

COLLECTIVE IDENTITY AS A RESOURCE AT BUILDING LOCAL PEACE: A STUDY OF THE WOMEN OF POKA, AMBON, MALUKU

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“If women stand hand in hand to bring about change, and are given the space to use their abilities and talents, there will be a transformation in gender relations which makes it possible for women to become equal and valuable members of society.” (Eugenia Piza-Lopez, Head of the Gender and Development Unit, Oxfam UK/Ireland, Oxford).

ABSTRACT

This paper presents an example how gender function as a resource in peace-building and femininity in specific way becomes productive for peace. It supports the argument that the peace-building process is an important element of social engineering and the creation of gender equality (Gizelis 2009). The women in Poka of Ambon Maluku created community identity – the “Poka-ness” to strengthen women’s capacities as peace-builders. Their success in peace-building resulted in them receiving greater trust and respect from the men and youths of Poka, which has led to greater gender equality. This paper finds that women’s strength in peace-building is not only found in their capacity as mothers and as caregivers for the community’s social life (Ruddick 1983; Cohn dan Jacobson 2012) but also in their identities and relations as members of their villages; these identities and bonds reinforce women’s capacity and motherly natures. Identity has a strong influence on women’s unity and helps mobilize them to ensure the security and peace of their families and the community. It shows that identity is an essential element of one’s understanding of one’s self and connections with other individuals as well as one’s community, one which is very real and powerful because it is connected to emotions (Fisher 2000).

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INTRODUCTION

Violent Conflict in Poka

Poka is located in the northeast of the City of Ambon. It is one among fifty villages and sub-districts in the City of Ambon. The City of Ambon itself

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consists of five districts, namely Sirimau, Nusaniwe, Teluk Ambon, Teluk Ambon Baguala, and South Leitimur. Poka is administratively part of the Teluk Ambon Baguala District. There is a housing complex in Poka which has become a symbol of peaceful life in diversity in Ambon (Eriyanto 2003). Based on the religious make-up of Poka, it has historically been a mixed area, with nearly equal numbers of Christians and Muslims.² Poka is also an open area, particularly for the students of Pattimura University, who live there temporarily during their studies.

Poka was caught in the flames of the violence of the Maluku Conflict on 23-24 July 1999. In the history of the Maluku Conflict, July 1999 was the beginning of the second phase of conflict (Manuputty 2004). The first phase of conflict lasted from January to April 1999, followed by three months of de-escalation of conflict precipitated by political campaigns and the general election. During the first phase of the conflict, Poka was relatively safe. The people of Poka heard about and knew of the conflict in the City of Ambon, but there were no incidents which disturbed the harmonious relations of the residents of Poka. But in July 1999, the peace and harmony in Poka became unsustainable. On 24 July 1999, Muslims and Christians threw stones at each other in Poka. The violence intensified to the razing of homes, both those belonging to Muslims and those belonging to Christians, in the National Housing Complex in Poka. The violent conflict in Poka was significant because it signaled the end of religious heterogeneity in most villages. After the second phase of conflict, segregation based on religious lines became increasingly explicit, and villages in which one religious group was the majority would drive out the minority religious groups. The majority religious groups stopped showing tolerance to the minority and attempting to protect them (Eriyanto 2003). The only exception was Wayame, only two villages to the west of Poka. Wayame was the only village able to maintain its heterogeneity, as it established a defense and conflict prevention mechanism led by twenty societal leaders, ten from each religion.

The Poka-ness

Although the religious, ethnic, and occupational identities of the people of Poka are diverse, there is a clear, shared identity which is worth noting, namely a sense of Poka-ness. This sense of Poka-ness can be identified as a collective identity derived from shared territory, as stated by Rudolfo Stavenhagen (1966).³ Territory here is not simply residents' current environment, but also their point of origin—physically and psychologically. This sense of Poka-ness is prominent and strongly felt by the women of Poka; it is an element of their need to be considered part of a group, and of their desire to feel secure as part of a group. This has given the women of Poka great self-confidence and strong belief in their identity. As such, when violent conflict occurred, other groups were initially unable to force an identity (Muslim or Christian) onto them or to dictate their actions. The violent conflict did not change the sense of Poka-ness or attitudes held by the women of Poka, even when they had different religious backgrounds. Women's sense of Poka-ness was formed because of the harmonic relations and culture of family that

² Interview with Noni Sulaiman, young woman, Poka, 24 November 2014.

³ Quoted from Fisher et al. 2000. p. 47.

was dominant before the conflict. This identity was able to shield them from the religious identities popularly used by others “condition the minds of society by validating the existence of a war between Muslims and Christians” (Manuputty 2004)⁴ and thus transform members of society into actors contributing to the escalation of the violent conflict. Even as the conflict erupted around them, the women of Poka maintained their sense of Poka-ness.

