

REVITALIZING LOCAL WISDOM: EFFORTS TO REDUCE TENSION AMONG BELIEVERS

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Abstract

This article aims to show that through the strengthening of local wisdom, apathy toward the existence of other groups can be avoided to form a better order of life. Concern about the condition of the Indonesian people that are considered to have less appreciation for the other groups, in particular against certain religious groups has triggered the author to explore these issues and to respond to the concern. This nation, in fact, has a mechanism which has proved capable of reducing and even quelling the potential of conflict in a multi-cultural society. It is often called local mechanism. Although it has local characteristics, but if taken to a higher level, then the mechanism will generate new institutions for creating a broader harmony. This brief article showed that the existing local wisdom could create a harmonious relationship among the Bugis community though they have different faith. This is part of their commitment to practicing the noble values of local wisdom so that differences of identity (religion) are not a deterrent in building good relations, but in deed serve as a medium that acts as a reinforcement to the existing order.

Keywords: Revitalizing, Local wisdom, Social Relations.

INTRODUCTION

On the first page of Kompas Daily, January 02, 2014, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono highlighted the condition of the nation, which he thought, has degraded in terms of appreciation (of others). According to him, Indonesia now has more freedom, but lack compliance. This turmoil is 'reasonable' given the circumstances right now are likely to abandon the great values that have been passed down and put into practice since long ago. The reality showed a deterioration of the recognition of other groups as a result of euphoria of freedom. Group solidity and solidarity continue to suffer an increasing degradation marked by strong "psychopathology of group" in looking at and understanding the existence of other groups. This attitude is a claim that always considers and looks down on other groups, and always leads to a claim of truth over oneself and one's own group.

A few days later, an editorial in Media Indonesia (January 9, 2014) entitled "Forced Unity" reviewed the current religious harmony in this country.

This is triggered by a strong desire of the Government to propose legislation governing religious harmony in Indonesia. Controversy happens not only among politicians and the Government, but also among the community itself. This attitude was caused by doubts about the effectiveness of some legislations actually regulate such matters, namely the laws on civic organizations. Similarly, the Government has a regulation regarding the handling of social conflict which places emphasis on the involvement of local governments in its handling.

Both conditions discussed above seem to show the presence of acute problems that are difficult to overcome, especially regarding social relations (religion) in the middle of the Indonesia society with multiple-culture. Weakening social relations is also caused by the failure of the State to manage different cultures by imposing uniformity. The State comes with its the 'uniformity' that even lead to the affect the '*saté politics*' by assuming the presence of certain groups (which are not in line) as the enemy and could endanger the state (Qadir, 2011: 102). That is, the uniformity of diversity will only kill the others because what happens is that there will be segmentation and segregation of society that is increasingly sharp as there are always majority-minority groups.

In addition, the above conditions also show a shift in national character; from appreciation of differences to rejection and group fanaticism. This reality, for example, is reflected in the number of events that indicated the rise of ethnic and religious sentiments in all aspects. Currently, the phenomenon of increasingly intense ownership claims in particular areas which have diverse composition of population such as Papua being Christian-owned, Aceh belonging to Islam, etc. (Alhamid, 2014). The claim is, to the author, based on a shallow rationalization because people just look at the composition of the religious population (the majority). Such claims continue to a larger scale, for example, Indonesia has to be 'an Islamic state' because the majority of the population embraces Islam. Similarly, the event of regional elections always brings out the crucial issue of local leaders with the slogan '*putra daerah*' (local son/person born locally). A local person is deemed worthy to be a leader so directly or not it closes the opportunity for others to step up and compete.

A shift in the national character as expressed above on one side is a reality that shows the occurrence of a fundamental change in society. In fact, it could potentially alter the character of the people of Indonesia to 'prey' on its own citizens. Therefore, it takes a strategic breakthrough in order to restore the spirit of a nation that strongly upholds the values of human differences and puts them in the highest position. On the other hand, the shift in such character is a real challenge for the nation's future so it requires the ability to

manage diversity in order to find inspiration for nation-building in the future. Indonesia with its diversity should have a great opportunity for the formation of the solidarity of the nation as it did during the fight against the colonists. Similarly, differences of views could be resolved when the debate about *Pancasila* was conducted between religious groups and nationalists (Ali, 2009: 155-167). In the debate, each group had strong argument that took a lot of time and energy to find the intersection that was acceptable to both parties. Referring to this event, the actual spirit of accepting different opinions was very strong in the tradition of the nation and has been developed by the founding fathers. The bottom line is, if differences of opinion can be managed well, then it will result in common vision in developing this nation in a better way as shown in the debate on the five basic principles of the state in the past. Conversely, if the difference is always positioned as the source of misfortune, the strife and destruction will always be preserved just as what is going on in many parts of the world.

