

Political and Religious Communication in Indonesia: A Preliminary Logological Analysis

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Abstract

Using Burke's theory of identification and logology, this paper analyzes the rhetorical strategies that can be found in political and religious communication in Indonesia. This paper focuses on the discourses and the communicative strategies of religious groups as well as political parties and their leaders throughout Indonesian history since its independence, but especially during the reform era following the abdication of Suharto in 1998. This paper does not provide a detailed account of specific communicative events or speeches, but focuses on the most commonly used terms and selected rhetorical visions that best represent and explain the motives as well as the rhetorical strategies of the major leaders or groups that have significant roles in the life of the Indonesian people. The rhetoric and communication of the reform era is different from those in Soekarno's or Soeharto's eras. Soekarno's charm, charisma, and confidence in his rhetorical power enabled him to dominate the stage of Indonesia's political communication as well as to unite the diverse Indonesian people by confronting them with his selection of common enemies. Soeharto's coercive campaign was based on themes and rhetorical visions that Soeharto himself selected, controlled and portrayed, whereby anyone or any group that opposed his rhetorical vision are viewed as common enemies and scapegoats. In the reform era, political persuasion often manipulates religious beliefs such as the use of hell to scare people to support or vote for certain parties; political groups' inconsistency in using rhetorical strategies confirm the idea that political parties are opportunistic, using whatever means to gain political support. On the other hand, religious rhetoric consistently uses antitheses and common enemies to decisively exclude non-believers.

Key words: *Indonesia, politics, communication, logology, religiosity*

Indonesia is the fourth most populous country in the world and the most populous Muslim country. According to law, Indonesians must profess adherence to one of six recognized state religions, including Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Confucianism. The state ideology Pancasila, however, makes it possible for Indonesia to position itself neither as a religious state nor as a totally secular one.

In the past two decades, Indonesia has gone through a significant religious, especially Islamic, transformation, such that religions have very important roles in the country's political life. This condition makes it acceptable for political communication to sound religious and religious communication to be political.

One of the most important characteristics of religious communication such as sermons in places of worship is the use of typical antitheses of good versus evil and reward versus punishment. The rhetoric of "good and evil" has always been aimed at separating the good religious followers from the less devout ones as well as from non-believers, while the "reward and punishment" rhetoric, which is commonly manifested in the portrayal of hell, is important to maintain religious virtues and commitment

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to the religious groups (Turner 1996). Political communication may, to a certain degree, use similar antithetical rhetoric such as conservatives versus liberals, but they usually focus on persuading every constituent to gain more followers and to attract the most support and votes possible using practically any persuasive means.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the rhetorical strategies that can be found in political and religious communication in Indonesia. For this purpose, I will employ Burke's theory of identification and logology. This analysis will focus on the discourses and the communicative strategies of religious groups as well as political parties and their leaders throughout Indonesian history since its independence, but especially during the reform era following the abdication of Suharto in 1998. Due to its wide coverage, this paper will not provide a detailed account of specific communicative events or speeches, but will focus on the most commonly used terms and selected rhetorical visions that best represent and explain the motives as well as the rhetorical strategies of the major leaders or groups that have significant roles in the life of the Indonesian people.

Burke's Identification and Logology

In his book, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1969), Kenneth Burke uses the term "identification" in his attempt to depart from the traditional theory of communication which emphasizes "persuasion." For Burke, the complexities of human communication cannot solely be viewed as persuasion which suggests an overt and deliberate effort to influence a targeted audience. Burke explains that identification as a fundamental process in human communication arises out of division (disagreement, differences, diversity, misunderstanding, etc.), because naturally humans are separate beings since birth and, therefore, strive for identification through communication in order to overcome division and separateness.

In addition to our biological separateness, we are also trapped in our man-made social, political, economic, ethnic and even religious divisions, where we struggle for identification throughout our lives. Ironically, our effort to create association or identification also creates dis-identification or division. For example, an effort to identify ourselves with a particular religion will consequently separate us from other groups and religions. This is the ambiguity we have to experience for being separate from, yet at the same time united with, others. As Burke (1969:21) asserted, humans are "both joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another."

