Designing Public Space to Promote Understanding on Diversity in Religious Conflict Prone Areas in Ambon and Poso

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Abstract—**Diversity is actually a distinguishing characteristic of Indonesian society and one of the factors making such diversity is religion. However, religion along with any religious matter are frequently to be a sensitive issue. By the name of 'truth' the religion doctrine is often used as justification for destroying, burning, attacking and even killing others having different faith. Ambon are frequently used to be examples and topics of discourses on horizontal conflicts based on religious issues. Many know that the conflicts were actually more economic and even political but they were wrapped by religious issues for such issues were very sensitive and even irrational. It will always be easily manipulated to recruit, aggregate, and move people (conflicting actors). This paper will discuss the needs of peace education in Ambon and Poso that really requires a vigorous role of students and young people to build confidence, diminish mutual mistrust, open dialogue in order to develop communication and intensive cooperation between interfaith groups and ethnicities. To embody the ideas mentioned above, it is necessary to build a public space that will be a meeting forum for communication. This public space will be plural, meaning a place where different people are possibly to interact to each other.**

Index Terms—**Religious conflicts, ambon, Poso, diversity understanding, public space.**

I. INTRODUCTION

"If we cannot end now our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity... Our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's future. And we are all mortal." Despite stated to signaling a decrease in tension between the United States and the Soviet Union, what US Presiden John F. Kennedy said on Monday, June 10, 1963 is relevant to current situation in countries with multi-ethnicity and multi-religion for instance Indonesia. Unfortunately, Indonesia and some other countries had many experiences of dispute, conflict, even riot because of the differences. Recently some terrible incidents had occurred in Indonesia and the impact was bad as those happened in Ambon (in Mollucas Island) and Poso (in Central Kalimantan). By the name of different doctrin of 'truth', destroying, burning, attacking and even killing others having different faith is justified. [1]

Prior to the end of 1998 – when elsewhere in Indonesia more than 500 churches and also several mosques had been destroyed or damaged already – Ambon was still free of unrest. Many people believed that the famous Moluccan "brotherhood" *(pela gandong / basudara)* would prevail over any menace of conflict. However, it turned out otherwise.[2] Ambon (and almost entire Mollucas) was in a state of simmering religious conflict. In January 1999, on the holy Islamic Day of Idul Fitri, a dispute between a Christian bus driver and a Muslim youth at Batumerah (Batumerah is a predominantly Muslim neighborhood of Ambon town), prompted an outbreak of violence that rapidly spread to other areas of the province. Scores of churches, mosques and houses were burnt down. By the end of the year violence had broken out several times on Ambon as well as on neighboring islands causing a large number of casualties.[3] Poso in Central Sulawesi had similar experience with Ambon. Conflict in Poso was triggered by an incident between a Christian and Muslim youth in which the latter was subsequently stabbed on Christmas Eve in 1998. Rumours quickly spread and soon assumed religious overtones dividing Muslim and Christian communities that then triggered more riots and violence between the two communities.[4] Many know that the conflicts actually can be attributed to a combination of socio-economic inequalities and even political matter[5] but they were wrapped by religious issues for such issues were very sensitive and even irrational.[6] It will always be easily manipulated to recruit, aggregate, and move people (conflicting actors).

II. URGENCY TO IMPLEMENT PEACE EDUCATION

The world is getting younger in which one in every four people is below age of 25 today. The young people, however, not only engaged in creating movement to promote positive change in their communities, but also had been manipulated towards violence. For that reason it is important to make them aware of the contrary situation and then sensible to declare peace and lead their communities towards non-violence and reconciliation.

To drive resources and social capital of young people to positively influence their society can be done by what so-called "peace education" both in formal schools as well as the non-formal ones. Such education should be well and comprehensively managed and implemented in order to invest young people to participate and ensure their energies in channeling towards sustainable peace. They are the greatest resource to implement peace education in achieving

reconciliation by fostering dialogue and mutual understanding that cut across ethno-religious lines, which serve to transform conflict into sustainable peace.

Likewise in Ambon and Poso, young people suppose to be agents for reducing intergroup trauma and prejudice that there still exist in their communities. The conflict resolution of Ambon and Poso that is not done in a comprehensive manner have left fairly complicated issues. The government emphasize peaceful settlement instantaneously without understanding that peace should be dynamic, participatory, and long-term. It means peace requires justice and the rule of law and order.

