

Peace in Religious Diversity: A Study of Community Inter-Communal Bonds in Thekelan Hamlet Semarang

Grita Gusti Gandi

Universitas Gadjah Mada
grita.gusti.gandi@mail.ugm.ac.id

Diah Kusumaningrum

Universitas Gadjah Mada
diabkei@ugm.ac.id

Abstract:

This study aims to examine civic engagement through inter-communal ties that occur in one of the hamlets in Indonesia as a representation of a peaceful area. The inter-communal ties that occur in everyday life and are institutionalized show an effort to unite society in diversity. This is important to scrutinize as an applied example for other regions in Indonesia on a small scale about addressing diversity in one region to create peace starting at the grassroots level. The community and religious leaders in Thekelan Hamlet, Batur Village, Getasan District, Semarang Regency, jointly carry out anjangsana activities that can invite the community to unite in commemorating the holidays of each religion in turn. The people of Thekelan Hamlet are a heterogeneous society that adheres to Islam, Buddhism, Christian, and Catholicism. This study uses an ethnographic approach in observing, documenting, and conducting in-depth interviews with informants. The results showed that anjangsana was an institutionalized daily activity. The grassroots community together with religious leaders designed these activities to increase inter-communal ties between communities and maintain peace. The recommendation for further research is to expand the scope of civic engagement studies by analyzing inter-communal ties in regions throughout Indonesia to find appropriate ways to implement peace efforts. The results showed that anjangsana was an institutionalized daily activity. The grassroots community together with religious leaders designed these activities to increase inter-communal ties between communities and maintain peace. The recommendation for further research is to expand the scope of civic engagement studies by analyzing inter-communal ties in regions throughout Indonesia to find appropriate ways to implement peace efforts.

Key Words: *Anjangsana, Civic Engagement, Inter-communal Ties, Diversity*

INTRODUCTION

The issue of conflict and peace in Indonesia with a very diverse composition of society is a challenge for all stakeholders in Indonesia. Policymakers at the government level together with academics, activists, and community or religious leaders work together to resolve conflicts and design a peace process for the stability of the state and nation. The synergy between these various forces is the key to the building of strategic peace in the future, not only in Indonesia but also in other parts of the world (Al Qurtuby, 2012).

Efforts to synergize peace require a lot of analysis, cultural, social, political, and economic negotiations between the community, religious leaders, local government, and the central government to achieve peace. Usually, the process requires mediators, negotiators, and academics from civil society organizations to formulate appropriate actions. "If you want peace, then learn about peace (Panggabean, 2018)" is one of the academics and activists of Indonesia who is engaged in peace. The quote illustrates that it is important for us to study peace patterns from an early age to be applied in the smallest community to manage conflicts or avoid conflicts that lead to open violence and claim lives. Galtung (1996) defines peace as an absence of violence. The concept of Galtung peace is inseparable from three concepts of violence, namely direct violence (physical violence) with *peacekeeping* as a solution, structural violence (contradiction, social discrimination due to access to basic human needs which is obstructed by social structures) with peace-building as a solution, and cultural violence (cultural violence such as religion, ideology, language, and art as justification for acts of violence) with peace-making as a solution. The article in this article describes the analysis of the inter-communal bonding process as the basis of peace in Thekelan Hamlet. This paper also aims to complement previous studies that have seen the harmonization of communal ties that are intentionally created after the conflict and or are always created for stability in the context of inter-communal harmonization to negate conflicts. The case in Thekelan Hamlet is an example of *civic engagement* through strengthening inter-communal ties inherited in daily activities and then institutionalized into an associational activity and becoming a cultural product. Galtung calls it *cultural peace* (Galtung, 1990).