Human communication which creates separateness is complicated by the spirit of hierarchy and order. This is true because we live in a hierarchical society where we strive not only for identification but also for moving up the ladder of the society by following and sometimes violating social order. Human communication which constitutes our effort to move up the hierarchical society is the basis for Burke's (1969) theory called "logology."

Logology, "words about words," is one of Burke's major works in theories of rhetoric to reveal the mystery of human motives and attitudes in their language use. He explained logology based on its analogy to theology, a verbal system which constitutes "words about God." Using Christian theology as a model, Burke asserts that language use creates and, at the same time, relies on hierarchies, which become the basis for human struggle to move up to a higher level of knowledge and of life. Upward movement is enabled by using language as "the negative." Language as the negative not only allows humans to make relationships among ideas and symbols that are not related (such as labeling things that they are not), but also enables people to creatively negate what has been accepted as the standard and perceived as the truth. The process of negating and criticizing the conventional standards and the effort to create new values and principles within this socially constructed hierarchical framework provides humans with a cycle of order and disorder. In theology, this cycle is realized in the form of "order/law-guilt-purification." This cycle constitutes a sense of failure (sin/guilt) or inability to follow the order which leads to humans' endeavor toward improvement and perfection (purification through redemption), thus, creating a new perfect order. At one point, however, this phase will be perceived as "not perfect enough" (creating guilt for not following the new perfect order/law); thus, people will restart the cycle toward the next ultimate perfection.

For Burke, the sequence of the cycle described above, which is based on Christian theology of atonement by sacrifice, can be applied to reveal human motives and attitudes in their language use and speeches. Burke's poem below summarizes his idea of the cycle (Burke 1970:4-5):

Here are the steps
In the iron Law of History
That Welds Order and Sacrifice

Order leads to Guilt
(for who can keep commandments)
Guilt needs Redemption

(for who would not be cleansed)
Redemption needs Redeemer
(which is to say, a Victim)
Order
Through Guilt
To Victimhood (hence: Cult of the kill)...

Burke believes that this cycle constitutes "the representative anecdotes" common to most, if not all, religions (Condit 1992:352). Since this theology of atonement by sacrifice is central not only to Christianity but also to the nature and mystery of human languages and human speeches, logology should be readily applicable to the analysis of religious as well as political speeches in Indonesia. This is especially true, because both religious and political speeches tend to emphasize the implementation of specific order and the exclusion of the enemies or those who disagree. Scapegoating and sacrificing these enemies become very important for advancing religious and political agenda.

The Communication Order and Disorder in Indonesian Politics

When applied to the Indonesian political changes since its independence in 1945, political communication has relied heavily on identification described above (Burke 1969). From Soekarno's identification of Indonesia as a unified people confronting colonialism to Soeharto's identification of communism as the common enemy, identification as a communicative strategy has been a part of Indonesian political and religious communication. The rhetoric of identification is most strikingly used through order and disorder cycles of Indonesian politics, as the order-guilt-purification and redemption cycle model proposed by Burke (1970). Each Indonesian regime not only represents a different political era but also has its own norms and policies as well as allies and enemies. For a new government with new ideologies and policies to emerge and succeed, it must victimize the current and/or old one by portraying the latter as the scapegoat that needs to be sacrificed.

Identification and Scapegoating during the Soekarno's Regime

The rhetoric in Indonesian politics during its independence and revolutionary movement between 1945 and 1965 was filled with themes focusing on the ills of Indonesian society, mainly caused by Dutch colonization and western imperialism. In this rhetoric, the Dutch colonizer was portrayed as a monster sucking all the wealth of the Indonesian people to enrich the Netherlands and thus impoverishing the Indonesian people. The rhetoric affirms that the only way to cure or cleanse the Indonesian people from their ills is not only through driving away the imperialists (including, for example, expelling Dutch citizens and nationalizing Dutch assets in the late 1950s) but also by depicting them as common enemies. This is true especially up until 1963 when the Dutch surrendered West Papua to Indonesia. At that time,

the portrayal of the common enemy of the Indonesian people was extended to include Westerners and their capitalist ideology as well as their allies, including Malaysia.

