

# THE DISPLAY OF RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS IN PUBLIC SPACE: THE CONTESTATION OF MUSLIM AND CHRISTIAN IDENTITIES IN JAYAPURA, PAPUA

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## Abstract

**Purpose of the study:** This study seeks to show that religious contestation in Jayapura, as apparent through the widespread use of religious symbols in the city, is not only a form of resistance against other faiths but also reflective of historical apprehensiveness. Studies on Muslim-Christian relations tend to deny the historical perspective by giving more attention to economic and political factors.

**Methodology:** As the basis of its analysis, this study uses visual data in the form of photographs. Further data was collected from informants through unstructured interviews. Using a phenomenological approach, data were analyzed to ascertain the meaning of the studied phenomenon.

**Main Findings:** This study shows that religious contestation in Papua, as manifested in public religious symbols, is not only a form of resistance against other faiths but also a continuation of unresolved interfaith tensions.

**Applications of this study:** Knowledge of the interfaith contestation, as manifested through the public display of religious symbols, is of paramount importance in creating a spatial planning policy that accommodates a multiethnic and multireligious society.

**Novelty/Originality of this study:** While previous studies have tended to show the causes of interfaith conflict, often by emphasizing religious differences, this study finds a shared space that offers an opportunity for religious accommodation and the resolution of interfaith tensions.

**Keywords:** Religious Symbols, Public Space, Contestation, Identities, Muslim-Christian Relations, Papua.

## INTRODUCTION

The public display of religious symbols in Jayapura, Papua, has transformed Muslim-Christian relations in the city. There are no records of when these religious symbols first entered the public space in Jayapura. However, it is clear that interfaith relations in the region have become more contestative and competitive since 1998 when Indonesia began its political reform. This shift, which was driven in part by increased freedom and openness, accelerated after the Papuan people were granted Special Autonomy. Under Special Autonomy, the people of Papua—particularly the Christians—had access to significant public spaces in which they could express themselves. This is perhaps most readily apparent in the display of religious symbols in public spaces such as mountains and islands, as well as the identification of Papua as the *Tanah Injil* (the Land of the Gospel; see [Iribaram, Abdullah & Pribadi, 2019](#)).

Two opposite tendencies may be seen in Muslim-Christian relations. First are those studies that frame Muslim-Christian relations as dynamic and contestative ([Thomas et al, 2017](#); [Jubba, 2019](#)), ultimately resulting in compromises between adherents of these religions. Historical studies, for example, have explored the power struggles of Muslims and Christians, with particular focus given to Islam's first few centuries. Second are those studies that view Muslim-Christian relations as collaborative and accommodative ([Ernas, 2016](#)), often as a result of socio-cultural factors. Studies of Muslim-Christian relations in Ambon, for example, have shown how adherents of both religions have worked side by side in rebuilding the island after its lengthy conflict. The social ties that were severed by conflict were reestablished through a local tradition known as *pelagandong*, wherein Muslim and Christian communities were positioned as kin and thus able to overlook religious differences ([Safi, 2019](#); [Tualeka Zn, 2015](#)). A similar tendency has been found among the people of Fak-Fak, Papua, where a belief in *satu tungku tiga batu* (literally "one hearth, three stones") has allowed social relations to flourish, without any religious divides ([Ernas, 2016](#); [Pessireron, Lolo, & Eisenring, 2017](#)). This article will enrich studies of interfaith relations by focusing its discussion on the identity contestations of Muslims and Christians.

This study explores how the public display of religious symbols has influenced Muslim-Christian relations in Jayapura, Papua. This topic will be discussed in detail through three stages: *first*, describing the forms of identity contestation that have occurred in the public spaces of Jayapura, Papua; *second*, mapping Muslim leaders' responses to the public display of religious symbols; *third*, exploring the implications of the above-mentioned identity contestations for interfaith

relations in Jayapura, Papua. This study departs from three assumptions: (1) the contestation of religious identity is a complex process with many aspects, including not only the public display of religious symbols but also economic and political struggles; (2) Muslim leaders have had diverse responses to the widespread public display of Christian religious symbols; and (3) the religious dimensions of territorial claims has resulted in increased interfaith tensions in Jayapura, Papua.

