

Blasphemy and Social Conflict in Abrahamic Religions: Historical Dynamics and Political Implications in Indonesia

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Abstract. This paper emphasizes the relationship between historical perspectives, social conflict, and political implications in cases of blasphemy in Abrahamic religions, with a focus on Indonesia as a case study. The main issue discussed is how blasphemy in Abrahamic religions can trigger social conflict through the interplay of theological interpretations, identity politics, and historical grievances. This study uses a historical qualitative approach combined with critical discourse analysis, with data collected through library research on primary and secondary historical documents, such as books, journals, and archives related to blasphemy against Abrahamic religions in Indonesia and worldwide. The research process involves analyzing the social, political, and cultural contexts of each historical period to understand the dynamics of change and continuity in cases of religious blasphemy. The findings reveal that responses to religious blasphemy are strongly influenced by social and political contexts, particularly the instrumentalization of blasphemy accusations for power consolidation. Legal and mediation approaches in Indonesia, such as the role of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), have proven effective in mitigating conflicts and maintaining religious harmony. This study concludes that collective efforts to enhance religious literacy and interfaith dialogue must be supported by structural reforms in blasphemy laws to prevent conflicts and preserve social harmony.

Keywords: Blasphemy, social conflict, religious literacy, Indonesia, mediation.

Abstrak. Artikel ini menekankan hubungan antara perspektif historis, konflik sosial, dan implikasi politik dalam kasus penistaan pada agama samawi, dengan fokus pada Indonesia sebagai studi kasus. Permasalahan utama yang dibahas adalah bagaimana penistaan dalam agama samawi dapat memicu konflik sosial melalui interaksi interpretasi teologis, politik identitas, dan persaingan historis. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif historis yang dikombinasikan dengan analisis wacana kritis, dengan data dikumpulkan melalui studi pustaka pada dokumen historis primer dan sekunder, seperti buku, jurnal, dan arsip terkait penistaan agama di Indonesia dan dunia. Proses penelitian melibatkan analisis konteks sosial, politik, dan budaya pada setiap periode sejarah untuk memahami dinamika perubahan dan kontinuitas kasus-kasus penistaan agama. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa respons terhadap penistaan agama sangat dipengaruhi oleh konteks sosial dan politik, khususnya politisasi tuduhan penistaan untuk konsolidasi kekuasaan. Pendekatan hukum dan mediasi di Indonesia, seperti peran Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI), terbukti efektif dalam meredam konflik dan memelihara kerukunan umat beragama. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa upaya kolektif dalam meningkatkan literasi agama dan dialog antaragama harus didukung reformasi struktural pada UU penodaan agama untuk mencegah konflik dan memelihara keharmonisan sosial.

Kata Kunci: Penistaan agama, konflik sosial, literasi keagamaan, Indonesia, mediasi.

1. INTRODUCTION

Blasphemy is not new in the history of modern mankind, but has existed since mankind was created. The following story can be called the first blasphemy: The Quran tells of the creation of the first man, Prophet Adam. He was the most perfect of all creatures. A more complete being, more everything than any other creature created by Allah. So perfect, on one occasion, Allah ordered Iblees and the angels to bow down to Prophet Adam. These two creatures responded to the command in different ways. Iblis refused to honor Adam because he felt superior, arguing that he was created from fire, while humans were made from clay (Zulkarnain, 2018). This is where the history of blasphemy began. Allah said:

[And God] said: "What has kept thee from prostrating thyself when I commanded thee?" Answered [Iblis]: "I am better than he: Thou hast created me out of fire, whereas him Thou hast created out of clay" (QS. Al-A'raaf [7]: 12).

In addition, the Quran explains that Iblis was punished by Allah SWT for defying His command, namely bowing down to Prophet Adam.

When We ordered the angels: "Prostrate before Adam in respect," they all prostrated except Iblees (Shaitan) who refused in his arrogance and became a disbeliever (QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 34).

Islamic history records a tragic story of blasphemy when Qabil defied Adam's command and killed Abel. This incident was not merely about the murder of a sibling but also a violation of God's command conveyed through Prophet Adam. This story illustrates that blasphemy is not only expressed in words but can also be manifested through actions that reject obedience to God's teachings. This event marks the first recorded instance of blasphemy committed by humans (Kiptiyah, 2019). After the death of Prophet Muhammad, blasphemy was started by a group of people who refused to pay zakat. For the then caliph, Abu Bakr Asshidiq, a Muslim should not pick and choose verses, taking only the ones he likes and ignoring the teachings he disagrees with (Rahman, 2022). Obedience must be comprehensive. Therefore,

those who reject some religious commandments must be dealt with.

Challenging religious teachings or merely doubting them, in a broad sense, can be considered blasphemy (Zulkarnain, 2018). In the past, religious leaders who held great power were almost entirely authorized to determine who was deemed guilty of blasphemy and deserved severe punishment. This authority was often not only based on theological interpretations but was also influenced by complex political and social interests. As a result, anyone perceived as deviating from official doctrine risked being labeled a blasphemer, which in turn triggered social conflicts within religious communities.