Studies on conflict resolution and peace efforts have been written by academics in Indonesia. However, so far the study of communal ties in society has been studied mostly after the conflict. It is intended as peace efforts that are carried out as a form of post-conflict reconciliation (Al Qurtuby, 2013; Antlöv, 2003; Bräuchler, 2015; Kusumaningrum et al., 2017; Manuputty, Salampessy, Ali-Fauzi, & Rafsadi, 2014; Permana, Setyowati, Slamet, & Juhadi, 2017; Yamashita, 2012). In other words, the communal ties that are formed after the conflict are always sought, designed, and created as recovery after the conflict, which is becoming as the favored theme of discussion than the existing peace studies. For example, peace studies from the grassroots, cultural tradition practices, civil society organizations that maintain peace and still survive today (Ainiyah, 2017; Dewi, 2018; Haryati, 2017; Hermawan, 2017; Saihu & Sahin, 2020; Santosa, 2015). Learning peace from an early age within the smallest community is through simple ways taken from the cultural traditions of the local community such as maintaining good relationships, cooperation, and celebrating certain rituals. Those are known as communal bonding (Lussier et al., 2017; Varshney, 2002). Besides being able to strengthen harmony, good relations between communities can also be a foundation for defending oneself from conflicts and prejudices targeting issues of racial differences. Likewise, the active role of figures who teach about religion is becoming the most important position in determining the pattern of harmonious relationships in society (Abu-Nimer, 2001). Therefore, learning peace from an early age that involves direct community interaction is a solid foundation of peace for each region. Also, the community can find appropriate conflict resolution strategies using agreed traditional methods and/or nonviolent methods, which according to Gene Sharp there are 198 methods (Sharp, 1973). From many previous studies, there is minimal research that discusses the formation and maintenance of relationships between

groups that form strong inter-communal bonds and can become the foundation and maintain peace from the grassroots level.

The process of strengthening inter-communal ties allows people to live side by side in all conditions with different backgrounds. They will be accustomed to heterogeneity or differences in religious, ethnic, racial, and class backgrounds to build harmony. Varshney (2002) in his book on ethnic conflict and Hindu-Muslim civic life in India tries to dismantle the *civic engagement* that has been formed by twisting the linkages of network integration between civil society structures and identity or communal violence. The network is classified into two, namely intra-communal and inter-communal. Varshney (2002) emphasizes that the focus of his study is not on intra-communal but on inter-communal. Inter-communal ties are the most influential thing in determining conflict and peace in a region. Inter-communal bonds are divided into two, namely daily and associational. The first inter-communal bond takes the form of simple and routine interactions in everyday life such as greetings, visits, cooperation, eating together, being involved in games and the same realm of work, and so on where all of those undifferentiated among identity backgrounds. The second inter-communal bond is more complicated, namely the involvement of the community in an institution or association that binds them to work together, and the stronger the institutionalization of these activities, the stronger the communal ties that involve them. This will have an impact on the dependence on cooperation. Examples of associational inter-communal ties include business associations, professional organizations, trade unions, cadre-based politics, and celebration committees to clubs that supply certain hobbies. To deepen its application, this article will answer the question of how can peace efforts by strengthening inter-communal ties in Thekelan hamlet occur?. This question responds to the formation of *civic engagement* as a foundation for peace by the grassroots community in Thekelan hamlet. The hypothesis of this research states that the people of Thekelan Hamlet with their inter-communal ties are still in a state of *negative peace*. With the argument that the effort to associate daily activities is a preventive measure against conflict handling. It can be inferred that there are conflict explosions handled with short-term non-violence measurements.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze inter-communal ties as the basis for civic engagement in Thekelan Hamlet which involves the community through simple activities carried out together. The choice of research location in Thekelan Hamlet, Batur Village, Getasan District, Semarang Regency, which can be said to be a representation of diversity in Indonesia. There is no majority and minority terms there because the population adheres to almost equal numbers of four religions. Different societal backgrounds do not matter when the principles of harmony are met. This is part of the characteristics of the people of Thekelan Village which are dominated by Javanese people. Besides, the principle of prioritizing togetherness and resentment also seems to emerge in the Thekelan village community, such as cooperation and mutual respect. Various activities designed by community leaders and religious leaders together with the community have been able to build inter-communal bonds as a pillar of peace. The focus of this research is on the phenomenon of why the people of Thekelan Hamlet can coexist harmoniously with each other?. Therefore, this paper shows the communal ties of the community in Thekelan Hamlet, a cultural adaptation strategy from the grassroots level with community leaders and religious leaders to maintain harmony in Thekelan Hamlet. This research uses field observational research techniques, participatory observation, in-depth interviews with informants, field shots and some secondary sources uploaded online. In the process of

observational data collecting and participatory observation, researchers *live in* one of the houses of the community leaders in Thekelan Hamlet. Researchers also looked for secondary data sources through social media channels that promote Thekelan as a peaceful village on the slopes of Mount Merbabu, namely through social media Youtube and online news, both for educational and entertainment purposes. Apart from that, no less important, written documents such as scientific articles, academic final assignments, and online articles about Thekelan were also collected.