This is evidenced by their spontaneous actions when the residents of Benteng Karang (a Christian village located in the hills above Poka) evacuated their village because of an attack by the Muslims of Jazirah Leihitu. The women of Poka, both Muslims and Christians, spontaneously aided the people of Benteng Karang with food, clothing, and temporary shelter (Rahma, ordinary woman, Poka). Another example of the Poka-ness had been told by a priest who had previously been stationed in Poka. He identified the sense of Poka-ness as a shared spirit for life which creates solidarity and camaraderie.⁵

Just last year, the women of Poka went to Jakarta. They collected money on their own through fundraising. At first they felt insulted by the people who lived in the city (of Ambon). If there were church celebrations, such as *sidi* (an affirmation of faith), or baptisms, usually there would be a party. They wanted to make their own events but they were mocked by the congregations in the places where they took refuge. These mocking words were a blow to them, but on the other hand it also drove them to rise up, to ignite their passions. “We were refugees, yes, but we have to rise up.” They went to Jakarta, with very high spirits, and they held several activities (for fund rising).⁶

This sense of Poka-ness is even still felt by the people of Poka who are now living in other villages. The Reverend Eda, for instance, became a refugee in Passo during the conflict; she has since become a resident of Passo. The Reverend Eda was born and raised in Poka and still feels strong ties to the village. She is saddened by her memories of the conflict in Poka, because it forced her to separate from her family, friends, and neighbors.⁷

Peace-building Initiatives by the Women of Poka

The women of Poka, made numerous peace-building efforts range to mediation to campaigns against violence and for peace. Here are stories of their activities in peace-buildings:

Mediation

⁴ Original: mengkondisikan kognisi masyarakat dalam memberikan pembenaran mengenai situasi perang Islam-Kristen yang terjadi.

⁵ Interview with Reverend Ferry, who was once stationed in Poka, 21 November 2014.

⁶ Original: Tahun lalu saja, perempuan Poka ke Jakarta. Mereka mengumpulkan uang sendiri dengan cara menggalang dana. Awalnya mereka pernah tersinggung dengan orang yang tinggal di kota (Ambon). Kalau ada acara hajatan gereja seperti *Sidi* (= bentuk pengakuan iman), Baptis, biasanya ada pesta. Mereka mau buat acara tapi mereka diejek oleh jemaat tempat mereka pengungsi. Kalimat sindiran itu membuat mereka terpukul tapi di sisi lain itu membangkitkan/memacu semangat mereka. Kita memang pengungsi tapi kita harus bangkit. Mereka ke Jakarta dengan semangat yang tinggi dan mereka mengadakan berbagai kegiatan. Tingkat solidaritas mereka sangat tinggi. Pertama kali mengungsi, saya membuat kalender dengan foto-foto mereka saat di pengungsian, sampai sekarang mereka masih menyimpannya.

⁷ Interview with Reverend Eda, Paso, 26 November 2014.

Mediation is a conflict resolution method in which a third party is involved. This third party, the mediator, assists in the interaction and communications between the conflicting parties until they are able to resolve the conflict. Lela Rengur, a teacher and civil servant who is active in women's group activities, often plays a role as a mediator. The mediation practiced by Lela Rengur includes arbitration, as she, the third party, has the authority to determine and enforce a resolution. This is related to her position as the wife of a former Ketua RT (neighborhood leader) and the current Ketua RT. In Ambon, fighting and arguing between youths as a result of drunkenness is considered ordinary and common. Husbands and wives fighting and "throwing harsh words at each other" to the point that the wife complains to her family or neighbors is likewise considered normal.⁸ Although they are considered acceptable and normal, both forms of fighting disturb the peace in the community, and as such require a third party to resolve them. To handle fights between drunken youths, Lela Rengur has them speak, then asks them to stop fighting.

From me, myself. The thing is we have to respect each other when speaking. Young people, elders, those older than me, or the same age as me. We have to speak to each other politely. This means that everything starts with how I carry myself. So, when we're speaking to someone, we have to respect that person, so that that person respects us too. While my husband was the Ketua RT, I was the head of the PKK (Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga; Guidance for Family Prosperity), and now I've become the Ketua RT. Alhamdulillah, when I speak people still listen. If there is a problem out there in society, I need only say "Stop" in a firm manner, and they'll stop. If somebody gets drunk and causes trouble, and then the children or someone else calls me, "Mama, there's chaos in the streets!" I go and take care of it.⁹

Meanwhile, to resolve fighting between a husband and wife, Rahma focuses predominantly on listening and giving advice.

A: Usually we in the family deal with it as best we can, so that things don't blow up and we don't have to report things to the police.