The guilt or the social ills of the Indonesian people were deeply felt due to rampant poverty and hyperinflation. Through Soekarno's speeches, the Indonesian people's guilt was rhetorically redeemed by sacrificing the common enemies. That is, the condemnation of the common enemies created a sense of being free from colonialism, the west, and capitalism which were depicted as the source of the Indonesian people's suffering. This portrayal of the scapegoats as common enemies led to the use of the terms "the west," "capitalism," "colonialism," and "imperialism" as evil terms antithetical to "nationalism," "communism," and "socialism."

The rhetoric of unity was particularly important in Soekarno's attempt to establish a united country out of this vastly diverse society. In the early 1960s Soekarno's most famous rhetoric concerned Nasakom (an abbreviation for nationalism, religion, and communism) and Nasasos (an abbreviation for nationalism, religion, and socialism and Marxism) as a rejection of western values. Although Indonesians were religious, many embraced communism and socialism.

In short, Soekarno's rhetoric reflected a total opposition against the colonial rules (order) in a nation facing severe economic and political challenges (guilt). Instead of looking at what could be wrong with his policies, he victimized and scapegoated imperialism, the west, and capitalism as the common enemies (sacrifice), creating a sense of unity and freedom (purification).

The unity he created by confronting various political factions with common enemies did not last very long, however. Soon there were divisions among the groups Soekarno tried to unite, especially between communists, the military and Islamists. The continuous economic degradation marked by hyperinflation generated dissatisfaction among various groups, created severe tension, and led to a coup attempt in 1965, supposedly by the communist party, which marked the beginning of Soekarno's downfall (Legge 2003).

New God Terms and Devil Terms for the Soeharto's New Order

A drastic political change took place after the alleged abortive coup when the gruesome killing of the seven top generals, supposedly by the communists, led Major General Soeharto to take charge, marking the beginning of the New Order regime. Soeharto pitted the New Order against the "Old Order" of Soekarno by portraying the communists and by implication Soekarno as the cause of the chaos and suffering of the Indonesian people. The drastic change in political communication in Indonesia was shown in the strong and consistent portrayal of the communists as the common enemy. The rhetoric of anti-communism was successful mostly because it was accompanied by a combination of coercive communicative strategies, mass arrests, and killings of about half a million alleged communists. By the late 1960s, communism was widely accepted as a devil term in Indonesia, making any association with it a threat to the life and livelihood of any groups or individuals.

The ills of the Indonesian society, namely the disastrous economy, rampant poverty, hunger, and a lack of security at the beginning of Soeharto's regime was blamed on the communists. The success of coercive communicative strategies restored order and security and helped the government implement development programs with the help of the US. After the communists were successfully shown as the scapegoats that had been sacrificed, the new emerging god terms were "Pancasila" and (pro capitalist) "development." These became the focus of Soeharto's communication strategies, compelling any Indonesian organizations, including religious ones, to adopt Pancasila as their basic foundation. The suppressive communication strategies of the New Order in the name of development and Pancasila, the demonizing of the communists and anyone opposing Soeharto's policies, as well as the financial aid from the US that helped improve the Indonesian economy eventually led the Indonesian people to accept and, in some cases, admire the new order regime (Vatikiotis 1993).

Soeharto's rhetoric of the New Order versus the Old Order confirms the logological theory of the cycle explained earlier, where a new order was created through victimizing and sacrificing the old and building a sense of redemption through purification from the ills and wrongs using the magic of rhetoric

of development. That is why, with the help of the US and other wealthy capitalistic nations, Indonesia experienced tremendous economic growth for the first time during the Soeharto regime in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

In the 1980s, Soeharto expanded the scapegoats and the enemies not only to communists and their sympathizers which he termed “extreme left” but also the radical Islamist which he termed the “extreme right,” leaving both leftists and Islamists to have a difficult time advancing their agendas. Tension between Soeharto and some of his loyalists as well as the increasing people’s awareness of Indonesia as being unjust and undemocratic under Soeharto’s dictatorship, however, made Soeharto form a close relationship with Islamic constituents. This is shown in the establishment of ICMI (The Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals) in 1990, which was the beginning of increasing Islamic politics in Indonesia accompanied by decreasing portrayal of radical Islam as the common enemy.