Social conflicts based on religious disputes also occurred in Christian history, particularly during the Middle Ages. During this period, the Catholic Church held immense power in determining scientific and theological truths. Any view that contradicted church doctrine was considered a threat to religious authority. One of the most famous examples is Galileo Galilei (1564-1642), who was sentenced to lifelong house arrest for his support of heliocentrism—the idea that the sun is the center of the solar system and the earth orbits around it (Noorzeha et. al., 2022). This scientific view contradicted the Catholic Church's geocentric doctrine, which stated that the earth was the center of the universe. The conflict between science and religion not only illustrated intellectual tension but also reflected the social control exercised by religious authorities at that time to maintain doctrinal stability. Galileo became a symbol of the tension between freedom of scientific thought and the absolute power of religious authority.

In the modern world, incidents of religious blasphemy continue to emerge alongside various social and cultural issues within society. In November 2011, the French magazine Charlie Hebdo published an edition titled "Charia Hebdo." The publication aimed to satirize the implementation of Islamic law. Although it carried a humanistic message and was not intended to insult or blaspheme Islam, from an axiological perspective, Charlie Hebdo mixed the transcendent values of supernatural religion with the immanent values of secular humanism (Thoyyibah, 2022).

The unrestricted publication of cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad by the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* has triggered several attacks and acts of terrorism. Freedom of expression and speech have been cited as reasons for *Charlie Hebdo*'s repeated publication of these cartoons, which are interpretively viewed as offensive and blasphemous to Islam.

The caricature of Prophet Muhammad saw was first published by *Charlie Hebdo* in 2006. Following this publication, *Charlie Hebdo* faced lawsuits from two Muslim associations in France, namely the Grand Mosque of Paris and the Union of Islamic Organizations of France. However, the French court dismissed the case, stating that the publication of the image did not incite religious hatred (Rahmawati, 2022).

After the legalization of the caricature of Prophet Muhammad saw by the French government, *Charlie Hebdo* continued its mission by publishing another caricature of Prophet Muhammad in 2011. The magazine released an edition titled "*Charia Hebdo*", featuring a cartoon depiction of Prophet Muhammad saw in a controversial manner. This publication sparked protests from the French Muslim community, and an Islamic organization filed a legal complaint against *Charlie Hebdo*. In November of the same year, the magazine's office was attacked with a Molotov cocktail, causing a fire.

In liberal democracies, the separation of religion and politics has long been established. Consequently, from the late 19th century until 1989, freedom of expression regarding religion seemed like an outdated concept. It was seen as something firmly rooted since the Enlightenment and the early days of democracy, thus taken for granted and no longer a subject of debate. This freedom was enshrined in the constitutions of liberal countries, regulated by press laws, and safeguarded by the judicial system (Favret-Saada, 2016). However, some groups of Christians have attempted to censor works they perceive as offensive to their religion. Since France does not have specific blasphemy laws, they filed objections on the grounds that these works hurt their religious sentiments.

In the early 21st century, issues of right-wing religious fundamentalism, both in Islam and Christianity, have come under sharper

scrutiny. Essentialist religious paradigms present risks and dilemmas that have become global concerns, on par with issues of poverty and global warming. In this context, the way society responds to blasphemy becomes a crucial part of the debate on tolerance within diverse communities (Fernandes-Dias Suzette & Burns Coleman, 2008).

The social conflict surrounding blasphemy in Christian contexts often manifests through legal, cultural, and inter-religious tensions. A notable case that exemplifies this phenomenon is the trial of Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, commonly known as Ahok, the former Christian governor of Jakarta, Indonesia. In 2017, Ahok was found guilty of blasphemy for comments he made regarding the Quran, which led to widespread protests and significant social unrest (Richardson et al., 2020). His conviction and subsequent imprisonment highlighted the sensitive nature of blasphemy accusations in a predominantly Muslim country, where such charges can provoke intense reactions from various religious communities.

The Ahok case serves as a focal point for understanding the broader dynamics of inter-religious conflict in Indonesia, particularly between Muslims and Christians, through the lens of sacred values theory (Atran, 2010). The trial not only polarized communities but also sparked discussions about the role of blasphemy laws in exacerbating tensions. Richardson et al. note that the discourse surrounding Ahok's trial involved a complex interplay of religious identity and political motivations, with supporters and opponents of the blasphemy charge representing divergent views within Indonesian society (Richardson et al., 2020). This situation exemplifies how accusations involving sacred religious symbols can trigger what Appadurai (2006) calls "predatory identities" - where group identities become weaponized in political competition. The case illustrates how blasphemy accusations can become a flashpoint for broader societal conflicts, often reflecting historical grievances and competition for political power.