DISCUSSION

Thekelan and Thekelan Hamlet Society

Thekelan Hamlet is known by the wider community as one of the destinations for Mount Merbabu climbing. It is located on the slopes of Mount Merbabu bordering the Kopeng area in the west, Nglelo Village in the east, Selodhuwur Hamlet in the north, and Mount Merbabu in the south. The topographical condition of the Thekelan hamlet with its geographical location certainly has a distinct nuance of the mountainous rural community. The people of Thekelan Hamlet are very heterogeneous even though they are located on the slopes of Mount Merbabu and seem like an isolated village. The history of Thekelan Village comes from a hereditary folklore story called *Thikilan*, namely the history of a village elder's meeting with a Kiai and the meaning of *thekelan* which means *thukul* can be narrated as "growing". The people of Thekelan hamlet are led by a Kadus who is directly elected and promoted by the people. A Kadus is chosen based on the community's belief in the practice of noble values that he maintains to protect the hamlet and the hamlet community. These values are believed to provide safety, harmony, and harmony in the relations of every member of society who has different backgrounds. Besides, maintaining noble values is also believed to strengthen the family ties of the Thekelan hamlet community.

The community in Thekelan hamlet is a heterogeneous society even though it is included in a rural area that seems isolated from the crowd. A total of 709 people adhere to various religions, 247 people are Muslim, 329 people are Buddhist, 129 people are Christians, and 4 people are Catholics. Almost all members of the hamlet community in an equal quantity adhere to Islam, Buddhism, Christianity and, adherents to Catholic minorities. This balanced number makes religious and social activities in the hamlet very diverse and celebrations are followed by everyone, without exception. For their livelihoods, the hamlet community is dominated by farming and raising livestock, although there are only a few people who are Civil Servants. The part-time livelihood of the Thekelan community is a jointly managed tourism development. The management of this tourism sector is very interesting because there is a concept that contributes to tourists' understanding of diversities. The system employed in the tourism industry is *live in* which accommodates the diversity of rural nuances and mountain views in Thekelan. Its location on the slopes of Mount Merbabu is also one of the mountain climbing routes, making this area open to the public and accustomed to receiving influences from outside the region.

The development of the economy in Thekelan village is supported by agricultural products from vegetables such as cabbage, green onions, mustard greens, and so on. Meanwhile, the livestock commodity is cattle farming. The people of Thekelan Hamlet also develop a tourism business, namely *live in* with the local community. The diversity of society is one positive thing that is used to introduce Thekelan hamlet to tourists, one of which is about the diversity of religions. The community also opens doors for tourists who

want to take part in ritual ceremonies and religious celebrations that are open to the public. This diversity provides an understanding of high tolerance for tourists who are invited to *live in* with local people of different religions. They learn about respect for the choices of people who are different from them, respect for everyone's background to cultivating higher moral values to create a harmonious life with lucrative nature tourism. The live-in placement is also arranged in such a way. For example, tourists who are Muslim will stay in the homes of residents who are Christian or Buddhist, and Christian tourists with residents who are Muslim or Buddhist, and so on. The purpose of this placement includes teaching tolerance so that it can understand the meaning of being related to religions that are different from those of tourists.

