," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 24, 2 (1997), 163.
5. See for example, *Report of the Second Conference of Red Cross and Red Crescent Leaders of Countries within ASEAN* (Jakarta: PMI, 1977); for the activities of Malaysian Red Cross Society see *The Great Flood of 1967 in Malaysia: The Story of the Malaysian Red Cross Society* (Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Red Cross Society, 1967). At that time, Malaysia had cooperated with other humanitarian associations under the same movement, and only few of which, including Saudi Arabia, that had adopted the Red Crescent to represent their national humanitarian associations. For the history and the development of the Red Cross societies in in the colonial era, see Leo van Bergen, *Een Menslievende en Natioale Talk: Orlog, Kolonialisme en het Rode Kruis in Nederlandsh-Indië, 1870-1950* (Soesterbeg: Aspekt, 2004).
6. The Israelis was given the privilege in 2006 of using the David Star. Following a humanitarian conference in 2005, the David Star has been recognized officially by the international community despite the fact that there are numerous symbols waiting for similar recognition.
7. See Dorothea Hilhorst and Nadja Schmiemann, "Humanitarian principles and organisational culture: everyday practice in M´edecins Sans Fronti `eres-Holland," *Development in Practice*, Volume 12, Numbers 3 & 4, (August 2002), 490-500; MSF was established by a number of physicians and journalists in France in 1971, partly as a response to the ICRC's concept of 'neutrality' in relieving victims in war zones. Despite sharing similarities with other international humanitarian associations in holding humanitarian principles and providing assistance, such as combating diseases and relieving disaster victims, the MSF's founder and activtists come to believe that protecting and defending the victims' rights from the oppressor is also necessary. On October 15, 1999, MSF was awarded a Nobel Prize. For its profile and brief history, see http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/aboutus/charter.cfm (Accessed March 17, 2011)
8. The voices and perspective of MSF on war and humanitarian intervention, see Médecins Sans Frontières, *World in Crisis: the Politics of Survival at the End of the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 1997).
9. David Forsythe and Barbara Ann J. Rieffer-Flanagan, *The International Committee of the Red Cross*, 11.
10. Other proposed distinctive emblems such as the Red Rhinoceros (proposed by Egypt), Red Shield of David (Israel), Red Wheel (India), Red Cedar-Tree (Lebanon) and others have not gained approval from the Geneva Conventions. See *ibid.*, 51. See also "Adoption of an Additional Distinctive Emblem," *International Review of the Red Cross*, Volume 88 Number 186 March 2006, 187-196.
11. See Umar Mu'in, *Pergerakan Palang Merah dan Bulan Sabit Internasional &*

Perhimpunan Palang Merah Indonesia [the Movement of ICRC and IFRC] (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1999), 129-30.