Moreover, the roots of conflicts between Muslims and Christians in Indonesia can be traced back to historical tensions, competition for resources, and ideological differences. Sukanto and Pramono argue that inter-group conflicts often arise from a history of prejudice and

competition, which can be exacerbated by incidents of perceived blasphemy (Sukanto & Pramono, 2020). Applying Brubaker's (2015) framework of ethnic boundary-making, the Ahok case demonstrates how religious boundaries become salient when political actors activate them for mobilization. The Ahok case is emblematic of this pattern, as it not only involved a legal judgment but also ignited long-standing animosities and fears between religious communities, leading to protests and violence.

In another instance, in Pakistan, for example, blasphemy accusations have also triggered social conflicts, often leading to mob violence and extrajudicial punishments. Ashraf discusses how blasphemy accusations in Pakistan are frequently tied to communal tensions and moral anxieties, reflecting deeper societal issues (Ashraf, 2021). This aligns with Asad's (2009) critique of how blasphemy laws in postcolonial states often serve as tools for majoritarian assertion rather than genuine religious protection. The legal framework surrounding blasphemy in Pakistan has been criticized for its potential to incite violence and discrimination against religious minorities, particularly Christians, who are often disproportionately affected by such laws.

The interplay between blasphemy laws and social conflict is also evident in the digital age, where social media has become a battleground for religious expression and accusations. Sarib et al. highlight how online platforms can amplify tensions surrounding blasphemy, leading to public outcry and mobilization against perceived offenders (Sarib et al., 2023). This phenomenon reflects what Tufekci (2017) describes as "networked publics," where digital platforms accelerate outrage dynamics around sacred values. This phenomenon underscores the evolving nature of blasphemy in contemporary society, where traditional legal frameworks intersect with modern communication technologies to shape public discourse and community relations.

In October 1997, the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne closed an exhibition by American artist Andres Serrano after his photograph *Piss Christ* (1987) faced physical attacks and criticism from Christian groups and U.S. senators who deemed it indecent. This case exemplifies Habermas's (2006) concept of the

"return of the sacred" in post-secular societies, where religious sensitivities re-emerge in public spheres. Funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, the artwork sparked protests, leading Senator Jesse Helms to propose ending funding for offensive works, supported by Senator Alphonse D'Amato. In Melbourne, Catholic Archbishop Dr. George Pell unsuccessfully sought a court injunction against the exhibit, but Justice Harper argued that blasphemous libel laws were irrelevant in Australia's pluralistic and tolerant society (Braddock, 2008).

This article does not intend to justify the acts of violence that have occurred, especially since every place has its own laws that must be respected. However, when referring to all the blasphemy cases mentioned above, a theoretical synthesis emerges: across diverse contexts, blasphemy controversies represent what Galtung (1990) would call "cultural violence" - where symbolic acts legitimize structural and direct violence against perceived transgressors. There is a common thread that should serve as a shared reflection and sharpen the sensitivity of all parties involved.

2. METHOD

Conceptually, various social situations can be the subject of ethnographic or historical studies. However, situations that are too close to the researcher or too controversial are often implicitly excluded from scientific inquiry to maintain neutrality and avoid bias, which is considered the cardinal scientific error (Favret-Saada, 2016).

This study employs a historical qualitative approach aimed at providing an in-depth depiction of the journey and development of blasphemy cases involving Abrahamic religions. Qualitative research is conducted to observe the quality of relationships, activities, situations, and relevant materials by presenting detailed and informative holistic descriptions (Cohen et. al., 2007). The historical qualitative approach is chosen because it offers a comprehensive overview of the dynamics of change, continuity, and development of blasphemy cases related to Abrahamic religions, particularly Islam in Indonesia, across different historical periods.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The historicity of blasphemy in the Abrahamic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—reveals a rich tapestry of theological, legal, and social dimensions that have evolved over centuries. Each of these religions has developed its own understanding and legal frameworks regarding blasphemy, reflecting their unique theological tenets and historical contexts.

3.1 Interpreting the Historicity of Blasphemy in Abrahamic Religions

In this study, the author will use the term “blasphemy” to refer to all statements that contain insults toward God or desecration of religious symbols. The author will attempt to explain this term from the perspective provided by the Abrahamic religions, namely Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

The term “blasphemy”, derived from the Ancient Greek word meaning “to speak evil,” is used in English to denote acts of sacrilege. In Judeo-Christian tradition, it refers to verbal expressions that oppose or insult values or beliefs considered sacred. The concept of blasphemy does not have a fixed definition and has evolved from its understanding in the Judeo-Christian tradition as derogatory phrases against God to statements that can provoke the emotions of certain religious communities. Its interpretation varies depending on who defines it (The Encyclopedia of Religion, 1986, vol. II).

