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Banjar-Jowo-Karo (BAJOKA): The Tolerance and Harmony between
Three Ethnicities in Paya Itik Village, Galang District, Deli Serdang
Regency

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Abstract

Diversity in social life is often used as an excuse for some people not to be unified. The diversity that is often considered is religious diversity and ethnic diversity. For various reasons, diversity is often used as a tool to legitimize actions that can lead to the breakdown of harmonious relations between communities. In fact, the differences that arise from the diversity in one community group should be used as a force to complement each other within the community group, so that a harmonious relationship will live on. This is what can be seen in the community in Paya Itik Village, Galang District, Deli Serdang Regency, which consists of Banjar, Karo, and Javanese ethnicity. The social interaction of the people in the village is very harmonious, even though the three ethnic groups have different backgrounds. The differences from the three ethnic groups are then merged and bound by a concept called *BAJOKA*. This concept is what makes both internal and external strengths for the community in Paya Itik Village. This paper discusses how the village communities respond to diversity so as to create a harmonious life in society. The discussion starts from the historical background, cultural and social life of the community, *BAJOKA* as the concept of the Internal and External Strength of Paya Itik Villagers, as well as Tolerance and Harmony between Ethnicity and Religion in Paya Itik Village.

Keywords: diversity; BAJOKA; tolerance; harmony

1. Introduction

The moved of the Deli Maatschappij office to Deli land or the city of Medan at this time was the beginning of the development of the Deli land area into a city. In the 1880s, Deli Maatschappij made a central square or open field or square surrounded by a highway near his office with the name *Esplanade* which was designed to be the city centre. The succeed of this export-oriented tobacco plantation was reflected in the establishment of prestigious buildings and the many trading companies that have been built around the Esplanade. Along with this progress, construction facilities had also begun to be constructed, such as railway stations, roads, telephones, telegraph connections, and various other facilities.

Although there were already some Chinese before the opening of the plantation, the biggest wave of migration occurred through the recruitment of Chinese labourers (contract coolies) to work on the plantations. In relatively small numbers, the subsequent migration of Chinese people was due to a desire to take advantage of economic opportunities in East Sumatra, particularly the city of Medan, which was then known as Tanah Deli. The Chinese, in the structure of colonial society, were classified as Foreign Eastern (*oosterlinegen*), including the governor's subjects, and were placed as intermediaries between the European and the indigenous peoples. Their central role, both in supporting the plantation industry and as minority middlemen, requires them to gather in a community. Considering the importance of the Chinese in East Sumatra, especially the city of Medan, the colonial government then considered it necessary to elect and appoint leaders from among them. This policy was needed to strengthen their position in the structure of colonial society, support the expansion of plantations, facilitate organization, and, last but not least, resolve the disputes that occurred between them (Rudiansyah, 2017: 46).

The land of Deli then developed very rapidly and was modern and had multicultural characteristics with residents of various ethnicities living in this city, including Malays, Chinese, Indians, European, Javanese and others ethnics. They generally live in groups according to their respective ethnicities. The Chinese community occupied the south of the heart of the city (esplanade), to be precise in Kesawan which is a Chinatown. To the south of the city boundary, is an area for local communities, especially the Malay community, to be precise around the Maimoon Palace, the residence of Sultan Makmun Perkasa Alam (Sultan Deli). Thus the Deli land eventually became the capital of the Deli Sultanate. Meanwhile, the Indian community occupied an area known as Kampung Keling or Kampung Madras. The European community created its own region in Polonia by building many villas and gardens, so it was nicknamed Paris van Sumatra (Tanjung, 2019: 71).

One of the legendary Chinese ethnic figures who played an important role in the history of Medan city development which was formerly known as the land of Deli is Tjong Fung Nam or known as Tjong A Fie. He came from China, to be precise in Songkou village, Meixian, Guangdong Province, South China. Living in a family that was completely deprived, did not hinder his growth into a smart figure. Living with a large family of 9 (nine) people, made Tjong A Fie had to share and love each other from

an early age. Since childhood, Tjong A Fie had high ideals. Realizing that his life would not develop in Guangdong, he also wanted to migrate like his brother, Tjong Yong Hian (Rebecca, 2011: 77).

Since the companies owned by his brother were growing rapidly, Tjong Yong Hian then invited Tjong A Fie to come to the land of Deli to help him. In 1875, at the age of 15, Tjong A Fie left his hometown for the land of Deli. Armed with trading tactics passed down from his father, who was a genuine trader, the Tjong brothers were able to establish a successful business empire in the land of Deli.

Armed with his proximity to the Deli Sultanate, Tjong A Fie could easily manoeuvre to expand the plantation area he had pioneered. His ability to lobby is very supportive in this regard hence Tjong A Fie can own tea, tobacco, rubber, coconut and coffee plantations. Tjong A Fie had many employees who were not only from China but also from indigenous people.

