

Tradition, Religion, and Social Inclusion: “Sedekah Bumi” as Multicultural Education Strategy in Dermolo Village, Kembang, Jepara

Ahmad Saefudin¹, Muh Shofiyuddin², Aliva Rosdiana³, Dewi Sulistyowati⁴

¹Universitas Islam Nahdlatul Ulama Jepara, 1

²Universitas Islam Nahdlatul Ulama Jepara, Jepara, Indonesia, muh_shofiyuddin@unisnu.ac.id

³Universitas Islam Nahdlatul Ulama Jepara, Jepara, Indonesia, alivarosdiana@unisnu.ac.id

⁴Universitas Islam Nahdlatul Ulama Jepara, Jepara, Indonesia, dewisulistyowati452@gmail.com

Abstract.

Conflict has happened since 2002 among society in Dermolo due to the use of worship place (church) at Dermolo. The impact of social order to the community is almost all Christians are excluded by Muslims as the majority religion. “Sedekah Bumi” tradition becomes a powerful media in Dermolo to create space of social inclusion because in the process always involve all plural society. The data collection was carried out through interviews with key actors as research informants consisting of village officials, religious leaders (clerics, clergy, and Buddhist clerics) to explore the values of multicultural education beyond “Sedekah Bumi” tradition. In order to better understand, the researchers also use observation technique to trace latent conflict surrounding Christian citizens vis a vis Muslims. Documentation technique becomes the third alternative used to browse related documents either notes, photos, or articles describing the process of “Sedekah Bumi” as a cultural ceremony integrating tradition aspects with religious dimension. All data obtained is, the, analyzed using descriptive analysis technique with phenomenological aspects. The steps include data reduction, followed by data presentation, and being ended by drawing conclusions and verifications. Apparently, “Sedekah Bumi” that has been going on for generations in Dermolo provides an opportunity for residents, regardless of their religious background, to mingle and interact each other. Thus, it will naturally reduce conflict and prejudice. Finally, it can be concluded that “Sedekah Bumi” is a multicultural education strategy that functions to foster an inclusive character for community.

Keywords: tradition, religion, social inclusion, Multicultural

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Introduction

Michele Dillon, a sociologist of contemporary religion, always provides solution offers to the humanitarian problems inherent in everyday life (Dillon, 2003). As an animal symbolicism that is impossible to escape from symbolic snares, religion is interpreted by humans through cultural attributes. By Clifford Geertz, the link between religion and culture is gathered in five fundamental domains, namely a symbolic system oriented to the motivational power in a person by formulating the concept of general existence that ultimately shines in a factual aura and forms a unique reality (Geertz, 1993). So that some people are no longer able to distinguish between the area of religion and cultural territory when carrying out a particular tradition. For example, the Sedekah Bumi tradition is routinely

carried out by the people of Dermolo, Kembang Sub-district, Jepara.

From the symbol aspect seen in the process, Sedekah Bumi is full of cultural values. Tayub traditional dance performance, *Tongtek* traditional music, *Jembul* procession containing a collection of local crops, and staging a traditional drama, *Ketoprak*, are various series of activities showing that Sedekah Bumi in Dermolo contains local cultural elements. Whereas in terms of religious rituals, Sedekah Bumi is closely intertwined with the religious dimension, such as *melekan*; stayed up all night at Punden (tomb) Mbah Tambar, a village ancestral tomb located in Dukuh Dombang, to *manganan*; eating and praying together in the morning. This is one of the adaptation strategies played by religious people in Dermolo as an effort to build harmony in their

environment through a cultural approach (Budiharso, 2016).

The uniqueness of Dermolo Alms is the location on the medium of social inclusion. Through the Earth Alms, the Dermolo Christian minority having experienced exclusion of the church construction conflict, could be fully involved in this series of rituals, from the recruitment process of the committee by the Village Government, planning of activities, to the implementation. In this way, Warschauer categorizes it as a practice of social inclusion in which minority groups can freely participate fully in community activities, without distinguishing aspects of economic resources, education, culture, and civic engagement (Warschauer, 2004; Romlah et al., 2020). It is well known that religious minority groups are very vulnerable to becoming victims of exclusion in society, as well as women, racial minorities, the poor, and disabled communities (Fauzan, 2018; Labonte, 2004).