One of the thorny issues faced by today Ambon and Poso is residential segregation; they are groupped into two, namely Muslim's and Christian's residential sites. The refugees flowing at the conflict time has made a spatial pattern of mono ethnicity and mono religion instead of the multi-ethnic and multi-religious settlement before the conflict. Moreover it is amplified by the post-conflict policy classsifying people's settlements based on their ethnicity and religions that potentially appear unexpected social impacts. Although such kind of segregation based on religious beliefs has existed since the Dutch colonial era to make the Dutch more easily control the people of its colony,[7] it once got fading out, particularly at the points of central of economic and political business. However, segregation problem then arises again after the conflict in 1999 which is either intentionally or not done in order to create instant peace. It made lack spaces between the religious groups for interaction to minimized cross-cutting affiliation. If this situation is not smartly and wisely corrected, it will bring a potential of further conflict outbreak. Such a segregation has unconsciously arised an impact of long term latent danger, especially if not monitored and handled properly. There are now only two remaining regions as sites where Muslims and Christians could live together in Ambon, namely the region of Wayame and the region of Rindam XVI Pattimura Military Command in Negeri Suli Atas.

Presently Ambon appears in a conducive state but it remains having latent sensitivity to volatile. Small frictions between citizens will be able to trigger conflict between bigger groups, a small incident can easily erupt into major conflict. This means the people of Ambon has not yet reached a strong and primary level of social integration and this alls means that other conflicts will potentially happen in the future. Based on this fact, restoring the role of students as pioneers of living in harmony in diversity and within their respective community is urgent.

III. Peace Education Based on Local Wisdoms

"When God has no answer, search for ancestral wisdom," [8] the proverb is appropriate to the conflict situation in Ambon and Poso. It is because the prolonged religious conflict that could not be settled by religion doctrin must be resolved by ancestral wisdom.

The values of living together in diversity have existed for hundreds of years in Ambon and Poso and have been maintained by generations. These values are also bequeathed to the public through education, both formal and non-formal, in case promulgation of these values could continuously take place. However, in recent years these values began to erode. Poso, however, is less successful in reviving their local wisdoms to the youths, compared to Ambon, so as many young people in Poso do not recognize their own local wisdoms. Consequently, it is considered necessary to develop a certain model of peace education based on local wisdom that could be an effective forum to educate university students to build peace and tolerance within their respective community.

Every local community has its own local wisdoms that are usually very powerful and influencing in guiding the community's daily life. As a consequences, it will be useful to revitalize, empower, and then insert the existing local wisdoms into peace building education so that there will be synergy of the values of peace building and local wisdoms to promote efforts in resolving the social conflicts, particularly in Ambon and Poso.

Integration and implementation of local wisdoms in the peace education are expected to enhance the students' understanding on the importance of local wisdoms in the context of conflict situations to initiate interreligious tolerance. A good understanding and effective peace education process are expected to encourage the students to play significant roles as agents of change in initiating, maintaining, and continuing peace efforts that have been attempted, so as to create a peaceful situation in Ambon and Poso. Education could be an effective tool in achieving peace. It can be a tool to young people as deep dialogue, a structured form of communication which emphasizes respectful and attentive listening about deep-rooted feelings, beliefs and experiences, that would contribute considerably to prevention of reoccurrence of the conflict.

In Ambon there is an education tool named "Mollucas Brotherhood Education Curriculum" (*Pendidikan Orang Basudara*) having the aim of changing the students' mindset about social conflict and the conflicts they have experienced some years before.[9] This curriculum is particularly implemented in the conflicting areas of the past. The young generation, especially students, are introduced to the values of their local wisdoms and moral code, so that they will have attention about how to respect the existing values of diversity and to make the values alive in their daily life. For instance, the local wisdom of community brotherhood system, which is popularly called *pela* and *gandong* (family members and kinship relations) is actually not based on religious considerations but on social relations Mollucas communities. Pela Gandong is a bond of ongoing brotherhood among all communities and it is established as a sacred covenant in which all parties are required to become blood brothers and to help each other as if they were born from one mother (one *gandong* or womb). Pela is a covenant relationship between one *nagari* (village) with another *nagari* that could possibly be from different or the same island. The relationship could also possibly from different or the same ethnicity or religious groups. Pela relationship has an important effect in which all people participate to encourage togetherness and to maintain the relationships. Like Ambon, Poso has local wisdom named *Sintuwu Maroso*. *Sintuwu Maroso* was a tradition of

mutual help based on the brotherhood of relatives, neighbors, friends and acquaintances who were rooted in tribal tradition Pamona (one of the tribes in Poso) when they were living as land cultivators. In addition, there was another local culture named *mosintuwu* meaning active mutual help and mutual *posintuwu* implementation that usually took forms of donating money, cattle or any goods. "Sintuwu Maroso" implementation as a local wisdom is expected to be able to reduce the potential conflicts that possibly occur at the present time

This curriculum is expected to become an effective instrument of a cultural transformation process, which is pro-pluralism and pro-humanity. The contents of the Mollucas Brotherhood Education Curriculum constitutes a blend of five programs, including competence-based communication skills, interpersonal relations, conflict resolution techniques, conflict problem solving and mutual understanding on diversity.[10]

Peace education is for all, not just students of universities. Considering that a lot of young people do not go to universities but they experience their daily life within pluralistic society, it is also necessary to provide them peace education according to their own understanding. To embody the idea, it needs an important effort to form strategic alliances with universities and some possible parties so as the module will be able as a guide for peace education, both in and outside classrooms. This means the module is also possibly disseminated to some parties like the head of traditional village (Raja Nagari), NGOs, local government, and community leaders that are expected to see and even to implement the module in any kind of community education activity. Therefore, the virus of peace is spread not only within the campus but also outside (communities).