After knowing the figure of Tjong A Fie as a legendary Chinese figure who contributed to the city of Medan, then Tjong A Fie's mansion, which is currently being converted into a museum, is located at JL. Jend. Ahmad Yani No.105, Kesawan, Medan city is a historical building as well as the evidence of Tjong A Fie's life journey. In this historical building, there are paintings of Chinese calligraphy, photographs, clothes of Tjong A Fie and his wife, and household furniture used by the Tjong A Fie family in the past. Not only that, but the Tjong A Fie Mansion museum also stores ancient writings or texts that were owned by Tjong A Fie, including a will he wrote before his death. Based on the explanation above, The writers wanted to explore more deeply about the writing or text of Chinese calligraphy which was found at the main entrance, front door and back of the left-wing of the Tjong A Fie Mansion museum building. This phenomenon was what later became the author's reference to study the writing or script of Chinese calligraphy through philological studies.

Information on the past is necessary to be disclosed because it is believed to hold historical and cultural values that are still relevant to the present. These values were stored in manuscripts or what we are better known as ancient manuscripts. However, not all people are in direct contact with the script. Only certain groups can access, and even store manuscripts, both in families inherited from generation to generation or in several scripts such as cultural institutions, museums, and libraries that store manuscripts.

Research on manuscripts if not initiated by philological research is considered imperfect. The breakdown in reading, material defects, and the appearance of a number of variations in the text demands a way to approach it. As a result, efforts to extract information stored in written works in the form of past products must deal with the conditions of the work, which apart from the material being informed is no longer understood by today's readers, also with its physical condition which is no longer perfect because it is damaged by time.

As philological research, at first, the researchers should determine which approaches that will be used in the research. This is important to make the research to be focused. It would be better if this research can formulate the approach first. This means, on the one hand, examining the original form of the text which is close to the original so as to obtain authentic text or information, on the other hand knowing the ways of changing the text that the copyists made in the existing versions. Hence, it was also identified the history of the text reading based on each reader or the reception. However, in a study, there are human limitations as authors. For example, limitations in terms of time, ability, cost, and so on. Therefore, it is hoped that this research will be more careful to overcome the existing limitations. Such as by limiting the research problem to be carried out, for example, one study could specialize in traditional philological studies and another in modern philological studies or oral philology. At least, with this specialization, research can be sharper and more specialized hence the results can be maximized. Thus, to obtain clear information on the text or information or manuscripts understudy can complement each other by converting the respective results from both traditional and modern philology research (Kosasih, 2014: 12).

Regarding its type of science, philology is motivated by a number of factors as follows: (1) The appearance of information about the past in a number of written works; (2) The presumption of values contained in the legacy of past writings that are still considered relevant to today's life; (3) The physical condition and substance of the information material due to a long period of time; (4) Socio-cultural factors behind the creation of past written works that no longer exist or are not the same as the socio-cultural background of today's readers; (5) The need to obtain accurate understanding results. (Baried, 1994: 3).

The basis for this work can determine the steps of the research. In traditional research, the way it works can be seen in previous research. The authors summarize their research starting with (1) an inventory of the manuscripts; (2) identification of the manuscript; (3) reconstruction/refining of manuscripts; (4) determine the script to be edited; (5) manuscript edition; (6) translation; and (7) explanation (Kosasih, 2014: 12).

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This research used the philology explanation theory from Henri Chambert-Loir, a philologist from France. Philology is not a goal, only a piece of equipment, this was brought up by Henri when he started his introduction to his edits to the manuscript of "*Hikayat Nakhoda Asik*" by Sapirin bin Usman and "*Hikayat Merpati Mas*" by Muhammad Bakir. Through this statement, he was not reducing the importance of philology. On the other hand, he was unravelling and placing the function of philology proportionally in scientific studies in general, as well as in text in particular. In this case, namely examining old texts to find out what the author intended to convey. Interpret and understand what is going on in Deli land concerning Tjong A Fie, the span of his life as a character in social as well as cultural interactions with the Deli land community. The single incident referred to is the study of philology contained in the Chinese calligraphy text/script at the main entrance, front door and back of the left-wing of Tjong A Fie's mansion, which is now converted into a historical museum.

2. Method

Primary and secondary data collection techniques were used in writing this article. The data was then obtained through observations in Paya Itik Village as the object area of research. The searching for supporting data was conducted to agencies deemed competent, such as the North Sumatra Provincial Library, the Medan City Library, the University of Sumatera Utara Library, and the Tengku Luckman Sinar Reading Park in order to collect archives, books, and other forms of publication that were in line with this research. In addition, the oral sources obtained from interviews with the local communities were also used. After all the data was obtained, the next process was to verify it, and then interpret it into writing.