## MUSLIM–CHRISTIAN RELATIONS: MODELS IN THE LITERATURE

The identity contestations that have occurred in Jayapura may be seen as part of broader tendencies; in other words, the global and national dynamics of Muslim–Christian have affected relations between these communities at the local level. Tensions between Muslims and Christians—caused not only by ideological differences but also by struggles to control economic and political resources—have been common. This can broadly be seen in North America and in Europe. In Indonesia, meanwhile, this is evident in conflicts in Poso, Ambon, and Papua ([Rahawarin, 2017](#)). Often, Muslims and Christians have competed to gain control of the required resources. However, interfaith cooperation and collaboration have also occurred. As shown by the cases of Ambon and Papua, such collaborative relations are made possible by shared socio-cultural characteristics.

As Abrahamic religions, Islam and Christianity both have a doctrine of truth and compel adherents to spread it. This has driven much of the contestation between the religions and their adherents. According to the literature, this contestation has only increased. As incidents of religious terrorism have become more common, many have debated the economic, social, and political rights of religious communities—especially Muslims ([Ahmad, 2009](#); [Mythen, Walklate, & Khan, 2009](#); [Roose, 2013](#)). As Muslim identity has been framed in terms of violence, terrorism, gender, ethnicity, and a binary opposition between Islam and modernity/the "West" ([Ahmad, 2009](#)), contestation between Muslims and non-Muslims has only become more prominent.

Several studies have shown that religious identity has become increasingly prominent in public spaces ([Abbink, 2011](#)). As public spaces have been used as loci of religious practices, thereby enabling congregations to assert their religious identities in multi-faith societies ([Qodir, 2014](#)), the public practice of religion has become hotly contested. The concept of public space is widespread in everyday social discourse. Habermas defines public space as an area of social life in which public opinion is formed and public interests are determined through the free and uncoerced expression and publication of views ([Kellner, 2014](#)). Many scholars tend to agree that the public space is autonomous, not being part of the political structure and influences the interpretation of the common good ([Shirky, 2011](#); [Woodward, Jones, Marston, 2012](#); [Losonczi, 2013](#)).

In Papua, for example, mass religious meetings—known among Christians as *Kebaktian Rohani* and among Muslims as *Tabligh Akbar*—have caused controversy since they were first held in the 1990s. Indeed, such events have often led to widespread demonstrations, prohibitions against religious activities, and opposition to the establishment of religious schools. This is not a purely local issue; the literature shows that similar issues have occurred around the globe, including in Europe ([Carol & Koopmans, 2013](#)), where Muslim–Christian relations have been plagued by controversy over the construction of mosques, religious education, and the wearing of the hijab and/or burqa ([Helbling, 2014](#)). Many have sought to resolve these interfaith contestations. One proposed solution is formal education ([Dilger & Schulz, 2013](#)), and schools have been urged to address interfaith contestation through their curricula. Another proposed solution is interfaith dialogue, as argued by [King \(2016\)](#) and [Sahrul \(2017\)](#). Music has even been suggested as a potent means of promoting interfaith harmony and enabling religious communities to create mutual understanding and acceptance ([King, 2016](#)); this has proven successful in Sub-Saharan Africa, where Muslims and Christians have been able to accept religious diversity ([Frederiks, 2010](#)) and thereby created stability.

## METHODOLOGY

This study is qualitative in nature which relies on subjective evaluation in data collection and analysis. Visual data (photographs of public religious symbols in Jayapura, Papua) constitutes the basis of its analysis. Jayapura was chosen as the site of this study owing to the prevalence of public religious symbols in the city. The researchers collected data by photographing Muslim and Christian symbols (crosses, churches, mosques, etc.) in public spaces while visiting the sites.

Aside from this visual data, the researchers also collected data through unstructured interviews with Muslim leaders in Papua; these included members of the Indonesian Council of Ulama (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, MUI), the Papuan Muslim Council (Majelis Muslim Papua, MMP), Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and Muhammadiyah, as well as Muslim academics. Interviews were also conducted with Christian leaders who not only understood Christian teachings but were also involved in Jayapura's interfaith activities. During interviews, which were conducted in Jayapura, informants openly provided information. For confidentiality purposes, this study refers to informants using only their initials. A review of pertinent literature, particularly that on Muslim–Christian relations, was used to strengthen the analysis.

Collected data were analyzed using a phenomenological approach, with photographic/visual symbols of religion being framed as meaningful texts. This approach was chosen based on the assumption that the religious symbols in Jayapura's public spaces (as with texts) could be "read" by anyone. Analysis of these symbols provided an understanding of current trends in Jayapura, particularly Muslim and Christian communities' contestation and competition over physical and

abstract spaces (such as economic and political power). This approach greatly helped the researchers analyze and interpret the public display of religious symbols in Jayapura as well as the diverse responses it has received.