Dermolo as a village that was once stricken by latent conflict between Muslims and Christians due to a dispute over the establishment of a church, a house of worship in 2002, was gradually decayed and stricken by the Sedekah Bumi ceremony always involving all members of the community. Dermolo is one of the villages in Jepara which has multicultural characteristics. Of the 5,330 communities who inhabit the village area of 979,380 Ha. of these, 98% of them are Muslim (5,223 people). While the rest adheres to a variety of beliefs with details of 1.26% Buddhist (57 people), 0.73% Christian (39 people), and 0.02% Catholic (1 person) (Data penduduk, 2017). As a minority group, Dermolo Christians have experienced religious conflict with the Muslim community. This friction, as Mashudi notes, was initially triggered by the objection of Muslims in Dombang Dermolo Hamlet over the construction of a church built on April 15, 2002 (Mashudi, 2016). In addition to the local community rejection factor, the conflict was not allegedly resolved due to the State role, in this case, Jepara District Government, deliberately reluctant to issue permits for the church use, even though the Christian congregation of Dermolo had followed legal procedures in accordance with applicable laws and regulations (Kholiludin, 2013).

Earth alms passed down for generations in the village providing opportunities for residents, regardless of their religious background, to mingle and interact one another. So that it will reduce conflict and prejudice. As a hypothesis, researchers conclude that Sedekah Bumi in Dermolo is one of

the multicultural education strategies served to foster an inclusive nature for the community. Furthermore, this paper aims to elaborate on the Alms of Earth ritual as a multicultural education strategy useful for suppressing exclusion that afflicts Christian minority groups in Dermolo. In the context of a plural society, such as in Indonesia, the principles of learning sensitive to diversity need to be encouraged. This concept came to be known as multicultural education. James A. Banks, in an article entitled *Diversity Within Unity: Essential Principles For Teaching and Learning In a Multicultural Society*, said that there are five categories that form the basic principles in concocting multicultural-based learning, namely: 1) teacher learning, 2) student learning, 3) intergroup relations, 4) school governance, organization, and equity (equity), and 5) assessment (Banks, 2001).

In the academic wilderness, the scientific study of conflict in Dermolo is by no means a new thing. Mashudi wrote an interesting article, *Resolving Conflicts in Religious Harmony With Hearts* published in the 2016 Dimas journal. After describing the profile of the "Dermolo Church", Mashudi succeeded in capturing the role of communities, religious leaders, and institutions under Religious Harmony Forum (FKUB) as a liberator conflict actor. Through political, theological, sociological, and juridical approaches, FKUB succeeded in strengthening pluralism (Fidiyani, 2016). It's just that, from the observations of researchers, there are gaps that should be criticized about the choice of research approaches used.

In contrast to Mashudi, using a legal approach, Rini Fidiyani tended to heed local wisdom which she considered more neutral in resolving rivalries between the two opposing religious groups. Unfortunately, Fidiyani did not specifically make the Dermolo conflict as the focus of research. In *Dinamika Pembangunan Rumah Ibadah Bagi Warga Minoritas Di Jawa Tengah*, she said that Dermolo only appeared three times. And that's in the form of excerpts from the study of the Institute for Social and Religious Studies (eLSA),—one of the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Semarang concerning accompanying issues of freedom of religion and belief—which assess that the Jepara Government is deliberately of doing omission and not serious in addressing the polemic to end the establishment of the Evangelical Church in the Land of Java (GITJ) in Dermolo (Jati, 2013).