Soeharto’s change in his rhetoric of anti-Islamist and his support of Islamic politics through Islamic organizations did not decrease the perceived injustice under Soeharto’s regime. The East Asian financial crisis of 1997, the revitalization of Islamic politics, and the restless student and grass-roots organizations augmented the criticism of the undemocratic and unjust Soeharto’s regime, forcing Soeharto to step down in 1998.

The Reform and Democratization Era: A newer Order or Disorder?

The end of the Soeharto regime required new communicative strategies to negate the rhetorical vision of the New Order which included the use of “Pancasila” and “Development” as the god terms and encouraged the formation of a new society with new god terms that could represent the rhetoric of the reform and democratization era. Since the reform era provides freedom of speech allowing various groups to express themselves freely, the god terms and the devil terms used vary according to each group’s political agendas, interests, and ideologies.

Some groups are more vocal or have more control over important channels of communication than the others, however, enabling them to influence the discourses as well as the policies of the democratic Indonesia. At first it was the nationalist, represented by Soeharto’s feared enemy, Megawati Soekarno Putri, the first daughter of president Soekarno, who headed the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P). PDI-P won a plurality of votes in the parliamentary election in 1999, perhaps in part due to the portrayal of this party as the enemy of Soeharto.

An identification strategy was formed among Islamic parties creating Poros Tengah (Central Axis), a parliamentary coalition that elected Abdurahman Wahid (known as Gus Dur), the former leader of the moderate Muslim organization Nadlahtul Ulama, as the next president of Indonesia. Gus Dur emphasized decisive reforms in Indonesia especially among the military, local government, and police force. He frequently dis-identified himself with Islamic parties and Muslim groups that had supported him to become president, however, and demonstrations and the withdrawal of support from important institutions such as the military forced Gus Dur’s resignation, who was then replaced by his vice president, Megawati Soekarnoputri.

The unclear identification of Megawati and PDI-P, the lack of powerful god terms and devil terms that bound the Indonesian voters, as well as the lack of accomplishment that differentiated Megawati’s reign from the Soeharto era led the Golkar Party to win the next election in 2004. During this election, a new party, Democratic Party (PD) led by Soesilo Bambang Yudoyono (SBY), was formed and won a significant number of votes. This led SBY to win the first direct presidential election. SBY’s government showed some success, especially in an attempt to eradicate corruption and create relative security. The victory of PD in 2009 confirmed the people’s identification with SBY as a leader who would be able to resolve various challenges Indonesians are facing.

Beginning in 2010, however, the people’s identification of SBY with strong government faded as the common enemies still pervade the Indonesian society. These include rampant poverty, injustice due to lack of law enforcement, and unbridled corruption. The SBY’s image has tarnished the people’s identification of his leadership supported by a coalition of different parties as decisive, strong, and clean.

As reported in Antara News (2011), SBY approval rating has dropped significantly in 2011, resulting in SBY being identified as an unsuccessful leader.

The frequent changes in government and the absent of strong identification as represented in the popularity of devil and god terms lead many leaders and parties during the reform era to conform to the demand of groups that are vocal and rhetorically powerful. Some of the most rhetorically powerful groups after Soeharto's downfall have been Islamic groups. These groups have established varieties of Islamic parties after Soeharto's downfall, including moderate ones such as the National Awakening Party (PKB) and the National Mandate Party (PAN) to conservative ones such as the Prosperity & Justice Party (PKS) and the Moon and Crescent Party (PBB). The wide range of Islamic rhetoric in Indonesia are most visibly reflected in the existence of various Islamic groups from the most liberal, such as JIL (Liberal Islamic Network), the moderate such as Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, the conservative such as MUI (Indonesian Counsel of Ulema), to the most radical such as FPI (Islam Defender's Front). These various Islamic rhetorics have vigorously competed for the support of the Indonesian people (Azra 2006). Although they all represent Islamic discourses, each has a different interpretation of Islam and, thus, each may attack the others in its discursive communication.