In general, blasphemy, understood as an offense against sacred matters, exists in all religious traditions. In some contexts, words or images considered blasphemous can provoke anger, while in others, they are seen as irrelevant (Stensvold, 2020). Stensvold explores the origins of blasphemy as a religious offense and traces its development from Christian traditions into secular law in Europe. During the colonial period, the concept of blasphemy was adapted to similar ideas in other religious traditions and spread as a global phenomenon.

In the Jewish context, blasphemy is understood as an act of insulting God, either through words or actions that express hatred toward Him (Ahmad, 2012).

Blasphemy within the Jewish tradition is a complex and multifaceted topic that encompasses

legal, theological, and historical dimensions. The Talmudic sources provide a foundational understanding of blasphemy in Judaism, categorizing it as the explicit rejection of God, which is considered a fundamental aspect of Jewish belief. According to Novák, blasphemy is forbidden not only to Jews but also to gentiles, indicating a universal prohibition that transcends ethnic boundaries within the Jewish legal framework (Novák, 2011). This prohibition is deeply rooted in the Jewish understanding of God’s sovereignty and the sanctity of divine names, which are treated with utmost reverence.

Historically, the concept of blasphemy has evolved, particularly in response to external pressures and the presence of religious minorities. Sherwood notes that modern interpretations of blasphemy often reflect the socio-political contexts in which they arise, suggesting that the visibility of religious and ethnic minorities has influenced contemporary blasphemy laws. In many cases, these laws have been applied selectively, often sidelining Jewish perspectives on blasphemy while focusing on Christian contexts (Sherwood, 2021). This selective application highlights the complexities of inter-religious dynamics and the historical positioning of Jews within broader societal frameworks.

The charge of blasphemy has also been pivotal in historical narratives, particularly during the medieval period. For instance, the trial of Nicholas Donin, a Jewish convert who accused the Talmud of containing blasphemies against Christianity, illustrates how accusations of blasphemy could be weaponized against Jewish communities. Rist discusses how Donin’s actions led to significant repercussions for Jews, including the infamous Talmud trials, which were fueled by accusations of blasphemy and heresy against Jewish texts (Rist, 2013). This historical context underscores the precarious position of Jews in Christian-dominated societies, where blasphemy accusations could lead to severe consequences.

Moreover, the theological implications of blasphemy in Judaism are significant, particularly in relation to the figure of Jesus. Perkins explores the charge of blasphemy against Jesus as depicted in the Gospel of Mark, arguing that this narrative reflects broader Jewish concerns about the exaltation of figures

who challenge traditional understandings of divinity (Perkins, 2003). This intersection of blasphemy and Christology reveals the tensions within Jewish thought regarding the nature of God and the boundaries of acceptable theological discourse.

In contemporary discussions, the notion of blasphemy continues to evoke strong reactions, particularly in the context of interfaith relations and the protection of religious sentiments. The historical and ongoing implications of blasphemy laws raise critical questions about freedom of expression, religious tolerance, and the rights of minority communities. The interplay between blasphemy, identity, and power dynamics remains a pertinent issue in both historical and modern contexts, as highlighted by various scholars who examine the implications of blasphemy across different religious traditions (Huppert & Fradkin, 2016; K  mierczyk, 2018; Montenegro, 2016).

Blasphemy in Judaism is not merely a legalistic concern but a deeply embedded aspect of Jewish identity and theology. It reflects the historical struggles of Jewish communities, their interactions with surrounding cultures, and the ongoing challenges posed by accusations of blasphemy in both historical and contemporary settings.

In Christian thought, the concept of blasphemy has a broad scope. Cursing, opposing, rejecting, and insulting Jesus are all considered forms of blasphemy.

Historically, blasphemy has been a contentious issue within Christian societies, leading to various legal and social repercussions. In medieval Europe, blasphemy was often met with severe punishments, including imprisonment and execution, reflecting the intertwining of church and state authority (Garrido, 2019). The enforcement of blasphemy laws served to maintain religious orthodoxy and social order, as blasphemous acts were perceived as threats to communal cohesion and the established religious hierarchy (Ishola, 2024). This historical context illustrates how blasphemy was not merely a theological issue but also a matter of public morality and governance.

In contemporary discussions, the legal status of blasphemy varies significantly across different jurisdictions. In some secular states,

blasphemy laws have been abolished or are rarely enforced, reflecting a shift towards prioritizing freedom of expression over religious sensitivities (Richardson et al., 2020). However, in other contexts, particularly where religious authority remains strong, blasphemy laws continue to be invoked to protect religious sentiments. For instance, in countries like Indonesia, blasphemy laws are actively enforced, often leading to social unrest and violence against perceived offenders (Sarib et al., 2023). This duality in the treatment of blasphemy highlights the ongoing tensions between religious freedom and the protection of religious beliefs in diverse sociopolitical landscapes.