3. Historical Background as the Constructer of Pluralistic Society

In the highlands of the Serdang region, lived the Simalungun and Karo people who remained subject to the Sultan. Both the Simalungun and the Karo people made a living from cultivating rice in the upstream area. [6] Karo people who lived upstream occasionally went downstream to carry out economic activities. Some of them who came downstream then chose to settle in these lower areas. In fact, many of them then converted to Islam. This was surely related to the economic and cultural motives that were believed to be able to get them a more decent life.[7]

Since the development of tobacco plantations pioneered by Jacobus Nienhuys in 1863, many foreign entrepreneurs wanted to follow in his footsteps to establish plantation companies to get big profits.[8] In 1873, there were already 15 *ondernemings* in East Sumatra where one of them was in the Serdang area. The number of *ondernemings* in the Serdang area then increased in 1884. There were 9 *ondernemings* operating in the Serdang area that year.[9]

The development of this plantation then faced with new problems. The lack of manpower on the plantations made *onderneming* owners bring in workers from outside the Serdang area itself. The procurement of labor from outside the area was carried out because the local people (Malays, Karo, Simalungun) were not willing to work as laborers. They chose to work on their own land to make a living. Moreover, several agricultural commodities, such as rice, pepper, and including tobacco itself, that were selling well in the market had been planted there.[10]

Initially, the workers were brought from Java Island, followed by the Chinese who were brought in from Penang. This change occurred because the workers from Java focused more on spreading Islam than on plantations. The arrival of the Chinese then occurred massively in the late 19th century due to the fact that Chinese workers were considered to be more skilled, thorough and resilient in doing the processing of tobacco leaves. [11] However, a shift towards the origin of labor occurred in the early 20th century. The plantations that were previously cultivated by Chinese workers were now taken over by the Javanese as before. Low recruitment costs, the daily wage system, and the family work system had contributed to this shift. This kind of aspects made the plantation companies more interested in bringing back workers from Java, rather than Chinese workers from Penang.[12]

The plantation owners also brought in Banjar people from Kalimantan Island aside from Java Island. The arrival of workers from Banjar had a slightly different system from workers from Java. The Banjar people were not bound by work contracts like the ones from Java. They were only tasked with building facilities needed by the plantation, such as warehouses, wards, or houses occupied by plantation officials.

Banjar people were also adept at building irrigation systems, other than carpentry. Their expertise was then utilized by the Serdang Sultanate, which was then held by Sultan Sulaiman. He then brought back the Banjar people to the Serdang area to build an irrigation system in the rice fields.[13] This decision was taken to boost rice production in the Serdang area, which at that time was already known as the rice granary area as well as to raise the welfare of the people.[14]

The arrival of the Javanese and the Banjar in the Serdang area made this region even more diverse. Moreover, those who came and settled in then built settlements on the outskirts of plantations, including in the Paya Itik area. Apart from the relatively close distance between the work and the residential location, it was also considered strategic because it was traversed by Batu Ginging

River; therefore, this area was a perfect place for farming. This was also what attracted Karo people to go downstream, including to the Paya Itik region.

4. The Cultural and Social Life of the Community

Each ethnic group has its own cultural characteristics.[15] This characteristic is then brought to social life so as the culture and society in social life cannot be separated. That is why culture is also referred to as a system that has coherence.[16] Culture exists as a form of community effort to meet the needs of daily life.

In principle, no culture is static. All cultures move and have their own dynamics. A non-static culture then moves according to human existence as a container of the culture itself. The movement can either lead vertically or horizontally in accordance with what the man himself is doing.

That is what happens to the Banjar, Javanese, and Karo ethnic groups who live in Paya Itik Village, Galang District, Deli Serdang Regency. The three of these ethnicities are still trying to adapt to their newly inhabited environment with their status as non-native residents. This adaptation is done as a form of adjustment so that they could be accepted by the surrounding community. In this case, the indigenous traditions and culture of the Banjar and Javanese ethnicity still survive, although they have undergone slight changes. This cultural change is a process of shifting, subtracting, adding and developing the elements contained in one culture.[17]

Greetings in kinship relationships are well preserved, as well as the concepts of *Rakut Sitelu* (*Sembuyak, Kalimbubu, and Anak Beru*) and *Mergasilima* (*Ginting, Sembiring, Tarigan, Karo-Karo and Warin-Angin*). They are still well preserved because of blood relations, marriage, even during daily social interactions between fellow residents.

5. BAJOKA The Concept of Internal and External Strength of the Villagers

The word *BAJOKA* is an acronym for the 3 tribes that live in Paya Itik Village; *Banjar, Jowo* (Java) and *Karo*. It then became a unique term for people who has just found out about it. When and who first popularized this term is still unclear. However, the term *BAJOKA* has been accepted by the people of Paya Itik Village as their identity. This identity is not only known by the people in the village, but also by the other villagers close to Paya Itik Village.