Religious Rhetorical Strategies and the Reform Era: Identification and Scapegoating

During the reform era, there are competing political rhetorics, religious rhetorics, and mixtures of both, because religious rhetoric is frequently political and political rhetoric can sound more religious than during the previous eras. Each group, political and religious, develops its own agenda and implements different and competing rhetorical strategies that attempt to significantly change the Indonesian people's awareness, beliefs, and lives. In eras of increased freedom of speech, such as in the Indonesian reform era, various groups may portray each other as allies or enemies. The discourse of the reform era is characterized by competing rhetoric, where each group and leader creates its own selection of devil terms and god terms that can change depending on their political needs.

The complexity of competing rhetoric on the Indonesian communication stage may be attributed to the increasing Indonesian religious conservatism in the past two decades. During Soeharto's era, when religious rhetoric in the political arena was controlled or restricted, religious rhetorical influence was very limited. And during Soekarno's era, religious influence in politics was mostly limited to the rhetoric of Islamic parties. The freedom of speech during this reform era, however, which often created uncertainty among the Indonesian people, could work to enhance religious rhetoric to become very influential and, in some cases, to dominate the Indonesian political communication landscape.

The power of the portrayal of common enemies and scapegoats from the past still has some effect in various Indonesian communication channels. There is still a strong portrayal of the colonial west, especially the US with capitalism as the common enemy, the main scapegoats in Soekarno's speeches. There are also residual anti-communist and anti-atheist sentiments in many political and religious speeches in Indonesia, which were strongly advocated by Soeharto. While Pancasila is no longer the important god term the way Soeharto portrayed, there is no strong opposition to Pancasila. Most political parties identify themselves with the concern of the majority of the Indonesian people that is mainly focused on poverty, immorality, and injustice (O'Rourke 2002).

During this reform and democratization era, each group is eager to show an effort to improve the country by identifying the root causes of social ills or common enemies. Although there are various common enemies and scapegoats frequently portrayed in various political and religious speeches, the most frequently acceptable common enemies can be grouped into two: internal and external enemies. The first group includes three common enemies: *Peklat* (an abbreviation of "penyakit masyarakat" which literally means the ills of the society including prostitution, gambling, drug abuse, thugs, theft), *Kafir* (the infidel, non-believers, including atheists) which is usually advocated by religious groups, and *KKN* (the acronym for Corruption, Collusion, and Nepotism). While most Indonesians from different walks of life agree with the internal common enemies, they may differ in their opinions on the second group or external enemies which usually include those associated with western values that can damage Indonesian

norms and standards. The external enemies include uncontrolled individualism and liberalism which leads to immorality. In addition, the west is also often associated with imperialism and Zionism that attempts to destroy Islam, a religion widely embraced by the majority of the Indonesian people.

Some groups may employ different terms to identify their common enemies. For example, some may consider anyone outside of their religious groups as *Kafirs*, while others believe only non-religious people and atheists are *Kafirs*. Conservative and radical Islamic groups view the West and anything related to western values such as pluralism, liberalism, liberalism as the scapegoats. In 2005, MUI (the Indonesian Council of Ulema) made a bold move in defending its conservative stand by issuing of 11 edicts consisting of, among others, banning secularism, pluralism, and liberalism. The Liberal Islamic groups, on the other hand, often portray radical Islam and religious extremism as the common enemies.

The identification of the Islamic religious groups is different from Islamic political parties. Islamic political parties are usually flexible in changing their communicative strategies of identification. Since their goal is to identify with as many Indonesian voters as possible, they tend to portray themselves as inclusive. For example, parties known as Islamists have been trying to recreate their identities as pluralists and nationalists. This is true not only for moderate parties such as PKB, and PAN, but also, more recently, for the PKS, which is regarded as a conservative Islamist party. During the 2009 campaign, the PKS tried to re-identify itself as a pluralist party by inviting members from outside of their religious bases. Political identification of a nationalist party with religion is also common. The PDI-P, for example, established an Islamic wing of the party called Baitul Muslimin in order to gain support from Muslim voters. See for example,

<http://www.asiaviews.org/print.php?content=25889s1dddt33gf&colcom=20070705024058> Political groups are often willing to identify with each other and compromise their ideology to achieve their goals and implement their agenda. Indonesian political groups are willing to re-identify themselves with any religious organization and vice-versa in order to achieve their goals. (See, for example, <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2004/05/28/fallacies-nationalismislamism-alignment.html>).