## RESULTS

### Religious Symbols in Public Space

The identity contestations of Jayapura's Muslim and Christian communities can be seen in (1) the form of visual symbols in public spaces, and (2) the form of these communities' respective houses of worship (i.e. mosques/churches). Religious symbols, both Muslim and Christian, are found through much of the city. Figure 1 shows a cross that was erected on a small island in the middle of the bay. This position is very strategic, as the cross can be clearly seen from passenger ships as they enter the Port of Jayapura. The view is particularly enticing at night, as numerous lights have been attached to the cross to accent its beauty. Owing to its considerable size and white color, the cross is easily visible from a distance; this is particularly true on clear days. The hilly terrain of Jayapura enables landbound residents to see the cross more easily, as does its location atop a hill in an uninhabited area (as seen in Illustration 1).



**Figure 1:** A Cross on an Island in Jayapura Bay

**Source:** Photograph by Researchers, 2018

Another religious symbol is a large sign, reading *SYALLOM* (i.e. shalom, a Hebrew word that literally means "peace" but is also used by Indonesian Christians as a greeting), that is readily visible to travelers as they enter Jayapura from Sentani. Located along the left side of the main road, the sign is easily read owing to its large size. Further along the ride is a sign reading *KANAAN* (i.e. Canaan, commonly identified with the biblical "Promised Land"). Visual symbols of Islam, conversely, are not found, a fact that can be attributed to Christians' dominance as Jayapura's religious majority.



**Figure 2:** SYALLOM: A Sign in the Mountains of Jayapura

**Source:** Photograph by Researchers, 2018

The identity contestations of Jayapura's Muslim and Christian communities can also be seen in the "mimicry" of form involved in the construction of their houses of worship. Figure 3 and Figure 4 respectively show a church and a mosque; these houses of worship, despite belonging to different religious communities, were constructed in a similar style. Figure 3 shows a large mosque located in the center of Jayapura (Baiturrahim Grand Mosque), wherein Muslims do religious activities such as prayer and Qur'anic recital. This mosque, the pride of the Muslim community in Jayapura, is characterized by a golden dome; such domes are commonly understood as symbols of Islam in Indonesia.



**Figure 3:** Baiturrahim Grand Mosque, Jayapura

**Source:** Photograph by Researchers, 2018

Christian houses of worship, meanwhile, are found throughout Jayapura (Figure 4 and Figure 5). Figure 4 highlights the similarities between one such church and the above-mentioned mosque. As with the Baiturrahim Grand Mosque, this church has white walls and a large golden dome. It is also surrounded by four minarets, one at each corner. As a result, it is often mistaken for a mosque.



**Figure 4:** The "Church of the Golden Dome", Jayapura

**Source:** Photograph by Researchers, 2018

These houses of worship highlight how Muslims and Christians have adopted similar architectural styles and color schemes for their houses of worship. Among the people of Jayapura, the above-mentioned houses of worship are best known as the "Mosque of the Golden Dome" and the "Church of the Golden Dome". On certain days, particularly religious holidays, both houses of worship are filled with members of their respective religious communities.



**Figure 5:** A Statue of Jesus Christ at Lake Sentani, Jayapura

**Source:** Photograph by Researchers, 2019

## Responses to the Rise of Religious Symbols in Public Spaces

The display of religious symbols in public spaces, as well as the "mimicry" of other symbols, has received various responses from Jayapura's Muslim community. Some of the religious leaders interviewed suggested that it was nothing more than religious expression, similar to that done by religious communities elsewhere in Indonesia. Others viewed it as a means for the Christian majority to assert its dominance in Papua. Still, others viewed it as a response to religious phenomena elsewhere. These views will be elucidated below.

Some informants expressed the view that, as religious expressions, these symbols were reasonable as all religions have symbols that they use for a range of purposes. For instance, a Muhammadiyah member named TM (50) stated that:

"What is happening in Jayapura now is related to what religious communities have been doing outside Jayapura. As a Javanese man, I've seen that there are symbols of Islam everywhere in Java. There are some in the town squares, on the roads, at schools. At markets and offices, there are mosques and prayer rooms because there are so many Muslims. I think it's reasonable for many symbols of Christianity to be displayed in Jayapura, as there are so many Christians here" (Interview, 25/04/2019).

A similar view was expressed by OF (38), a Muslim youth leader. He stated that:

"What's happening now is part of how Christians express their religious beliefs. In Sulawesi, in Java, in Sumatra, where there are Muslim majorities, these things happen too, so I think it's nothing special" (Interview, 10/05/19).