The Thekelan community is included in the category of rural community groups. Such a society is called Tönnies in classical sociology as a *Gemeinschaft* society, namely rural people who have intimacy in their daily relationships together (Christenson, 1984). Hamlet leaders are elected directly by the community on a voluntary basis without any general election process. Therefore, the legitimacy or interference of the central government to regulate the implementation of cultural traditions, religious rituals, and political agendas is minimal there. The interest in filling the leadership position in the hamlet is also only for completing administrative needs. This is the same as giving leeway to socio-religious-cultural expressions that develop in local ways. With the direct appointment of the Kadus, the tolerance process can be properly managed according to the needs of the Thekelan community. Also, the influence of the presence of religious leaders who contributed greatly is impacting the development of socio, religious and cultural relations positively. These figures work together to maintain the peace of the hamlet with religious and cultural symbols. Besides, they also build these expressions in various arts by village youths. Likewise with activities that local people introduce to tourists or newcomers are traditional cultural activities.

Strengthening Inter-communal Bonds through Thekelan Community Harmony

The people of Thekelan hamlet are predominantly Javanese and have several shared concepts in social life such as maintaining harmony, always working together and respecting each other. The implementation of the Javanese community concept has also been an important factor in the formation of civic engagement of the Thekelan people since long ago at the grassroots level. Also, the Thekelan people who embrace four religions and complement each other like the Javanese who must be in harmony, cooperation, and respect are the essence of the practice of peace. According to Varshney, inter-communal ties have a strong influence in determining the occurrence of conflict and peace in a region. Inter-communal bonds are divided into two, namely daily ties and associational bonds. Of course, In this case, it requires the roles of community leaders and religious leaders as supporters of the daily and associational activities of the Thekelan community. Without this support, community intimacy will only last in daily life.

Village communities, community leaders, and religious leaders are very united in showing mutual harmony between residents. Designing and jointly carrying out activities in the hamlet, such as commemorating religious holidays, building houses of worship, celebrating hamlet traditional ceremonies, rites of passage, celebrating the Republic of Indonesia's Independence Day, and so on. Besides, artistic activities such as Ketoprak, Karawitan, Tambourine, Drumband, Drumblek, Kuda Lumping, Kubro Dance, Warokan, Jaranan, Gambyong, Dangdut Wijadari, and so on are also presented to tourists according

to their respective stage schedules. These activities are managed by youth and village officials to fill their spare time as well as develop performance tours in the hamlet.

Sacred religious activities (because there is a view of the Thekelan community not to interfere with the religious activities of every individual and religion is the matter of every individual) are also being upheld by society. Uniquely, in intra-communal activities, they still discuss tolerance and co-existence by religious leaders. Some non-religious traditional activities that have been carried out from generation to generation are still preserved. There are so many traditions, I classify them into two based on the time of implementation, namely simple traditions and large traditions. Simple traditions are carried out regularly or more than once a year. Usually, this tradition only requires a small fee and little involvement of people in it. These simple traditions include *puputan* babies, *numur-uwuri*, and *kenduri*. Meanwhile, a large tradition is a tradition that is only carried out once a year. Usually, this tradition is only celebrated on special days and requires a lot of money, and involves all the people of Thekelan Hamlet. Some of these great traditions include *meriti dusun*, cutting dreadlocks and, working together to build houses of worship.

A very diverse community works hand in hand in building good harmony between religions and between levels of society to strengthen the harmony of the community led by respective religious leaders and hamlet community leaders as the joint responsibility. With the condition of the community like this, it is natural and even obligatory for everyone to cooperate when there is a religious celebration, cultural tradition ritual, or the implementation of the construction of a house of worship. Likewise, congratulating people who celebrate is something that should not be absent. These routine activities are carried out by the community consciously. The frequency of understanding about good religion is a plus because of the cohesiveness and harmony that can stand up and bind them together. Harmonization, tolerance, working together and respecting each other are becoming the special traits of Thekelan hamlet society.

Peace in an area can occur if inter-communal ties are strong, and vice versa, the weaker the ties, the greater the potential for conflict. Daily ties such as playing, greeting neighbors, *nonggo*, working together in the fields, farms, petty diving, and *rewang* are daily activities and define the intimacy of the relationship in each interaction. Meanwhile, associational ties such as religious and cultural ritual activities, arts, kinship, and managing a business together are another bond that is more important to maintain because it directly impacts the lives of many people. One unique phenomenon in the findings above is the associational family. This uniqueness can be seen from the presence of family members of different religions in 30 families. Besides, interfaith marriages are also commonplace in the Thekelan community. This is proof that the strong inter-communal relations of the Thekelan people have legitimized the very taboo differences in Indonesian culture. Basic things such as diversity education, parenting styles, internalization of noble moral values seem to have been obtained directly in every day and associational life in the Thekelan environment outside of the socializing role of parents.