A more comprehensive review from Wasisto Raharjo Jati in *Kearifan Lokal Sebagai Resolusi Konflik Keagamaan* (Rohmah, 2015). By taking a location setting in Maluku, Jati concluded that local wisdom in the form of *pela gandong* tradition became a powerful conflict resolution media for the people. Another authoritative scientific work to be a reference for further research is a thesis entitled *Masyarakat Sipil dan Pengelolaan Keberagamaan (Studi atas Peran FSMD terhadap Penggunaan Rumah Ibadah di Gereja Injili Tanah Jawa Dermolo, Jepara dalam Perspektif Hukum dan HAM)* by Fisqiyyatur Rohmah. The new finding she got about the Dermolo case was the rise of the ideology of majoritarianism represented by Dermolo Muslim Solidarity Forum (FSMD). For Rohmah, FSMD is inclined to the conservative religious paradigm. This is at the same time a source of resistance for Muslim communities towards pluralism and has the opportunity to create a climate of domination and violence.

From previous researches, not a single researcher has focused on the Sedekah Bumi tradition domain as a multicultural education strategy in Dermolo. Substantively, this follow-up research has a distinctive aspect when being compared to the presentation of various previous research results. The academic contribution of this research can be classified into at least two, namely theoretical and practical category.

Method

This type of research is a field research with a qualitative approach, because researchers describe all data about the Earth Alms ritual verbally, not in the form of numbers. Researchers try to describe all things about the strategy of applying multicultural education in the Sedekah Bumi ritual as a conflict resolution based on conditions in the village of Dermolo (natural setting). Researchers choose a case study as a method. The holistic case portrayed is the Earth Alms ritual in Dermolo.

Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews with key actors as research informants consisting of village officials, religious leaders (clerics, priests, and Buddhist clerics) to explore the values of multicultural education behind the Earth Alms ritual. To be more comprehensive, researchers also used participatory observation techniques to sniff out the scent of latent conflict that enveloped Christian *vis a vis* Muslim activity. The documentation technique becomes the third alternative used by searching related documents in the form of notes,

photographs or articles describing the process of Sedekah Bumi as a cultural ceremony integrating aspects of tradition with religious dimensions. All data obtained were then analyzed using descriptive analysis techniques using a phenomenological approach. The steps include reducing the data, continuing to present the data, then ending with drawing conclusions and verification.

Researchers summarize and focus on the important things from the many data about multicultural education strategies as a conflict resolution in Dermolo. Then the data is reduced by describing it explosively in the form of a text description. Then organize it to look more patterned and sort various relevant data to be used as conclusions. The last stage is narrating in the form of a paper compiled using a knife analysis of multicultural education theory from James A. Banks and social inclusion theory.

Result and Discussion

a. Conflict and Social Exclusion in Dermolo Village

Issuance of Building Permit (IMB) house of worship (church) No. 648/150 on March 9, 2002 should have been a happy start for residents of Krsiten in Dermolo. Imagine, the dream to perform Sunday worship on private property will soon be realized. Understandably, the Dermolo Christian congregation which is under the denomination of the Evangelical Church of the Land of Java (GITJ), so far only allowed to worship in the area of PT. Perkebunan Nusantara (PTPN) IX, a State Owned Enterprises (SOE) Holding company located in Beji Hamlet in Balong Village, about 5 km from Dermolo Village. In addition to worshipping in the PTPN IX area, Dermolo Christians who have lived there since 1960 usually also use the church in the villages of Beji, Kaligarang, Kelet, and Kembang which are geographically far away enough (Huda, 2018).

However, so far this expectation has failed, along with the incessant of rejection to the church building process by Muslim groups affiliated with the Dermolo Muslim Solidarity Forum (FSMD) organization. Pasamuwan residents, as the Christian church Dermolo, temporarily must perform their rituals of worship in a car garage hut owned by the Rev. Theofalus Tumijan (Huda, 2018). FSMD is an organization whose members are NU and Muhammadiyah in response to the establishment of the church. Initially, the FSMD was initiated by local Muhammadiyah leaders. However, because the number of Muhammadiyah members in Dermolo

was not as much as NU, to strengthen the legitimacy of the FSMD, Muhammadiyah leaders involved NU figures in the management structure. In fact, the FSMD Chair was first held by NU Branch Chair Dermolon (Hauqola, 2010).