IV. DESIGNING PUBLIC SPACE

It is also necessary to employ an innovative programmes to engage youth in building social cohesion and promoting intercultural understanding to foster peace and development. Some activities can be advanced such as skill trainings, recreational clubs and other events. In this effort SCU realize to involving some youth assosiation for instance Ambon Bergerak and Provokator Damai (Peace Provocator). Their role become very important, especially to encourage cross-group communication, to make a cooperation in many activities, and to engage each others in constructive way in reconciliation process and to implement their own programmes. Some important measures should be taken to overcome the latent danger of horizontal conflicts, by having a new principle and action that is "segregation to integration". This means the notion of segregation that often causes exclusivity should be directed to a blending having inclusivity spirit. Peace-building should aim to a constructive transformation of social relations that will open not only for communication but also cooperation so that it will manifest social cohesion.

Accordingly, peace in Ambon and Poso really requires a vigorous role of students and young people to build confidence, diminish mutual mistrust, open dialogue in order to develop communication and intensive cooperation between interfaith groups and ethnicities. They can establish an effective early warning system to detect any issues and incidents, which might create violence utilising the membership of each youth community. However, young people cannot let alone in this effort. Such a collaboration between stakes-holder could be a legitimation to the make the peace building implementation stronger and have broader prevalence.

To foster the ideas mentioned above, it is necessary to build a public space that will be a meeting forum for communication. This public space will be plural, meaning a place where different people are possibly to interact to each other. Without interaction there is no togetherness. This public space could be an ideal picture of a democracy in which values of justice, diversity, freedom and solidarity could be found.[11]

Therefore, the public space for Ambonese here is understood as two meanings, namely public space and public sphere. The first has a physical meaning, that is a place where people possibly do activities such as jogging, gathering, etc. whereas a public sphere means could be meant as an atmosphere in which people are possibly to have interaction, discussion, problem solving process, etc. and it is open to everyone.[12] There are three conditions required to build a public space as described above, namely:

a) Responsive; this means the space should be designed and managed by taking into account the users' interests, therefore, the space is possibly to be used for wider activities and interests.

b) Democratic; this means that the users' rights to use the space are protected, they are to have free expression in the space. However, there should be certain limitations due to the use of shared space should ahve tolerance among the space users. This may imply that the public from different social, economic and cultural backgrounds can freely access the public space.

c) Meaningful; this includes an emotional bond between the space and the users' life. The public space must have a link between people, space, and the world wide based on the social context.[13]

The public space designed must also meet some qualifiactions, namely open access (could be accessed by anyone), participation, social equality and it could accommodate different communities to communicate and interact (interpublic relations).[14]

Such a public space will be significantly for Ambonese because of some reasons as follows:

a) A public space is a spatial social construction. The space around us is a part of social reality. Determined and determining spatial behavior is integrated part of our social existence.

b) A public sapce will build inclusiveness. Each group of people have confidence, characters and problems of their own. If they are internally kept just by the group, not communicated shared with other groups, they are to happen as exclusivity that could potentially be the seeds of prejudice, jealousy, social segregation, etc. The feeling of "in group" and "out group" are then to emerge and will easily be provoked by irresponsible

parties having particular interests. A public space can create encounters of people having different backgrounds and they can openly interact with each other so that a party will know the others. The face to face and eye contacted encounters will create a natural sense of sympathy and empathy, not artificial as it may occur in virtual world. On the other hand, a public space can be meant as a "cross cutting affiliation" for all people involved though they come from different backgrounds. They have a common concern that must be struggled in togetherness, particularly the desire to be able to have safe and comfortable life, not bothered by fears and worries.

c) Reintegration of socio-spatial division

Public space becomes a mediator of private sphere that dominates the city area and plays an important role in socio-spatial distribution. Without a mediation process, spatial movement within the city will be very limited. A public space is considered capable to be a forum of communication and coordination.

Based on the description above, it can be said that a public space is not only physical such as a park, a field, a virtual space, an institution, or an organization which is legal but communication among the citizens itself can actually be called a public space.

V. CONCLUSION

The motto of Indonesia, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika,* Unity in Diversity, will not then longer remain just as a slogan but it is really alive because of being revived. Some supporting programs are possibly designed to build social cohesion in the public spaces as a preventive measure to prevent horizontal conflicts. Conflict resolution based on peace education will be boosted by a forum of communication empowering "a public communication space" and to build a mutual agreement and mutual understanding based on partnership. All of the efforts reinforce what Albert Einstein said, "Peace cannot be kept by force, it can only be achieved by understanding.

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