OF further explained:

"The erection of hillside signs in certain places is not done by people who understand politics, but by junior and senior high school students as part of their religious expression. I don't see it as having any political purpose, unlike "Gospel City" in Manokwari. The hillsides with names from the Bible, those are part of their worship, their approach to understanding their religion by symbolically bringing it close to them, just like when they build Nativity Scenes and whatnot. That, I consider it only an expression of their creativity, using the moment of Christmas" (Interview, 10/05/2019).

Both of the above informants referred to the display of religious symbols in public as reasonable or normal. These informants linked recent trends in Jayapura with conditions elsewhere. Religious groups have diverse means of expressing themselves, including through the display of visual symbols in public spaces. Similarly, many symbols are intended as part of the commemoration of religious holidays, and as such are displayed annually.

However, some informants suggested that these religious symbols had a hidden purpose: to assert Christians' dominance as the religious majority in Jayapura, Papua. This was mentioned by SI (44), who stated:

"Displaying religious symbols in public places is one way they tell the entire community that Papuan land is Christian land, and affirming that they are the religious majority in Papua" (Interview, 26/04/2019)

A similar view was expressed by MY (43), a Muslim academic:

"The Christian symbols that we can find in many places really aren't problematic, as that is one way our Christian fellows say that they were the first to come to Papua. This is still debated—historical records show that Islam entered Papua first. However, because Christianity spread faster, and was able to reach the hinterlands and the mountains, what we see now is that Christianity is dominant. This cannot be separated from how the Dutch helped spread Christianity in Papua" (Interview, 27/04/2019).

This was echoed by FS (44), the Secretary-General of MUI Papua:

"MUI has seen these symbols as a signal and a statement to others (i.e. non-Christians) that *Tanah Tabi* (Jayapura) is a blessed Christian land, as well as a form of resistance against the massive influx of Muslim migrants and their control of various sectors" (Interview, 26/04/2019).

FS also stated that the public display of Christian symbols is intended to assert the dominance of Christianity as well as show opposition to the Muslim migrants who have traveled to Jayapura over the past few decades.

Other informants expressed the view that the public display of religious symbols was a response to the establishment of mosques and Islamic schools in the region. MR (53), a Muslim academic and NU member, stated that:

"There are many Muslims in Jayapura now, and every Muslim settlement has a mosque, showing the considerable growth of the Muslim community. Mosques, especially in Jayapura, have gotten to be quite luxurious, and so many Christians have become jealous of Muslims" (Interview, 25/04/2019).

As an example of a luxurious mosque, MR mentioned the Grand Mosque of Jayapura, which is located in the center of the city and can be easily accessed. Five times a day, the call to prayer rings out from the mosque, and in the month of

Ramadhan, the mosque hosts well-attended religious activities and sermons. "Perhaps this is what makes Christians jealous," MR surmised.

Nonetheless, informants indicated that the public display of Christian symbols is but part of Jayapura's religious dynamics. FS, a Muhammadiyah member, stated:

"Muhammadiyah hasn't seen these symbols as disruptive, but understood them as part of the religious dynamics of Papua and a challenge to proselytization. We can see that, even though there is considerable resistance to Islam, Muslims have continued to grow and establish communications with Christians. [Christians] have even admitted that, during the flooding in Sentani and Jayapura on March 16–17, 2019, it was Muslims who contributed to and empathized with them the most." (Interview, 26/04/2019).

The above-discussed views indicate three different tendencies in understanding and responding to the public display of religious symbols in Jayapura. *First*, these symbols' inclusion in public space may be seen as an expression of faith. *Second*, these symbols may be understood as 'opposition to' or 'rejection of' other religious communities. *Third*, the symbols may be seen as a challenge for future proselytization, and thus require a careful response.

## DISCUSSION

### Contestation of Economic and Political Spaces

According to *Jayapura dalam Angka* (Jayapura in Numbers, 2018), the population of Jayapura is relatively evenly divided between Muslims and Christians. Of Jayapura's 293,690 residents, a total of 130,897 (44.57%) identify as Protestant Christian. A further 121,763 (41.46%) identify as Muslim, 38,943 (13.26%) as Catholic, and 2,086 (0.71%) as either Hindu or Buddhist. This demographic composition indicates that the Muslim and (Protestant) Christian communities of Jayapura are of similar sizes, a situation that has tangibly affected their contestation for public space.