Concerns about the deterioration of compliance also have a strong basis especially when one pays attention to a series of conflicts involving religious groups as we can witness the last decade. Many people argued that this is one of the signs of the 'deficit' against the practice of *Pancasila* (Karman, 2010: 115). Freedom and compliance are two things should go hand in hand, but this time it happened otherwise. Departing from this discussion, through this paper, it will be shown that there is a mechanism that should be developed in order to create and strengthen a relationship which is based on the spirit of togetherness and appreciation. In certain communities, there is a mechanism that runs very effectively in managing diversity. For example, the Bugis community with its the spirit of *sipakatau*, *sipakalebbi*, and *sipakainge* which are still under the principle of *siri* and put into practice not only limited to social relations, but also in a religious life so as to produce a pattern of relationship which is more open and tolerant.

BUGIS SOCIETY: PRACTICING RELIGION IN TOGETHERNESS

The spread of religion, especially Islam among the Bugis community was in contrast with the spread of Islamic faith in Java. Islam was propagated among the people of Bugis-Makassar in a top-down pattern, from the ruler and then to the common people (Sewang, 2005), while in Java it was the opposite. The impact of the dissemination as it happened among the Bugis community had consequences at the level of understanding of the teachings of the religion itself. Although the spread of the Islamic religion took place swiftly, but the level of understanding of the people was poor. This is reflected from the

religious behavior that remains strong on a formal level and tends to leave the substance of religion itself. The Muslim community of Bugis, for example, in its religious practice, stresses on how to display religion through feasts, rather than how to understand the substance of Islam in terms of its application in the social life of the community. It can also be seen in the implementation of the pilgrimage (*hajj*) which tends to showcase the aspects of a person's ability to perform acts of worship rather than the core implementation of the *Hajj* itself which should show sincerity and sacrifice.

Bugis is identical with Islam (Hasse J, 2009). This statement may be affected by the reality that the majority of adherents of the Bugis community is Islam. However, in some places, there are also followers of other religions besides Islam, such as Hinduism and Christianity. The presence of religions (especially Islam and Christianity) in Indonesia has change the map of the established religious life earlier. Hinduism and Buddhism, which were previously embraced by many, had to go through a change after religious missions were introduced by the Muslim *da'i* and Christian missionary. Encounter of religions has an impact on the change of patterns of people's religious relations.

Currently, in Sidenreng Rappang District we still find a local religion which is the remains of Hindu teachings. The local religion is called Tolotang Towani embraced by the Bugis community in this place. In this District, about 10-15% of the population is adherents of the Towani Tolotang. Adherents of Tolotang Towani are classified into Hinduism. Towani Tolotang is known as the local religion has existed until today with various attributes such as steadfastness with tradition, solidarity, and a commitment to brotherhood, as well as compliance with the legacy of their ancestors.

The arrival of new religions (for example, Islam which is regarded as 'imported' religion) certainly gives a new color in the dynamics of social relations in any society. In many cases, new religions bring conflicts with the old ones. However, in some occasions, the encounter has generated the compromise in various forms. In its encounter, the relationship between Islam and local religions such as Tolotang Towani generated not only conflict, but also compromise. Relationship of the two religions which are in conflict can obviously be seen from the very basic teachings which are principle such as the obligation of worship.

Meanwhile, the pattern which is more appealing to look at is the trend both for mutual compromise in some issues such as the celebration of holy day especially the *Eidul fitri* which also involves the Towani Tolotang. They also prepare food and open their doors for visit during the holy day. Similarly, regarding funeral arrangements, there are similarities with the Muslims. When Muslims die,

they are buried almost in the same as the Towani Tolotang, though there is a little difference in the procession. It also distinguishes the treatment of dead bodies between the Towani Tolotang and the Hindus who generally, especially in Bali, burn the corpse.

Judging by the above phenomenon, especially the procession of funeral which is very different between Towani Tolotang and that of Hindus in Bali, then we have a fundamental question about the relationship between Towani Tolotang and Balinese Hindus. This issue can at least be answered by looking at how the Towani Tolotang equip themselves with education. Many Towani parents send their children to Hindu schools or colleges such as the State Institute of Hindu Dharma (IHDN) in Bali. According to one of the lecturers of IHDN, Gde Suwindia, "There are several students attending college here who come from Sidrap, and from time to time the number has been increasing". This confirms the notion that there is something that brings the Towani Tolotang closer to the Balinese Hindu, though this can also be seen as a structural impact of efforts of the State to affiliate the Towani Tolotang into Hinduism.