12. This includes former Vice President Moh. Hatta (1945-1948); former Governor of West Java Soetarjo Kartohadikoesoemo (1948-1949); former member of the Committee of Preparation for Indonesian Independence (BPKI) BPH Bintoro (1949-1952); former Minister of Education and Culture Bahder Djohan (1952-1954); former Governor of Yogyakarta and Principal of Kadipaten Pakualaman P. A. A. Paku Alam VIII (1954-1966); former Minister of the Interior Lieutenant General Basuki Rachmat (1966-1970); former Minister of Health Satrio (1970-1982); Soeyoso Soemodimedjo (1982-1986); former Director of Indonesian Oil Company and minister of mineral and energy Ibnu Sutowo (1986-1994); entrepreneur and eldest daughter of President Soeharto Siti Hardiyanti Rukmana (1994-1999); former Minister of Finance Mar'ie Muhammad (1999-2009).
13. Arifin M. Hadi, *Ligt Up: Indonesian Red Cross Contribution towards the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015* (Jakarta & Geneva: Indonesian Red Cross & IFRC, 2008).
14. BSMI, *Laporan Kegiatan Bantuan Korban Gempa di Yogyakarta, Jawa Tengah* [Reports on Earthquake Relief in Yogyakarta, Central Java] (Jakarta: BSMI, 2006).
15. Jonathan Benthal and Jerome Bellion-Jourdan, *the Charitable Crescent,* 53.
16. For further discussion of health services provided by LKC and other Islamic associations in Indonesia see Hilman Latief, "Health provision for the poor: Islamic aid and the rise of charitable clinics in Indonesia," *SEAR,* Vol 18, No 3 (September 2010), 503-553.
17. Author's interview with Vincent Nicod, Head of the ICRC Delegation to Indonesia (March 25, 2009).
18. Aside from being invited by the Department of Health to be included in a humanitarian team sent to Egypt, it was reported in the media that the President of the Republic of Indonesia hosted the BSMI's volunteers in the state palace, and it was also reported that the Vice President had made a visit to the BSMI.
19. *Suara Merdeka* (June 10, 2002)
20. Jean-Francois Que'guiner, "Commentary on the Protocol additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Adoption of an Additional Distinctive Emblem (Protocol III), *International Review of the Red Cross,* Volume 89 Number 865 March 2007, 175-207.
21. Hilal Ahmar Indonesia is a social organization, basing in the United Arab Emirates, whose main projects are mosque reconstruction, da'wa and outreach social activities. Until 2009, Hilal Ahmar has built and rebuilt more than 1000 mosques throughout Indonesia. The lands being used for mosque construction are originated from endowment. http://www.republika.co.id/berita/breaking-news/nasional/09/02/15/31686-hilalahmarbangunmasjidke20didepok (Accessed March 17, 2011)
22. "Israel Saja Pakai Lambang Bintang David [Even the Israelis use David Star Symbol]," interview dr. Basuki Supartono, SpOt, FICS, MARS, the President of BSMI, with *Suara Hidayatullah* Edisi 06/XXIII, October 2010/Syawal 1431 H, 34-39.
23. Author's interview with Vincent Nicod, Head of the ICRC Delegation to Indonesia (March 25, 2009).
24. Author's interview with Vincent Nicod, Head of the ICRC Delegation to Indonesia (March 25, 2009).
25. Jonathan Benthal and Jerome Bellion-Jourdan, *The Charitable Crescent*, 53.
26. Author's interview with Heru Susetyo, Head of Legal Division and Humanitarian of BSMI (August 19, 2010).
27. Author's interview with Fitriana Sidikah, Head of IHL (International Humanitarian Law) Dissemination Sub Division, Communication Division, Indonesian Red Cross, National Headquarter, (January 7, 2010). See also Thomas G. Weiss and Cindy Collins, *Humanitarian Challenges and Intervention (World Politics and the Dilemma of Help* (Colorado, Boulder: West View Press, 1996), 98.
28. http://uhik.org/en/index.php (Accessed May 12, 2011)

29. Jonathan Benthal and Jerome Bellion-Jourdan, *The Charitable Crescent*, 54.
30. Author's interview with Vincent Nicod, Head of ICRC Delegation of Indonesia (March 25, 2009).
31. http://www.palangmerah.org/publikasi.asp?stat=ina&news_id=533 (Access date May 6, 2009)
32. See Arskal Salim, *Challenging the Secular State: the Islamization of Law in Indonesia* (Honolulu: the Univeristy of Hawai'i Press, 2008); also Michele Ann Miller and R. Michael Feener, Ëmegergency and Islamic Law in Aceh," in Victor Ramraj and Arun K. Thiruvengadam (eds.), *Emergency Power in Asia: Exploring the Limits of Legality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 213-236.
33. http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/interviews/a-discussion-with-trihadi-saptoadi-director-world-vision-indonesia (Accessed 17 February 2011)
34. Author's interview with Jimmy Nadapdap, Head of Emergency Relief Division, the World Vision Indonesia (August 5, 2010)
35. For the development of Muhammadiyah's humanitarian wings and philanthropic activism, see Hilman Latief, *Melayani Umat: Filantropi Islam dan Ideologi Kesejahteraan Kaum Modernis* (Jakarta: Gramedia, 2010).
36. Author's interview with Romo Baskoro, Board Director of JRS Indonesia and a professor of Sanata Dharma Catholic University of Yogyakarta (October 17, 2008).
37. Author's interview in Yogyakarta, October 15, 2008.

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