Moreover, the discourse surrounding blasphemy is increasingly intertwined with human rights considerations. Scholars argue that while blasphemy laws may serve to uphold public morals, they can also infringe upon individual rights, particularly the right to freedom of expression (Cox, 2020). The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) allows for limitations on freedom of expression in the name of public morality, yet the application of blasphemy laws often raises questions about their necessity and proportionality (Temperman, 2008). This ongoing debate underscores the complexity of balancing respect for religious beliefs with the fundamental rights of individuals in pluralistic societies.

Blasphemy in Christianity encompasses a rich tapestry of theological, historical, and legal dimensions. The concept has evolved over time, reflecting broader societal changes and the dynamic interplay between religion and law. As societies continue to grapple with issues of religious freedom and expression, the discourse on blasphemy remains a critical area of inquiry, highlighting the need for nuanced understandings that respect both religious sentiments and individual rights.

Blasphemy in Christianity is a significant theological and social issue that has evolved over time, reflecting the complexities of religious belief, cultural context, and legal frameworks. Within Christian doctrine, blasphemy is generally understood as the act of speaking disrespectfully about God or sacred things. This concept is rooted in biblical texts, (Mark 3:29)

particularly in the New Testament, where blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is described as an unforgivable sin (Susilowati et al., 2024). This theological foundation establishes blasphemy as a serious offense within Christian communities, emphasizing the sanctity of divine names and the importance of maintaining reverence towards God.

Blasphemy laws have been intertwined with the political and social fabric of Christian societies. In medieval Europe, blasphemy was often met with severe penalties, including execution, reflecting the church's authority in maintaining religious orthodoxy and social order (Hunter, 2013). The intertwining of church and state meant that blasphemy accusations could serve as tools for political repression, as dissenters were often labeled as blasphemers to justify their punishment (Hunter, 2013). This historical context illustrates how blasphemy was not merely a theological concern but also a matter of public morality and governance.

Blasphemy shares the same root as blame; both can be traced back to the Greek word *blasphēmein* (meaning to speak ill of, to slander). Although these words are related, their meanings have evolved differently over the centuries, leading to distinctly different connotations today.

The issue is that secular liberals accuse religious adherents of restricting freedom of expression. According to them, religion uses the pretexts of blasphemy, heresy, polytheism, taboo, and so on to silence their thoughts. In their perception, religious scholars limit the right to understand religion to religious authorities (scholars, priests, etc.). As a result, religion is viewed negatively and positioned as an obstacle to freedom (Zarkasyi, 2010).

Blasphemy in Islam is a serious offense that encompasses a range of actions and statements deemed disrespectful towards God, the Prophet Muhammad, and sacred Islamic texts. The concept of blasphemy is rooted in both the Qur'an and Hadith, which provide a framework for understanding what constitutes blasphemous behavior and the associated consequences. In Islamic jurisprudence, blasphemy can manifest in various forms, including defiling (*tadnis*), insulting (*istihza*),

and ridiculing (*syatama*) (Abdullah, 2023; Hilman, 2020). These actions are viewed as violations of the fundamental tenets of Islam and can lead to severe legal repercussions.

The legal implications of blasphemy in Islamic law are significant, with many scholars agreeing that it can be punishable by death, particularly in cases involving insults to the Prophet Muhammad (Köroğlu et al., 2024). This severe punishment is often justified by citing the need to protect the sanctity of the faith and prevent fitnah, or civil unrest, within the Muslim community (Sherwood, 2021). The application of blasphemy laws varies widely across different Islamic countries, with some nations enforcing strict penalties while others adopt a more lenient approach. For instance, in Pakistan, blasphemy laws have been used to target religious minorities and dissenters, leading to widespread violence and social unrest (Munshey, 2017). The politicization of blasphemy accusations in such contexts often reflects deeper societal tensions and struggles for power.

The historical context of blasphemy in Islam reveals its evolution over time, influenced by cultural, political, and theological factors. The use of blasphemy laws has often been intertwined with political agendas, where accusations can serve as tools for suppressing dissent or consolidating power. In contemporary Islamic societies, blasphemy accusations can lead to mob violence and extrajudicial punishments, particularly against individuals from minority communities or those perceived as challenging the dominant religious narrative (Munshey, 2017). This dynamic underscores the complexities surrounding blasphemy in modern contexts, where legal frameworks intersect with social and political realities.

Moreover, the discourse surrounding blasphemy in Islam is often marked by significant debate among scholars and practitioners. Some argue that blasphemy laws should be re-evaluated in light of contemporary human rights standards, emphasizing the need for a balance between protecting religious sentiments and upholding freedom of expression (Richardson et al., 2020). Others contend that the strict enforcement of blasphemy laws is essential for maintaining social order and protecting the integrity of the

faith (Abdullah, 2023; Hilman, 2020). This ongoing debate reflects the broader tensions within Islamic societies regarding the interpretation of religious texts and the application of law in a rapidly changing world.