This kind of re-identification usually does not apply to religious organizations, which tend to be strictly exclusive, since identification is usually not negotiable. Based on traditional doctrine and biblical teachings, religious groups confirm their beliefs and strengthen the groups' identity by portraying almost anyone outside their groups as the non-believer and, thus, common enemies. Although the portrayal of enemies is more overt in some groups than in others, this communicative strategy is important to maintain the followers' faith and to teach followers to believe that only when they belong to their groups will they be considered safe.

Political parties and their leaders can change their common enemies and, thus, their political orientation, but they have to be careful in portraying their common enemies, because enemies can become friends in the future. During the 2004 election, for example, President SBY and his Democratic Party associated himself with Jusuf Kalla of Golkar, but SBY had occasionally been in competition against Kalla, especially when the latter had presidential ambitions. Kalla, on the other hand, has not been firm in his opposition against SBY. Similarly, many political groups and parties that used to form a coalition supporting SBY's leadership may begin to dis-identify themselves with SBY, while others attempt to position themselves as the ideals parties or leaders with whom the Indonesian people could possibly identify themselves.

Religious groups, on the other hand, are relatively consistent in their selection and portrayal of their common enemies. Various sermons and mosques and other places of worships are filled with the identification of the common enemies through the portrayals of those who will be punished and "go to hell." In many sermons, and in most of the TV miniseries, the torment of hell is detailed for specific individuals with specific acts and behaviors. This kind of punishments which are portrayed to take place during or right after death can be found in anecdotes based on traditional mysticism or beliefs and not necessarily contained in the religious doctrines.

Political parties or organizations often exploit religious beliefs and symbols in order to achieve their goals. During the campaign for the election of district head (*bupati*) in Karanganyar, Central Java, an

anonymous flier citing Quranic verses states that selecting a female leader is punishable by going to hell. (See for example: http://www.suaramerdeka.com/beta1/news/print.php?id_news=13602 On the other hand, religious institutions can also be open in their interference in political matters). In so doing, both religious and political organizations rely on the rhetoric of identification and scapegoating.

Conclusion

Examined using identification and logology theories of Burke (1969, 1970), the rhetoric and communication of the reform era is different from those in Soekarno's or Soeharto's eras. Soekarno's charm, charisma, and confidence in his rhetorical power enabled him to dominate the stage of Indonesia's political communication as well as to unite the diverse Indonesian people by confronting them with his selection of common enemies. The reform era is also different from Soeharto's era, since Soeharto's coercive campaign was based on themes and rhetorical visions that Soeharto himself selected, controlled and portrayed, whereby anyone or any group that opposed his rhetorical vision are viewed as common enemies and scapegoats.

In the reform era, political persuasion often manipulates religious beliefs such as the use of hell to scare people to support or vote for certain parties; political groups' inconsistency in using rhetorical strategies confirm the idea that political parties are opportunistic, using whatever means to gain political support. On the other hand, religious rhetoric consistently uses antitheses and common enemies to decisively exclude non-believers. The use of images of hell to strengthen group membership, persuade non-believers to join the group, and punish those who do not want to be part of the group can be coercive, because as in the Soeharto era, fear is widely exploited in religious communication.

The logological analysis has helped explain how the portrayal of common enemies during the reform era follows the cycles of guilt-redemption-sacrifice which becomes the ritual of cleansing. The frequent reference to Pekat, KKN, legal mafia, corruption, and *kafirs* in many texts and speeches in various Indonesian channel of communication constitutes the identification of who should be blamed and punished. At the same time, this also constitutes a ritual of purification where the communicator is aware of the need for cleansing. The ritual is apparent in political communication and more so in religious speeches. The images of hell in speeches and the popularity of shows depicting such images of punishments in various media in Indonesia fit the beliefs of the Indonesian people on the ritual of cleansing described in logology.

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