Q: How is that dealt with?

A: [Once] we advised my sister. If her husband had calmed and was in a good mood, we would ask our sister to go back home and speak it over with him

Q: Did you facilitate them?

⁸ Interview with Noni Sulaiman, young woman, Poka, 24 November 2014.

⁹ Original: Dari beta sendiri. Cara bicara harus saling menghargai. Anak muda, orang tua lebih dari beta atau sebaya dengan beta berbicara dengan santun. Artinya semua ini berasal dari pembawaan diri sendiri. Karena ketika berbicara dengan orang itu kita harus menghargai orang agar orang juga menghargai katong. Selama ini dari bapak masih jadi RT, beta masih jadi Ibu PKK sampe beta su jadi RT sampe sekarang, Alhamdulillah kalau berbicara orang masih dengar. Kalau ada masalah sedikit di masyarakat, beta cuma bilang "stop" dengan tekanan suara yang tinggi, mereka pasti stop. kalau ada yang mabuk bikin kacau dan kebetulan anak-anak atau orang lain yang panggil bilang Mama ada kaco dimuka jalan, beta pergi atasi.

A: Yes. I made them meet, but I didn't interfere. See, it's their domestic life.¹⁰

Repatriation of Refugees

In 2002, when the level of violence began to decrease in Maluku, the people of Poka, specifically those who had remained, began to consider a way to repatriate the residents of Poka who had become refugees. Their initiative was warmly received by the local security forces, including the military and police. The Muslim men and women were enthusiastic supporters of this plan and attended a meeting to discuss it. One of the women of Poka recalls that this meeting was held in August 2002.¹¹

There was a meeting at the mushola here in Poka, a meeting to discuss how we could bring back our Christian fellows who wanted to return to Poka. My husband didn't go. I was the one who went to the meeting. There was the commander of the Navy Base, the Work Unit (leader; Satgas), the Camat (district chief), the village chief of Poka, (and) the Reverend Nahusona. At the time everyone was talking. Some of the elders (who were Muslim) did not want to speak, so they stayed quiet.

Because everyone was talking, I finally asked permission to speak. "My apologies, everyone. We've been talking about bringing them (the Christians) back here (to Poka). We're not forbidding it, because that is their right, and they own land. I ask but one thing. In the oath we took together back then, there was an article which stated 'Whomsoever attacks first will be banished from the village of Poka'. Regarding that, I ask the Camat, the Priest, and the Village Chief to answer."

But those three people didn't answer. I said "Father, at the time you had said that there is no red, there is no white, there is only the red and white (there are no Christians, there are no Muslims, there are only Indonesians; a play on the "colors" used to differentiate the two fighting groups)." I said "I partook in that oath. We took it at Unpatti, so I know the whole process. You said "there is no red, there is no white, there is only the red and white", and yet it turned out that the red (Christians) attacked the white (Muslims). The priest bowed his head. Didn't dare raise it. Everyone was quiet. Speechless. Even now there hasn't been an answer."¹²

¹⁰ Original:

J: Biasanya kita dalam keluarga selesaikan dengan baik-baik, sehingga tidak membesar dan tidak sampai melapor ke polisi.

T: Cara mengatasinya itu bagaimana?

J: Kita nasehati adik perempuan saya itu, kalau suami sudah diam dan dalam kondisi baik, baru minta adik perempuan kembali ke rumahnya dan bicara baik-baik.

T: Saat itu, ibu ada fasilitasi mereka?

J: Iya, hanya mempertemukan mereka tapi tidak ikut campur, itu kan orang punggul rumah tangga.

¹¹ Interview with Rahma, ordinary woman, Poka, 20 November 2014.

¹² Original: Dulu itu ada pertemuan di Mushala Poka sini, pertemuan untuk membicarakan pengembalian kita punya saudara Kristen mau kembali ke Poka. Saat itu bapak (suami) tidak pergi. Yang ikut pertemuan itu saya. Saat itu ada Komandan Lanal, Satgas, Camat,

Although the initial plenary meetings for the refugees' return to Poka were tense owing to Rahma's request for accountability for the conflict in Poka in 1999, the homecoming process went smoothly. The mayor of Ambon at the time, Yoppy Papilaya, who had previously been a resident of Poka, was also in attendance. The mayor walked approximately one kilometer together with the refugees from the refugee camps to Poka. Through an *adat* ceremony, the refugees were welcomed warmly by the residents of Poka who had not evacuated. Most of refugees from Poka ultimately returned, although there are some who have not yet returned for a variety of reasons. The fact that some of these refugees have not returned has changed the social situation in Poka. Before the conflict, Poka was considered a mixed village, but it is now majority Islam. However, the sense of Poka-ness remains stronger among the women than their religious identities.