In Islam, blasphemy includes defamation of the sources of Islamic law, namely the Qur'an and Hadith, as well as turning away from the laws contained within them; it also includes insulting God and His Messenger. In Islam, insulting religion is contrary to the Qur'an and Hadith.

Bowker (2000) states that blasphemy in Islam is defined as an expression of insult toward God, the Prophet Muhammad, angels, or traditional interpretations of religious revelation, which is considered an offense. The scope of blasphemy in Islam is broader. If God, angels, the Prophet, or verses of the Qur'an are insulted, such actions can be categorized as forms of blasphemy.

The issue of blasphemy is not new in the history of Islam. In recent decades, Muslims have experienced it several times. Among the cases that later became global issues are the Salman Rushdie case with *The Satanic Verses*, the Danish cartoons in the Jyllands-Posten newspaper, the Innocence of Muslims film, the Quran-burning movement in America, and the cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad in Charlie Hebdo magazine published in France.

Regarding blasphemy, contemporary Muslim responses are quite varied, ranging from silence and ignoring it, organizing peaceful protests, issuing fatwas or death threats, to actual killings. After such killings occur, debates or discussions quickly arise about who is most responsible for them; whether it represents Islam; whether Islamic teachings are compatible with freedom of speech, which is a fundamental democratic value; whether Islam advocates killing those who commit blasphemy; and other related issues.

According to Zulkarnain (2018) some people associate these cases with Islam because the perpetrators used Islamic symbols (such as flags bearing the "shahada," shouting "takbir," or, as reported in the Charlie Hebdo case, the attackers claimed to be seeking revenge in the name of the Prophet Muhammad).

The term for blasphemy used in the Qur'an is *istihza'*, which means "insulting, mocking." The objects of this action include everything related to religion: God, His verses, His messengers, His followers, the believers, and even religious teachings. In the Qur'an, these objects of mockery are mentioned together:

And if you ask them, they will surely say, "We were only conversing and playing." Say, "Is it Allāh and His verses and His Messenger that you were mocking?" (At-Taubah 9:65).

The perpetrators of this act are hypocrites. They claim to believe but conceal their disbelief. As a result, in their daily behavior, they often use religion as an object of ridicule. The expression of *istihza'* with a profound meaning is *ittakhadzu huzuwan wa la'iban*, which means "taking (religion) as a mockery and play." In the Qur'an, Surah Al-Maidah (5:57-58) states:

O you who have believed, take not those who have taken your religion in ridicule and amusement among the ones who were given the Scripture before you nor the disbelievers as allies. And fear Allāh, if you should [truly] be believers.

And when you call to prayer, they take it in ridicule and amusement. That is because they are a people who do not use reason (Al-Maidah 5:57-58).

The meaning of this verse is that the perpetrators of this act are disbelievers, including among the People of the Book. They use the new religion, Islam, as an object of mockery and entertainment. Therefore, this verse includes a prohibition against taking them as close friends and protectors.

3.2 Analysis of the Blasphemy Controversy in Indonesia

In Indonesia, cases of blasphemy have occurred for over 100 years. One significant historical event involved the newspaper *Djawi Hisworo* in 1918, which played a crucial role in the context of Islam in Indonesia and its socio-political landscape in the early 20th century. *Djawi Hisworo*, a newspaper that engaged in polemics with the Sarekat Islam movement, published articles that were perceived as blasphemous, particularly against the Prophet Muhammad. This incident sparked widespread

outrage among the Muslim community and had significant social and political repercussions.

Currently, according to Zulkarnain (2018) *Djawi Hisworo* is primarily remembered for its involvement in a conflict with Sarekat Islam in 1918. In January of that year, the newspaper published a satirical article depicting the Prophet Muhammad as a drunkard and opium user. Tjokroaminoto, the leader of Sarekat Islam, responded by launching a campaign against the newspaper through a committee known as TKNM (Tentara Kandjeng Nabi Mohammad).

The *Djawi Hisworo* incident is emblematic of the tensions between religious sentiments and political activism in Indonesia during the colonial period. As Supratman notes, the newspaper played a crucial role in shaping public discourse and mobilizing the Muslim community against perceived threats to their faith (Supratman, 2023). The articles published in *Djawi Hisworo* were not merely expressions of dissent but were strategically used to galvanize support for the Sarekat Islam movement, which sought to assert Muslim identity and political power in the face of colonial rule.

Juma's research highlights how the blasphemy controversy surrounding *Djawi Hisworo* contributed to the formation of solidarity among Muslims, as the community rallied against what they perceived as an affront to their religion (Juma, 2018). This solidarity was rooted in a collective response to the perceived threat posed by the newspaper's content, which was seen as undermining the sanctity of Islam. The incident illustrates how blasphemy accusations can serve as catalysts for social movements, uniting individuals around a common cause.