Looking more specifically at the distribution of political power, data obtained from the Regional Staffing Agency (Badan Kepegawaian Daerah, BKD (2018) showed a clear predominance of Christians. For example, in 2017, of the 43 Working Units under the Jayapura municipal government, 37 were led by Christians; the remaining 6 were headed by Muslims. This not only underscores the administrative dominance of Jayapura's Christian community but also indicates an unbalanced distribution of power that has contributed to Muslim–Christian tensions (Iribaram et al., 2019). Owing to the dominance of the Christian community in the Jayapura municipal government, non-Christians have been implicitly subordinated. This dominance may also be viewed as a means for the Christian community to reinforce its position as the city's religious majority.

Conversely, it is Muslims—predominantly migrants from Java, Sumatra, and Sulawesi—who dominate the economic sector. At Hamadi Market, for instance, the main economic actors are Muslims who provide foodstuffs, construction materials, and services. Through their economic dominance, Muslims have been able to fund the erection of mosques and Islamic schools in the region. As such, Muslims' dominance of the economic sector has been viewed by some as part of the Islamicization of Papua (Murtafdo, 2018).

Their respective dominance of these sectors has positioned Muslims and Christians as mutually dependent; this, in turn, has promoted harmony in their interactions. However, it cannot be ignored that these communities' relatively equal populations have not enjoyed a proportional distribution of power; as stated above, the Christians have a clear dominance in the government bureaucracy, while the Muslims are prominent in the economic sector. Owing to the dualism of the situation, Muslims and Christians have enjoyed bilateral relations while simultaneously competing against each other. Their interactions have been further influenced by the fluidity of interfaith relations at the national level, particularly since the beginning of political reform.

### Muslim Leaders' Responses to Religious Symbols in Public Space

Muslim leaders have responded diversely to the presence of religious symbols in Jayapura's public spaces. These responses may be divided into three categories, as follows. *First* is the view that religious symbols in public spaces are intended to convey specific messages, or, more specifically, that religious symbols are assertions of Christians' dominance. Christians, this view argues, use these symbols as part of their mission to realize slogans such as "Papua is a Land of Peace", "Papua is the Land of Christ", and "Papua is a Blessed Land". The identification of Papuans as Christian is an important one. As Christianity spread through Papua more rapidly than other religions, it is easy to find people who identify as Christian in isolated villages and the hinterlands. Muslims, meanwhile, are concentrated along Papua's coasts; only a few can be found inland, in the mountains near Puncak Jaya.

*Second* is the view that the public display of religious symbols is a reasonable form of religious expression. Recognizing that Christians are the religious majority in Papua, it is understandable that its symbols are prominent in everyday life. At its essence, religious expression is intended to help maintain one's religious traditions. Symbols are not used solely for worship or rituals; they are also important means of showing a religion's continued survival and practice. According to this view, such public displays are thus reasonable, especially since other religious communities around Indonesia—particularly Muslims—have displayed their religious symbols on a massive scale.

*The third* is the view that the widespread public display of religious symbols in Jayapura is a form of resistance against the growth of non-Christian religions in the city. Religious symbols, while displayed openly, may conceal ulterior motives (including economic and political ones). They may not only assert the existence of religion but also show opposition to other religions. As such, these religious symbols are simultaneously open and closed; they are open because they are displayed publicly and may be read by anybody, but they are closed because they cannot voice their intent by themselves.

The prohibition against the construction of mosque minarets in Sentani, a town in Jayapura Regency (near Jayapura City) is a clear indicator of the fervency through which Papua is claimed as a 'Christian' land. This is also evident in the passage of Biblical Regional Bylaws in Manokwari, Papua (Hutabarat, 2019), as a response to sharia bylaws that were enacted elsewhere in Indonesia (Abra, 2016; Bik, 2018; Jati, 2018). Both of these recent phenomena are indicative of Christians' desire to assert their dominance through religious legislation and symbols.

### Religious Tensions and Ownership Claims

History shows that Muslim-Christian relations, both contestative and cooperative, have ebbed and flowed over time. Contestative relations may be seen in these religious communities' claims to truth and status as "God's chosen", as supported by their respective sacred texts. In Islam, for example, QS Ali Imran 3:19 states that "Indeed, the religion in the sight of Allah is Islam." Similarly, in the Christian Bible (John 14:6), Jesus is quoted as saying "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Such claims are not exclusive to Abrahamic religions; in the Hindu *Bhagavad Gita* (IV:11), it is stated, "In whatever way people surrender unto me, I reciprocate with them accordingly." According to Ngakan, the "way" referenced in this quote refers to the four paths of yoga: Karma Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, and Raja Yoga, each of which is only found in Hinduism (Armuyanto, 2013).