Other associational inter-communal ties are in the fields of economy, agriculture, and tourism including climbing and tolerance education. It is also including agriculture concerns cooperation, farmer network organization, and distribution. The relationship is counted as an inter-communal bond. Meanwhile, climbing includes managerial management and the openness of the Thekelan community to newcomers. The concept of *live in* tourists activities, whether climbers or those who deliberately come for a tour offers the concept of tolerance education, namely learning tolerance by living in and participating

in religious activities there. The tourism sector has collaborated several times with CSO organizations such as Kampoeng Percik by compiling a program for young friends. In the program, the themes offered are diversity and tolerance, following the concept of Thekelan education. The collaboration illustrates that the Thekelan community is open to anyone other than tourists and climbers. The Thekelan community is also open to organizations that carry themes that match Thekelan's identity. Also, Thekelan has also built itself closely with local cultural practices. It is due to this local culture or ancestral tradition that contributes to long-rooted inter-communal ties.

Anjangsana as Meeting Space and Peace Base

The strong guideline held by the Thekelan community is togetherness in celebrating religious celebrations while regarding the choice of religion and worship is a private matter for everyone that cannot be disturbed. This is because apart from the religious celebration of different people and the construction of houses of worship, the matter of diversity of religious choices in one family is also a common thing. In fact, in the field, there are about 30 heads of families who have family members of different religions and live in one house. It is not surprising that religious differences have become a positive thing and become the strengths of the Thekelan community. That is why things like building houses of worship can also be done together with neighbors who work together regardless of religious status. Almost everyone has the same sense of ownership of the houses of worship that have been built collectively. A sense of kinship towards people who have *gawe* is a natural thing. The mosque, church, and monastery were built jointly by the Thekelan people. Not only men or fathers, but women or mothers also carry out the practice of togetherness. This condition also applies to religious ritual celebrations. The Thekelan people usually flock to cook together and build *terop* as a celebration of religious rituals. If those who celebrate are Buddhists, then Muslims, Christians, and Catholics will be busy arranging everything and vice versa. They work hand in hand to create harmony in religious ritual celebrations without interfering with the religious rituals. Some examples that are often carried out are during the celebration of each religious holiday, whether it be Vesak, Idul Fitri, or Christmas, the people of Thekelan Hamlet will hold *Anjangsana*.

Anjangsana is an activity of visiting each other between religious believers who still celebrate their holiday by providing food or just congratulating people. *Anjangsana* was originally initiated in 2006 by Buddhists for Muslims during the celebration of Eid. Buddhists wait for Muslims to finish praying Eid in front of the mosque, then congratulate and apologize right away. *Anjangsana* is currently regulated by the hamlet community committee with the aim to strengthen harmony between religious communities, increase empathy, and organizing in order. Another example of *anjangsana* on religious holidays is when the Vesak celebration. Non-Buddhist people come and line up in front of the monastery waiting for Buddhists to finish praying and leave the monastery. They met in front of the monastery and reached out to each other to greet and congratulate the celebration as a sign of respect. Then Buddhists invite non-Buddhists to come to their houses to have a meal together, that's how *anjangsana* is carried out *door to door*, taking turns giving congratulations in the courtyard of the house of worship and visiting the houses of each celebrating person. Exactly such activities are also carried out on Eid and Christmas celebrations. Usually, with deep empathy, the women, apart from shaking hands, also feel the emotion until they are sobbing. This compassion is evidence of a sense of togetherness, mutual guilt, mutual forgiveness as part of the Thekelan community.