The presence of the Towani Tolotang provides an opportunity for Islam to show its character as a religion of *dakwah* on the one hand, and as a religion that respects the differences on the other, as stated in the Qur'an especially *surah al Kafirun* and *al Ikhlas*. In its journey, the relationship of both religions experienced a lot of ups and downs. Both had been involved in conflict before. However, the conflicts did not intensify as both parties, especially the religious leaders, quickly resolved the disagreements. Though these religions have conflict with each other, in many ways, they mutually accommodate each other's interests so there have been dynamics of open relationship. This can be seen at least from the way the followers of both Islam and Towani Tolotang live side by side in a neighborhood.

REVITALIZING LOCAL WISDOM TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE CULTURE

Local wisdom actually still exists in any society (Jim Ife, 2002 in Permana, 2010: 4) and has a potential to build harmonious relations between ethnic groups as well as between (followers of) religions. In the local wisdom found in Bugis society, there is a spirit of openness and mutual recognition of the existence of other groups. However, the spirit is no longer able to survive due to the weak local reference (Abdullah, 2006) which had been confronted by market penetration, not only in urban areas, but the rural areas as well.

In the context of relations between different religions, the presence of the 'official religions' such as Islam and Christianity, can be seen as an expansion

of these religions that directly “destroy” the order of local religions which have existed earlier. Of course, there are serious issues emerging from the encounter of the two different religious characters. One of the issues that pose potential conflict is the desire of each religion to continue to exist and develop in accordance with its respective teachings. However, it is difficult to materialize given the *dakwah* character of the official religions are always emphasized when dealing with local religions, no exception between the Muslims and the Tolotang Towani.

Until today, the relations between Towani Tolotang and Muslims have no problem. According to the author, there are three things that underlie good relations between the two religious followers. First, the contextualization of values. This can be realized at least by making local wisdom a shared issue. The spirit of *sipakatau*’ is a value that has a lot of meanings. Through local wisdom, human beings should be placed on the top and central position in the dynamic social life. In this concept, however, the difference is reduced by the spirit of respect for the values of humanities and is no longer about the question of identity differences. In this concept, the emphasis is on respecting and appreciating each other without challenging the backgrounds concerned, let alone religious differences.

Another concept that must be maintained among the Bugis community is *sipakalebbi* which means mutual respect. This cannot be separated from the practice of the *sipakatau*’ spirit. By positioning humans in their nature as God’s most perfect creations, is the same as giving the appreciation to any person without taking their identity as a criterion that often serves as the beginning of discriminatory treatment. *Sipakalebbi*’ or mutual respect is very potential and suitable in conditions where the (religious) communities now often show that their groups is the most prominent. Such claim will be eroded by those who practice *sipakatau*’ and *sipakalebbi*’.

Another local wisdom that is always emphasized among Bugis people is *sipakainge*’, i.e. the spirit to continually remind each other. Mutual reminding here is very relevant to the terminology “*amar ma’ruf nahi munkar*” in Islamic teachings. The spirit of *sipakainge*’ is practiced not only for example by a *da’i* during a religious sermon, but also in the context of broader social interaction. Reminding each other in *sipakainge*’ includes concern for anyone to always be reminded to do good things. The three forms of local wisdom discussed above are the manifestation of the main spirit of *padaidi*’ (fellowship, brotherhood). This means that whoever the person is, they remain the same creature (human being) so all forms of difference between people, including differences in religion, fall into the spirit of humanity.

Second, by making diversity a source of strength, not division. Indonesia, prior to becoming a nation, was inhabited by diverse ethnic groups; Aceh, Javanese, Bugis, Dayak, Papua, and so on. They live in each different region. As awareness emerged especially during colonization, there arose a number of leaders who sought freedom from the colonizers. They did not even challenge the differences based on religious affiliation, but the awareness was built on the basis of the same fate that gave birth to a struggle shared by the groups mentioned to ensure the state of Indonesia was established. The country finally successfully concluded that these differences should be a basis for unity as stated in the national slogan: *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity).

The difference should be turned into adhesive between the adherents of religions that have a very different doctrine. Conflicts based on differences of (religion) can be reduced if other noble values are highlighted. For example religious differences among the Bugis are 'eroded' by ethnic similarities that still have strong influence on them. Referring to the practice of the values contained in the three types of local wisdom above, we then can take a conclusion that managing the differences into strengths is not difficult. Religious differences among the Bugis community has already existed since a long time ago. The advent of Islam, for example, is considered part of the dynamics of life (*way of Allah*). Prior to Islam, the Towani Tolotang had become part of a community of Bugis, particularly in Wajo at that time (Mudzhar, 2002). The Towani Tolotang experienced challenges when new religions arrived and were embraced by the Bugis community.