Moreover, the response to the *Djawi Hisworo* incident was not limited to protests and public outcry; it also involved organized efforts to counteract the perceived blasphemy. According to Mutoharoh and Safitry, various Islamic newspapers and organizations mobilized to condemn the articles published by *Djawi Hisworo*, framing their responses within a broader narrative of defending Islam against blasphemy (Mutoharoh & Safitry, 2024). This media framing played a critical role in shaping public perception and discourse surrounding the incident.

The historical context of the *Djawi Hisworo* blasphemy case also reflects the broader

dynamics of religious and political identity in Indonesia. As Nugroho and Rochmat discuss, the publication of blasphemous articles against the Prophet Muhammad in *Djawi Hisworo* coincided with a period of heightened religious consciousness and activism among Muslims in the Dutch East Indies (Nugroho & Rochmat, 2024). The incident highlighted the intersection of religion and politics, as leaders within the Sarekat Islam movement sought to leverage the controversy to strengthen their political standing and mobilize support against colonial authorities.

At that time, media was not like it is today. There was no social media such as Facebook or Twitter, and television stations did not exist yet. Even radios were owned by only a few people. TKNM relied solely on word-of-mouth and paper leaflets to gather such a large crowd. This illustrates the immense anger felt by the Indonesian Muslim community at that time.

Every case of blasphemy always draws the attention of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. A research team from the Research and Development Agency (Balitbang) of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia has conducted various studies and in-depth analyses. They have examined many blasphemy cases, such as the case of the Gerakan Fajar Nusantara (Gafatar) movement and the blasphemy case involving the Shia group led by Tajul Muluk in Sampang, Madura, East Java. Balitbang investigates each case of religious blasphemy based on the PNPS Law (Prevention of Religious Abuse and/or Blasphemy). Additionally, it was recorded that in 2016, there was a Draft Law on the Protection of Religious Communities (RUU PUB).

The main purpose of the Draft Law on the Protection of Religious Communities (RUU PUB) is to protect religious communities from potential blasphemy. It is explained that Indonesia, as a religious state, differs from Western countries. According to the Ministry of Religious Affairs, many Western countries no longer use legal regulations in religious matters (Zulkarnain, 2018). This means that every case of blasphemy must be legally processed. There are laws governing blasphemy, and the government can be blamed if it allows blasphemy to occur. However, as of 2025, the draft law has not been passed by the House of Representatives.

In the history of blasphemy cases in Indonesia, at least two types of solutions have been applied: (a) Criminal penalties in the form of imprisonment, and (b) Mediation conducted through the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI).

The enforcement of blasphemy laws has been experienced by Ahok, or Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (former Governor of Jakarta), in 2017. In addition, several other blasphemy cases have ended up in court, including the case of Tajul Muluk in Sampang (2012) and Ahmad Musadeq with Qiyadah Islamiyah (2007).

The cases of blasphemy involving Tajul Muluk, Ahmad Musadeq, and the Gafatar movement in Indonesia illustrate the complexities of religious identity, legal frameworks, and social dynamics within the country. Each of these cases reflects the broader implications of Indonesia's blasphemy laws, which have been increasingly utilized to target minority religious groups and unorthodox beliefs.

Tajul Muluk, a Shi'a Muslim leader, became a prominent figure in the discourse surrounding blasphemy in Indonesia. His case is particularly significant as it highlights the intersection of religious minority status and legal persecution. Muluk was sentenced under Indonesia's blasphemy law for promoting Shi'a Islam, which is often viewed with suspicion by the Sunni majority. Muktiono et al. discuss how the judiciary's application of blasphemy laws in Muluk's case revealed a complex interplay between legal reasoning and the protection of human rights, ultimately undermining access to justice for religious minorities (Muktiono et al., 2021). The case exemplifies how blasphemy accusations can serve as tools for marginalizing minority groups and reinforcing dominant religious narratives.

Similarly, Ahmad Musadeq's case underscores the challenges faced by individuals who claim prophetic status within Islam. Musadeq, who declared himself a prophet, was prosecuted under blasphemy laws, which were used to suppress what was deemed unorthodox beliefs. Rochman notes that Musadeq's situation reflects a broader trend in Indonesia, where blasphemy laws are employed to restrict religious freedom and silence dissenting voices within the Islamic community (Rochman, 2020). This pattern of legal action against self-

proclaimed prophets illustrates the tension between established religious authority and emerging religious movements.

The Gafatar movement, which emerged in 2011, faced significant backlash and accusations of blasphemy, culminating in the government's decision to repatriate thousands of its followers in 2016. The movement was characterized by its unorthodox beliefs, which deviated from mainstream Islamic teachings. Winarni et al. explore how media framing of the Gafatar controversy shaped public perception and contributed to the movement's stigmatization as a blasphemous entity (Winarni et al., 2017). This case highlights the role of public discourse and media in influencing societal attitudes towards religious minorities, often exacerbating tensions and leading to legal repercussions.