It can thus be concluded that every religion asserts its own primacy, which leads towards exclusivity. These claims are rooted in the doctrine of being "chosen". In the Old Testament of the Christian Bible (Leviticus 20:26), for example, it is written, "You are to be holy to me because I, the Lord, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own." Similarly, Deuteronomy 7:6 reads, "For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession" (Armuyanto, 2013). This doctrine has had a considerable effect on religious communities and their perceptions of their own primacy.

The slogan "Papua is a Blessed Land" has been widely used by religious communities. Over time, this has been concretized into a that Papua is a Christian land, as the word "blessed" (or *diberkati* in Indonesian) is widely used in the Christian tradition. Such an ownership claim has not only influenced how Muslims and Christians show their religious identities but also to social practices in which communities compete with or even oppose each other. The public display of religious symbols such as crosses, domes, mosques, and churches has become but part of these communities' contestations for space and influence.

In Jayapura, Papua, ownership claims have not only been made by the common people but also by religious elites—both Muslim and Christian. Although the literature shows that Islam entered Papua before the Christian missions, this has not abated debate. Both communities have offered their own evidence of their involvement and importance in Papua's growth and development, resulting in further claims. These interfaith contestations are only exacerbated by the rise of religion-based educational institutions (both Muslim and Christian). Indeed, as seen in Illustration 3 and Illustration 4, these communities' respective houses of worship even use the "same" golden dome, even though (in Indonesia, at least) this architectural feature is most common in mosques.

The public display of religious symbols, as seen in Illustration 1 and Illustration 2, may be seen as showing a passion for religion and religious practices. At the same time, however, it can be understood as a form of religious expression that attempts to symbolically annihilate other religious communities. Admittedly, the current trend of publicly displaying religious symbols and thereby dominating public space cannot be separated from the dynamics of national interfaith relations. Interfaith contestation has been common in other areas; the dominance of Islam and the influence of Islamic culture can be widely seen in Java, Sulawesi, and Sumatra.

### CONCLUSION

The public space, long envisioned as a shared space, has been repurposed by certain religious communities through a disproportional assertion of power. Such a process of harmonization has been manifested in various ways, including through the public display of symbols. This article makes three important points. *First*, claims of ownership are intended as a means of obtaining greater and broader influence. The public display of religious symbols thus offers an alternative approach to showing communities' hegemonic power and gaining legitimacy. As such, the visualization and placement of religious symbols in public spaces offer a strong indicator of open contestation between religious communities, as well as evidence of communities' continued proselytization efforts.

*Second*, while their responses have varied, Muslim leaders in Jayapura have understood the display of Christian symbols in public spaces as part of everyday interfaith dynamics. Some have said that this phenomenon is reasonable, given that Christians are the religious majority and that similar practices occur in places where non-Christian religions are dominant. There is, however, concern that this practice has not been intended solely to 'spread' Christianity, but also to

'provoke' other religious communities and create further interfaith tensions in Jayapura. Some informants even understood these religious symbols as being part of a hegemonic effort to subordinate religious minorities.

Third, the public display of religious symbols in Jayapura, Papua, has had a deleterious effect on pro-diversity sentiments, thereby leading to sustained interfaith contestations in various arenas. This is particularly evident in Muslims' and Christians' efforts to control the economic and political sectors. Today, each community controls one of these sectors: Muslims are dominant in the economic sector, while Christians are prevalent in the political sector. This phenomenon, while showing a tentative "division of power", also underscores that existing interfaith tensions and contestations have continued.

## IMPLICATIONS

This study has shown that identity contestations have occurred between religious communities as a result of said communities' respective drives to assert dominance and gain power. Religious symbols have offered a medium through which these communities have spread their own influence while simultaneously 'annihilating' others. This has implications for the establishment of productive interfaith relations at various levels, as well as in the economic and political sectors. The involvement of both Muslims and Christians in spatial contestations can be seen as part of a struggle to influence and assert power over various aspects of everyday life. These spatial contestations have resulted in dualism in interfaith relations, which have become simultaneously dynamic and contestative while also being collaborative and accommodative.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends the creation of shared public spaces that can be enjoyed by all religious communities as a means of minimizing unilateral claims. It is necessary to comprehensively resolve identity contestations such as those in Jayapura to prevent the rise of new tensions as we move towards a multi-religious society.

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