The difference can be a source of power that joins all elements in society especially when they are involved in activities in which each member of the community shares the work. In the construction of social facilities such as roads, for example, all should actively be involved so as to awaken the spirit of togetherness. In fact, the Towani Tolotang is active in the construction of mosques in some of the villages in their territory. This should be an example for the development of cross-religious communication that is not only limited to the level of discourse, but is also manifested in the form of real practice in the midst of the community. In the executive office, several people of the Towani Tolotang have certain positions. At the legislative level, in each election there are at least two politicians of the Towani Tolotang became members of PARLIAMENT. This can be seen as a form of commitment together with the exclusion of religion in building a regional egoism with the spirit of togetherness.

Third, opening up to other cultures. In this case there is an attitude which promotes the possibility of a more open relationship with the culture from

outside. In other words, this is called *accommodative culture* (Amirin, 2012: 9) that applies to nearly all the ethnic groups in Indonesia. Though Javanese culture is dominant in Indonesia, for example, but it should not suppress other cultures. Rather, it should give an opportunity for others to grow and thrive. Not only does this take place in social life, but it also provides opportunities (read: freedom) in religion. Similarly, in South Sulawesi, the majority ethnic Bugis converted to Islam but did not use their position as a means and a reason to suppress the minority. In celebration of religious holidays such as *Eidul fitri* holiday for example, it is celebrated by both Muslims and the Towani Tolotang. They visit each other and give special Bugis food to each other.

In the context of the relationship between Islam and Towani Tolotang, the three assumptions above should be able to be used to measure their social relations. Currently, both are of the same ethnic group, namely Bugis. It also serves as one of the important factors of the sustainable relationship between the two. That is, both Muslims and Towani Tolotang should put forward the spirit of togetherness and shared values that distinction (religion) is a law of nature that is inevitable but can be compromised. Therefore, it is clear that religious differences could be used for building a good relationship, thus the differences could serve as the main force in creating a peaceful society based on mutual respect and understanding. Thus, it is the relationship and understanding that should be improved, and only with a shared commitment can this nation step into a better life in the future.

However, those values cannot run by itself. In this case, it requires the intervention of the other parties such as the society, religion, and state. Community intervention is needed in the framework of how these values are put into practice. It is also the case with religion, as an institution that is entrenched and widespread in society, religion has a strategic position to be able to force believers to obey their respective holy doctrines. Lastly, the state intervention is absolutely necessary in the process of internalization of values. However, the previous stage that must be completed is the institutionalization (Berger, 1994) of the values that penetrated into each individual. The process of institutionalization of the community can be made through the following stages: known, understood, obeyed, and appreciated (Sulistiyowati, 2003: 103).

CLOSING REMARKS

Local wisdom is an important milestone for the implementation of noble values in a particular community. Local wisdom passed down from earlier generation has various strengths in building a more harmonious and humanistic relationship. In the context of religious life, local wisdom turns

out to be able to save the spirit of tolerance. This at least may be found in the dynamics of religious social interaction between the Muslims and the Towani Tolotang in South Sulawesi. Both faiths are no longer stuck on formalized religious differences, but rather grow and develop in an atmosphere of competitive religious practices and local noble values.

The life principles of the Muslim Bugis, as described above, always uphold the spirit of the recognition and appreciation of others. The Towani Tolotang, despite having different beliefs in the middle of Muslim majorities, still have a place and freedom to observe their religious teachings. Muslims do not consider the presence of the Towani Tolotang as 'the enemy'. In fact, both the Muslim and the Towani Tolotang coexist with open communication. The Towani Tolotang have been regarded as brothers and sisters and have a place in the middle of the Bugis community majority. Both religions can live side by side with their respective principles without provoking others with good and bad claims. Here we can find how to put forward the respect of all forms of diversity in order to build the dignity of humanity as real implications of the practice of the essence of religions.

However, local wisdom that exists in each community continues to experience erosion in different conditions. There is a tendency that today's generation assumes that the legacy of the ancestors is no longer relevant with the context of today's modern life. This has resulted in the local wisdom being no longer implemented in society, so it has somehow lost its 'wisdom'. In fact, the contextualization of local wisdom values is much more important in the development of the nation, rather than adopting the values from outside which have unproven effectiveness in this nation's civilization. This is where the weak spots need to be filled through a variety of efforts to build good relations among religious people, one of which, through the internalization of local wisdom in life so that peace and prosperity can be enjoyed together.

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