The broader implications of these cases reveal the challenges of religious pluralism in Indonesia, where blasphemy laws are frequently used to target those who deviate from mainstream religious practices. Hasyim discusses how these laws have been increasingly applied to punish unorthodox interpretations of Islam, reflecting a growing intolerance towards diversity within the religious landscape (Hasyim, 2019). This trend raises critical questions about the balance between maintaining social harmony and protecting individual rights in a pluralistic society.

In addition to blasphemy cases that result in criminal penalties, some are resolved through mediation. Mediation can occur if the offender provides clarification and publicly returns to the correct path. This clarification and return to the correct path must receive a response from both the central and regional branches of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI).

The case of blasphemy involving Gus Jari, a figure associated with the Jombang region in East Java, in 2016, highlights the intricate dynamics of religious authority, social identity, and legal frameworks in contemporary Indonesian society. Gus Jari, known for his controversial statements and interpretations of Islamic teachings, faced accusations of blasphemy that sparked significant public discourse and mobilization among various religious groups.

Gus Jari's statements, which some perceived as undermining traditional Islamic

beliefs, led to widespread backlash from conservative Muslim factions. The accusations against him were emblematic of the broader tensions within Indonesian Islam, where differing interpretations can lead to severe social consequences. The rise of Islamic populism in Indonesia has created an environment where blasphemy accusations can be politically motivated, often used to consolidate power and mobilize support among the electorate (Akmaliah & Nadzir, 2024). This context is critical for understanding the motivations behind the accusations against Gus Jari and the subsequent reactions from various segments of society.

This blasphemy case was resolved through mediation involving Gus Jari, a resident of Jombang, East Java. He was reported to have spread the idea that he claimed to be the last prophet. However, after being represented by the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), Jari expressed repentance and clarified that he did not intend to claim himself as the last prophet.

Another case involved bilingual prayer (using both Arabic and Indonesian during prayer) introduced by Yusman Roy in 2005 in Malang, East Java, which drew public attention. This case was resolved through mediation after representatives from the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) met directly with Roy. Eventually, Roy agreed to the mediation and expressed his commitment to returning to the correct path of Islam.

Regarding the blasphemy accusations against Ahok, the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia did not have the authority to make a decision. This was due to the key element in the blasphemy article of the Criminal Code (KUHP), which requires the presence of intent or lack thereof. In the aforementioned cases, the element of intent was proven to be present.

To assess the presence of intent, three approaches can be used. First, by examining the statement itself. Through linguistics, the validity of the statement can be analyzed grammatically. Second, by evaluating the statement in relation to the identity of the speaker. This involves assessing whether the statement aligns with the speaker's identity, thus requiring confirmation of who made the statement. Third, a critical discourse approach can be applied. This approach

examines the underlying reasons why someone makes a statement that is later perceived as blasphemy (Jamil, 2014).

Jamil concludes that if the three approaches consistently lead to the same conclusion, then a criminal act can be determined. Conversely, if there is no consistency among the three approaches, the blasphemy accusation is difficult to substantiate.

The Indonesian government has responded to efforts to prevent blasphemy by promoting regulations on religious life. Additionally, it has empowered interfaith communication forums, facilitated dialogues, and organized meetings. These measures are intended to ensure that the handling of blasphemy cases is not solely based on the Criminal Code and the PNPS Law. Blasphemy can occur in any religion; therefore, the public must be cautious, wise, and not easily provoked by news of blasphemy in any form.

The definition of blasphemy should be clear. The essence of blasphemy must be well-defined to avoid issues of multiple interpretations within society. If there are many interpretations, accusations of blasphemy will follow different perspectives. Regarding the text of holy scriptures, explanations should come from professionals or experts, such as religious scholars, historians, and textual analysts.

4. CONCLUSION

Historically, blasphemy against Abrahamic religions has been a significant source of potential conflict, not only in Indonesia but also in various parts of the world. Cases of blasphemy are often triggered by differences in religious interpretation, social controversies, and cultural tensions, which can escalate into conflicts involving broader religious communities. Understanding the historical roots and evolving dynamics of blasphemy is crucial for anticipating potential conflicts and fostering social harmony.

The findings of this study reveal that responses to blasphemy are heavily influenced by the social, political, and cultural context of each historical period. Legal and mediation approaches, as seen in several cases in Indonesia, demonstrate that resolving conflicts over blasphemy requires wise and inclusive policies. The role of religious institutions, such as

the MUI, as well as interfaith communication, has proven effective in mitigating conflicts and maintaining religious harmony.

As a lesson for social harmony, collective efforts are needed to enhance religious literacy, strengthen interfaith dialogue, and develop clear and fair regulations regarding blasphemy. By doing so, the potential for conflicts arising from blasphemy can be minimized, and tolerance as well as social harmony can be maintained in a pluralistic society.

5. REFERENCES

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