Campaigns against Violence and for Peace

In 2014, a local NGO, the Arika Mahina Foundation, launched its MAMPU (Maju Perempuan Indonesia untuk Penanggulangan Kemiskinan; Advancing Indonesian Women to Eradicate Poverty) Program in collaboration with the BaKTI Foundation and with financial support from the Australian Government; this program supports the women of Poka. Approximately 25 women from Poka are active as members of the Constituent Group. Through the MAMPU Program, several members have received training from Arika Mahina. This includes advocacy training (for human and women's rights) and organizational training.

Aside from offering training, Arika Mahina also disseminates information about social organization, reproductive health, and the BPJS (Badan Penyelenggara Jaminan Sosial; Board for the Provision of Social Protection) health insurance program. According to the head of Arika Mahina, Ina Sospelisa, the training and information they have provided has had a positive effect on group members' attitudes, mindsets, and actions, particularly in terms of raising awareness of gender roles in society and in organizations. Ina states that, generally, after participating in training, women immediately share their knowledge with both constituent members and women who are not members. The forums used are generally women's Qur'anic reading groups, church groups, and other local meetings.

One highly active member of the Constituent Group is Martina Kelbulan, also called Ivon (aged 40). Ivon works for the village government of Poka, in its governance office. In her free time, Ivon actively invites other

Kepala Desa Poka, Bapak Pendeta Nahusona. Saat itu semua orang sudah bicara, kita punya sesepuh (yang muslim) tidak mau bicara, mereka pilih diam.

Karena semua sudah bicara, terakhir saya minta bicara. "Saya minta maaf dari semua, dari tadi dibicarakan tentang kembalinya mereka (Kristen) kesini (Poka), kita tidak larang, karena ini mereka punya hak, karena mereka punya tanah. Satu yang saya mau minta, didalam kita pung ikrar bersama dulu kan ada, salah satu butir yang berbunyi, siapa yang duluan menyerang, maka dia keluar dari desa Poka, Untuk itu saya minta yang jawab ini dari Bapak Camat, Bapak Pendeta dan Bapak Kepala Desa." Tapi Tiga orang itu tidak jawab. Saya bilang Bapak Pendeta saat itu kan ada yang menyatakan bahwa tidak ada merah, tidak ada putih, yang ada itu merah putih. saya bilang saya hadir saat acara ikrar itu, kan di bikin di Unpatti, jadi saya tahu semua proses saat itu. Bapak kan bilang tidak ada merah, tidak ada putih, yang ada itu merah putih nyatanya merah hantam putih. Bapak Pendeta Tunduk tidak angkat muka. Semua diam tidak ada suara. Sampai detik ini tidak ada yang jawab.

women to join village-level meetings and advocates for the resolution of issues facing Poka, including domestic violence. The advocacy method used by Ivon begins with an approach to the victim—the wife—which leads to the victim voluntarily describing the domestic violence she has faced. Afterwards, Ivon accompanies the victim to the police to file a report so that the perpetrator—the husband—can be detained for several days. Only after the perpetrator is freed does Ivon conduct mediation/arbitration with the family members and religious leaders in the hope that the victim and perpetrator can live in harmony again. Ivon accompanies the victim until the case is closed by the police.

CONCLUSION

The peace-building efforts of women in Poka were spontaneous and not accompanied by analysis or strategic planning. They have tended to depend on their emotions, instincts, and identity and sense of solidarity as women. These women's actions were capable of preserving the integrity and survival of their families and communities. Their efforts to manage the conflict received little support from civil organizations such as local, national, and international NGOs; rather, local and national NGOs have focused on specific topics such as the prevention of violence against women and children, rather than promoting an understanding and realization of planned and strategic peace-building activities. The main factor that drove or motivated their efforts at local peace-building was a collective territorial identity, a sense of Poka-ness, that continues to strengthen the solidarity and social ties between the women of Poka.

However, simply depending on a shared identity in order to manage conflict and build peace is not sufficient, as identity can change quickly in response to threats, both direct and indirect. One's identity, as part of one's need to be a part of a unit and feel secure, is also fragile because one's social context can also change quickly. As such, to support and improve the women of Poka's conflict management abilities, they should be given an understanding of the importance of knowledge and conflict-analysis skills, of the ability to plan and formulate strategies for conflict management. Their efforts to prevent and transform must also be developed so they resolve not only conflicts that are readily evident, but also latent conflicts and their causes.

In order to achieve sustainable peace in Poka and its neighborhood there must be support, be it political (in a general sense), adequate organizational capacity (though not too formal), financial support, or long-term planning. These four forms of support are necessary to ensure that social violence can be effectively prevented and reduced.

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