The term *BAJOKA* becomes a representative form of how strong diversity is when united. This union then creates strong companionship ties among fellow villagers. Even though they are united in the concept of *BAJOKA*, the characters of each ethnic group still live on in each ethnic member. In this case, it is surely necessary to suppress ego attitudes among fellow ethnic members, so that the three of them can unite. This is what is meant by the internal strength possessed by the people of Paya Itik Village.

Furthermore, in the external concept, *BAJOKA* is able to become a sign that Paya Itik Village is a strong village, where all the people protect and take care of each other. Even though they come from different ethnicities, they are always ready to help each other, protect and take care of every member of their group. The other villagers might need to consider causing trouble with the people of Paya Itik Village for they have a 'protection' called *BAJOKA*.

BAJOKA which was originally only a simple acronym, turned into a single force that shows togetherness. The existence of tolerance among members of community groups makes this *BAJOKA* appear and survive, so that it can become an identity that gives strength to the community.

6. Tolerance and Harmony between Ethnicities and Religions in Paya Itik Village

As a multicultural society, the people in Paya Itik Village seem to be well aware of what multiculturalism means. Multiculturalism requires the unity of different cultural groups with the same rights and socio-political status in modern society. Multiculturalism is also referred to as the depiction of the unity of the various ethnic groups of different societies.[18]

Multicultural societies are faced with two conflicting demands. They are required to find political structures that allow people to reconcile themselves in just and acceptable ways. This political structure can foster a strong sense of unity and togetherness among its people. The political structure also cannot act as a community that can take over and carry out collective and binding decisions.[19]

The existence of *BAJOKA* is not as a community, but as an identity of a village which illustrates that the togetherness between the Banjar, Javanese and Karo people is very well established. That means, the tolerance among fellow people from each ethnic group has grown and is binding, because it is a form of accommodation in community social interactions. This is shown by how dynamic the social relations of society are as a result of the awareness of the same cultural characteristics, without the need to ignore their own characteristics that can be seen by other people. [20]

In one model of the theory called the social assimilationist by Bikhu Parekh, every layer of community plays a role in forming an order that can interact well with cultural practices and the ideals of the community. This model emphasizes uniformity in the public sphere and diversity in the family sphere.[21]

When viewed from this context, a harmonious relationship in society will occur if tolerance in each ethnic group already exists. *BAJOKA* as the identity of Paya Itik Village is an example of the result of this harmonious relationship. This relationship will emerge when society has openness, generosity, voluntary, gentleness, mutual respect, mutual acceptance and appreciation amidst the diversity of cultures and human character. [22]

Apart from the existence of the *BAJOKA* identity, each member of the ethnic group is also able to speak a mother tongue from other ethnicity either actively or passively. This happens because when communicating with different ethnicities, they will use one of the three local languages, whether it is Banjar, Javanese, or Karo language.

In terms of religious relations, even though Islam is the major religion in the village, Christianity as the minority is also respected and appreciated. This is proven by the establishment of a church next to a madrasa school. It also applies when celebrating religious holidays. During the celebration of Muslim holidays such as Eid al-Fitr, Christian people also celebrate it by visiting and forging ties with the Muslim community. Likewise, during Easter and Christmas, it is common for Muslim people to help in preparing cakes and food. In fact, they even volunteer to help secure the church when the Christians do prayer. In this village, there are also associations based on religion, such as Qur'anic recitation association (*pengajian*), *perwritan* or *perpulangan jabu-jabu* for Christians. Even so, the relationship between religious communities is well maintained and preserved.

Tolerance between ethnic groups is also shown by the occurrence of mixed marriages. The community no longer concerns if their family members marry a bride who comes from outside their ethnic group, whether it is from the scope of *BAJOKA* itself, or outside of that ethnic group. This will certainly further strengthen tolerance between ethnic groups, where other ethnic groups enter the family kinship system. From this kinship system, it can be seen how the structure of the community in Paya Itik Village is.

When there is news of grief, the people will still be present to express their mourning while giving encouragement to the families in grief doesn't matter what the religion or ethnicity is. The same thing can be seen when a cultural event from one ethnic group is held. Other ethnic groups are also invited to participate in celebrating the event, because they believe that the joy felt by one ethnic group who is celebrating the event, belongs to all communities.

7. Conclusions

The community in Paya Itik Village provides a very good example to other communities that, if you want a harmonious life in community social relations, tolerance in responding to differences needs to be raised for difference has become a necessity. Being different does not mean that it must be debated, let alone equated for difference is a beauty that needs to be embraced in order to create a harmonious and peaceful society.

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