Fisqiyyatur Rohmah in her thesis entitled *Masyarakat Sipil dan Pengelolaan Keberagamaan (Studi atas Peran FSMD terhadap Penggunaan Rumah Ibadah di Gereja Injili Tanah Jawa Dermolo, Jepara dalam Perspektif Hukum dan HAM)* revealed the chronology of FSMD's rejection of the Dermolo GITJ establishment process. On 10 May 2002, FSMD sent a letter to the Government of Jepara Regency No. 01/FSMD/V/2002 which refers to the Joint Decree (SKB) of the Minister of Religion and the Minister of Home Affairs No. 01/BER/mdn-mag/1969 concerning the Implementation of the Duties of the Government Apparatus in Ensuring Order and Smooth Implementation of Development and Religious Worship by its Adherents. The essence of the FSMD letter is that the construction of a church in Dermolo Village has disturbed public order and caused divisions among religious communities. Therefore, the Government of Jepara Regency needs to review the IMB that has already been issued.

The Christian-Islamic polemic in Dermolo reappeared in December 2003. Dermolo Christian residents notified officials in letter No. 02/PN.GITJ/XII/2003 about the agenda of holding a Christmas celebration at the Papanthan GITJ Building. FSMD moved quickly by sending complaint letter No. 08/FSMD/XI/2003 to Dermolo Officials. In the letter, the FSMD considered that Dermolo Christians did not have good intentions in maintaining harmony between religions. The indication is that the church building then named as a residence in the name of Mr. Supardi RT. 01 RW. 06 Dermolo, which has reached 99% completion stage, has a spatial design more similar to a church building with all its facilities. Moreover, the building was openly used for conventions 4 times in a row, namely on Saturday/ Sunday, 15/16, 22/23, and 29/30 November 2003. In fact, rumors arose in the community that the building indicated to be used for conventions and Christmas celebrations in December 2003.

After the issuance of the Joint Regulation of the Minister of Religion and Home Affairs Number 8 and 9 of 2006 concerning Guidelines for Implementing Duties of Regional Head/ Deputy Regional Head in Maintaining Religious Harmony, Empowering Religious Harmony Forums, and

Establishing Houses of Worship, conflicts between FSMD and Christian Dermolo residents meet a new chapter. The IMB of the Dermolo village church was "questioned" by the FSMD because it was considered to be in conflict with one of the articles contained in the latest regulation on the construction of houses of worship. Article 14 verse 2 in chapter IV concerning the Establishment of Synagogues states that construction of synagogues must meet administrative requirements including: a) list of names and Identity Cards of users of synagogues users of at least 90 (ninety) people authorized by local officials in accordance with the level of territorial boundaries, b) local community support of at least 60 (sixty) people authorized by the *lurah/* village head, c) written recommendation from the head of the district/ city religious department office, and d) written recommendation from the District/ City FKUB. This clause, according to FSMD, has not yet been fulfilled by the GITJ Dermolo development committee.

Joint Regulation of the Minister of Religion and Minister of Home Affairs Number 8 and 9 in 2006 got a "cold" response by Christians in Dermolo. They argued that the regulation did not apply retroactively so that Dermolo Village IMB of GITJ remained legal and in accordance with applicable legal procedures. Nevertheless, the Christian then tried to fulfill the requirements contained in Article 14 verse 2. By putting on a despair face, MM, one of the Christians, shared the difficulties she faced while trying to fight for the legality of the church.

We have tried to request exceptions in accordance with the transitional regulations in accordance with the 2006 decree or SKB. If the number of congregations did not meet at the village level, it can take the sub-district level, but they still refused it. Whereas from the beginning, the decline in building permits as well as its status as a place of worship (church). They had asked if they wanted to continue the construction, it should be changed into a house. Every building (church) is used, must have always agreements prepared to be agreed upon by congregants and opponents. Every time the requirements meet the condition, it is always less than enough. We have been tired, Sir! This continues. We only ask for certainty from the Regional Government (MM, 2019).