The practice of 'local culture' as a means for peace is becoming increasingly popular in peace studies and conflict science disciplines (Bräuchler, 2015). In addition to *anjangsana*, the practice of local cultural rites in Thekelan hamlet is marked by routinely carrying out rituals such as *merti dusun*, *saparan*, *puputan pasar bayi*, cutting dreadlocks, and several other rites of passage. A rite of passage is a transitional ceremony or ritual that occurs when a person leaves one group to enter another group. This involves a significant change in status in society including the initiation rite, for example in this context is the ceremony of cutting the dreadlocks. This rite is always accompanied by the creation and meaning of symbols in the ritual (Turner, 1969). The rituals that are still being carried out today are a sign that the Thekelan people are still maintaining their ancestral teaching traditions well. Besides, the richness of these ancestral cultural traditions is also developed into artistic skills which are followed by most of the young people and children of the Thekelan hamlet. The number of arts created illustrates the reality of the diverse community of Thekelan hamlet and grows with creativity as an associational inter-communal bond. The stronger the bond, the closer it is to the definition of peace. Galtung sees peace from the process that occurs in society by defining whether this peace includes positive peace or negative peace. Peace is positive if there is no structural or cultural violence with a stable state of society. If there are still outbreaks of conflict, strategies to avoid conflict, or constructions to build harmony, then these conditions are included in negative peace. This is still happening in Thekelan society. Because the Thekelan community is a heterogeneous *gemeinschaft* community and always gets influence from outside by opening tourist destinations as well as an entrance area for climbing Mount Merbabu.

Revitalization of traditional institutions and conflict resolution mechanisms brought to the surface to rebuild bridges between religions. (Bräuchler, 2015) *Anjangsana* is a tradition of *salam-salaman* on the holidays of every religion as part of binding harmony accompanied by peace actors at the hamlet level. This activity was officially organized and formed by a committee in 2006. In the beginning, it originated from the daily ties that were formed on every holiday, which was limited to visits and congratulations. The strong daily ties of each person led several residents to organize these activities. The response and enthusiasm of the community have grown to this day because of the support from various elements of society. The ties that are formed in inter-communal relations are the strengthening of the routine activities ties, starting from neighbors often meeting each other during holiday celebrations then being organized or managed and ultimately bringing various benefits to increase the economy by becoming a tourist village that is exposed through the media. The implication of the committee or the management of *anjangsana* becoming a mandatory joint activity is a form of cultural peace. Cultural peace is aspects of culture that serve to justify and legitimize direct peace and structural peace. (Galtung, 1990)

The diversity of different community backgrounds with a high level of harmony in Thekelan hamlet is the ultimate weapon for all stakeholders in fending off the issues of conflict, identity politic violence, and emphasizing harmony, togetherness, and peace. The role of religious and community leaders in building peacebuilding and legitimizing *anjangsana* is one thing that has a very positive impact. As an implication, the daily practices of the Thekelan people are an opportunity to invite tourists and witness the diversity of views in Thekelan. The harmony that is fostered because of this diversity has become a great potential for the Thekelan hamlet community in developing tourism management.

CONCLUSION

The people of Thekelan Semarang Hamlet have strong inter-communal ties, both daily and associational. This is formed from the existence of various meeting spaces between people of different religions. *Anjangsana* is one concrete example of a strong inter-communal bond. This is because *anjangsana* formed from the level of daily ties can change to an associational level. This change requires public awareness as well as community leaders about the importance of peace in diversity. Although it cannot be said to be positive peace (which is still in negative peace), however, with strong inter-communal ties it will automatically form a peaceful system. This peaceful system originates from the *grassroots level* and is directly driven by community leaders, hamlet and religion government in Thekelan. The peaceful system that was formed in Thekelan Hamlet goes hand in hand with the existence of meeting spaces, both daily and associational. Therefore, it will allow communication and verification of divisive issues that can lead to open violence peacefully.

This research is still in a narrow scope due to limited time and field research which is collided by the COVID-19 virus pandemic in all countries, especially Indonesia. Therefore, further research is needed. The recommendation for further research is to expand the scope of *civic engagement* studies by analyzing inter-communal ties in other parts of Indonesia to find appropriate ways to implement peace efforts. Lastly, it is necessary to raise other topics such as conflict management and also from a religious point of view.

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