The continuing latent conflict involving Muslims and Christians in Dermolo has a direct

impact on aspects of service and social acceptance, especially for school-age Christian children. In addition, the indecisive attitude of the Regional Government of Jepara in handling disputes over the construction of places of worship there, it contributed also to fostering social exclusion practices. From the results of the workshop

facilitated by the Institute of Human Resources Study and Development (Lakpesdam) of NU Jepara on December 26, 2015 at the Jepara NU Building, the effect of the Christian-Christian rivalry of Dermolo Village resulted in three faces of social exclusion as in the table below:

Table 1.Forms of Social Exclusion in Dermolo Village

Social Services	Social acceptance	Policy
Children do not get Christian religious textbook facilities in 4 elementary schools in Dermolo	Minority residents get stigmatized Christianization Children at school are ostracized by friends and teachers Being not involved in social activities The decrease of respect in the procession of the death ceremony Discrimination in expressing religious practices (For example: Christmas celebrations)	Permission on the use of houses of worship is complicated by complicated and unclear regulations. Violation Christmas celebration

Sedekah Bumi As a Multicultural Education Strategy

Sedekah Bumi in Dermolo is an annual ritual aiming to celebrate the favors given by God for the welfare and prosperity of the citizens. Since it was as hereditary, this ritual is attended by all elements of Dermolo residents, with the total approximately 500 people consisting of religious leaders, community leaders, student and youth organizations, NU, Muhammadiyah, Christian, and Hindu residents.

It is a common, this event starts on Thursday afternoon at 18:00 WIB with the agenda of *Melekan* and *manganan* in Punden (Village Ancestors' Tomb) which was attended by the committee, officials, village officials, and all residents of Dermolo. In the morning on Friday,

the Carnival event took the *Petinggen* route or the residence of the higher-ups towards Punden Mbah Tambar (in the tomb) at 8:00. All members of the Dermolo community from various backgrounds, farmers, laborers, teachers, employees, students, young and old ones, also have different religious beliefs, united and harmoniously walk and join hands by displaying art while parading produce (Jembul) towards Punden. Also present were officials and village officials, religious leaders, community leaders, and security forces (police and military). Entering 13.00 hours the event continued with Ketoprak performance until late night. Then, it is closed with a joint prayer led by religious leaders of Islam (NU, Muhammadiyah, Christianity, and Hinduism).



Fig. 1. Jembul procession at Sedekah Bumi Dermolo Village, 2 September 2016

Sedekah Bumi has been carried out in Dermolo for almost 200 years. Sedekah Bumi must be realized in Dermolo village. If being not done, then the village will get a very big trial or test (Mashudi, 2016).

Sedekah Bumi Dermolo became a constructive force in growing spaces of social inclusion. Among these are reflected in the activities of draining and taking fish from the Giyah Well to be used as a side dish during the ritual. The figure given the mandate to take fish is also not just anyone. Usually, this ritual is led by a Key Officer or village elder. All Dermolo residents, whatever their religion, follow the ceremony to drain the Giyah Well. Then it is followed by praying together according to the beliefs and faith of

each. The determination of being realized on Friday Kliwon of the Javanese month, is also based on consensus among residents. Likewise, when making a committee structure, the representation of each religion in Dermolo always gets its turn in sequence to become the chair of the event committee. If the chairman of the Earth Alms program last year was from Islam, this year it would be replaced by Hindus, and the following year would automatically be Christians.



Fig. 2. *Manganan* Activities at Sedekah Bumi Dermolo Village 2 September 2016

Conclusion

Sedekah Bumi Tradition in Dermolo Village, beside having religious and cultural dimensions, it also influences the process of developing social inclusion. Although overshadowed by latent conflict over disputes over the construction of worship placement involving Muslims and Christians, through Sedekah Bumi, Dermolo residents are able to blend and gather in one tradition. The Christian minority can freely become fully involved in this annual ritual series. The series of Alms of the Earth, which includes the tradition of draining the Well of Giyah, *melekan*, *manganan*, until the procession of *jembul*, break the chain of conflict. Social cohesion that had been uprooted, now began to grow.

Widened religious divides and various forms of social exclusion practices have been minimized and decreased. At the very least, Sedekah Bumi in Dermolo Village is able to be the best example in the process of social inclusion after all this time the Christian minority felt being isolated.

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