



Can Aceh become a model for the development of a multicultural society in Indonesia?

Description

In this essay, there are three keywords, namely *life*, *culture*, and *adat*, linked to the concept of multi-culture in Aceh. Of course, this topic is a triangle that must be connected. The term *life* is found in animate creatures. While *culture* on the pattern of life between individuals. [1]

The *custom* is often seen as a habit. In tradition, Aceh adat is defined as ‘law’ known as *Adat Meukuta’ Alam* (AMA). If the term human is added, *humans live, are cultured, and have customs*. When *humans live*, they will experience a process of understanding *being* (state), *awareness* (awareness), and *action* (action). In achieving *existence*, humans will seek *identity*.

The Concept of *Jati*

The term *jati* means authenticity. There is the term *Melayu Jati in Malaysia*, which means *the original Malay*. In Indonesia, the term that is often raised is *national identity*. When translated, native Indonesians are those who can understand the authenticity of the values of the Wangsa (nation) in the archipelago. In other words, all the authenticity that exists in the nation in the archipelago will be drawn on the foundation of the life of the nation and state.

“*Jati*” is applied to the Acehnese. Then the problem is how to find the authenticity of the Acehnese in the form of *existence, awareness, and action*. That way, people living in Aceh need to know what makes them ‘exist’ as Acehnese. Or, what are the basics of consciousness that sustain *Acehnese human life*? [2] When will the Acehnese *realize its authenticity*? Because if we can know the forms of human consciousness, it will be elementary to understand the system of thinking and symbol systems that affect humans, which is then often termed *culture* which will be explored in this essay so that it can be known *whether the Acehnese can live with the various cultures in front of them* which is related to the term *multi-culture*, which is the

foundation of thought in the life of the nation in Indonesia.

Indonesia is a country that has various cultures that stretch from Sabang to Merauke. This diversity makes Indonesia a *nation-state* that cannot be separated from cultural issues. In turn, this diversity and diversity appears various *cosmic awareness* in each ethnic group. [3]

There will be problems with *knitting the cosmic diversity within a frame of national unity and integrity* in Indonesia. Another thing that arises is the resilience of the culture in this country in the face of culture from outside, which is often known as *pop culture*. Through the advancement of ICT (*Information, Communication, Technology*), this culture has been present in every aspect of people's lives. [4]

For this reason, this study describes how to construct harmony in life in cultural diversity. It is hoped that this presentation will provide a paradigm from a socio-anthropological perspective regarding the role of culture in everyday human life.

What is Multiculturalism?

So far, studies of multiculturalism are often carried out in anthropology. [5] Anthropologists try to explain cultural diversity in a country with various cultures. Therefore, there is a view that in cultural studies, there is a mention of the term *Multiculturalism without Culture* which is because: “*It was also widely accepted that laws, rules, and institutions are likely to be biased towards the identities and interests. of majority cultural groups, even when they have been crafted in ways that are supposed to make them culture blind .*” [6]

In Indonesia, the identity and interests of cultural groups are controlled mainly by Javanese culture. So that *other cultures* in Indonesia must *adapt to becoming Javanese* (becoming Javanese). The pattern of life follows the pattern of Javanese culture based on Hindu and Buddhist theology. [7] The pattern of government also follows the standard of Javanese cosmology. [8]

Therefore, as the majority group, the interests of Javanese culture in Indonesia are already tied to the interests of the life of the state and nation. The thesis of ‘multicultural without culture’ becomes important to be seen in the Indonesian context.

The *Kejawen*

Hadiwijaya said that “the domination of nature thinks the Javanese are still very much influenced by the magnitude of natural forces such as the outer ocean, high mountains that can erupt at any time, haunted forests, highlands with very cold craters, and so on.” [9]

This pattern of macro-cosmic interpretation is already typical in Javanese life. The dominating culture in Indonesia departs from human harmony with the universe or human submission to the universe. This philosophy was then used as a cultural religion known as *Kejawen* or *Javanese Religion*. Anthropologists try to understand *the Javanese religion* [10], which analyzes how Javanese humans form in understanding their lives before the universe.

Those who can understand and control nature, especially mountains and spirits, are only appointed as kings or queens. In other words, if someone becomes a leader in Java, the universe must first approve it. The process of seeking *the blessing of nature* is carried out by a religious group known as *Ki Ajar*. [11]

After that, all humans under the king will walk according to their respective cosmic functions. The theory to explain this paradigm is the onion theory, where a person *rises and then disappears*. They do not need to walk at the core of the cosmos but remain around the cosmos, namely nature and kings. [12] The king was then seen as having magical powers that smelled mystical. In his rotation of power, he must be on good terms with nature. This model then creates *harmony in the life of the Javanese people* in sustaining power in culture. [13]

Therefore, the pattern of harmony with nature has become the foundation of Javanese culture. As for the pattern of life that must be passed, it is done spiritually.

Meanwhile, the *kebatinan* area is then translated into an art known as *wayang*. [14] Some of the inner cores of *kebatinan* that live among the Javanese are *narima ing pangdum* (accepting what has been given as part of it). The explanation of *narima* is:

The word “*narima*” does not mean passively do not want to do or try something. Here is meant what is in hand, done, well cared for, with pleasure and joy—people who “*narima*” do not want to own the property of others. Do not be jealous of other people’s success. If people want to move forward, starting from what has been started, not “*ngongso-ongso*” (passionate, emotional), and regularly and persistently ... run their business until it is achieved. People who “*narima*” are people who can thank God. [15]

Meanwhile, another concept implemented by the Javanese *kebatinan* community is *Mamayu hayuningbawana* which makes the world/universe prosperous. [16] This concept teaches in its sequence the *sepi ing pamrih* (no desire to gain profit for oneself) and *rame ing gawe* (work hard, diligent, advanced in doing work/obligations). [17] Some of these concepts become the paradigm of Javanese cultural thinking. This harmony in the nation’s life wants to apply the

cultural values of the majority group.

The Concept of Kala

As for understanding time, the Javanese use the term “*Kala*.” Every *time* some signs have been foretold. In Java, the construction of predictions carried out by kebatinan/religious/spiritual/poet groups states that the Javanese only “enter” and carry out the “play” process in every historical episode. The prediction of independence is called the *Kalabendu*, marked by the rise of nationalism in Indonesia until 1945.

The independence is known as the *Kalasuba*. The people rejoice because the country of Java has been able to stand as a country. This prediction by Ranggawarsito is still embedded in the minds of the Javanese people. [18] So that every natural sign is interpreted as a disaster that brings a new chapter in history. Besides Ranggawarsito, there is Prabu Jayabaya (King of Kediri in 1135-1157 AD) [19] which became an essential point in the life of the Javanese in living the lives of fellow humans and also with the universe. [20]

Javanese Culture

Why do I associate the issue of harmony in life with Javanese teachings and philosophy? One of the essential answers is that after the Old Order, Indonesia became a country that implemented all of Java’s philosophies and core teachings. At that time, discussions about cultures other than Java that contained and invited conflict were directly suppressed in the issue of SARA. Therefore, cultural forces outside Java are considered a “threat” if they disturb the country’s stability. The essence of Javanese teachings was then translated into Pancasila, where Suharto, as President of the Republic of Indonesia, was used as the sole principal of the ideology of the Indonesian nation. [21]

The relationship between Pancasila and Hindu-Buddhist teachings is very close. One of the sentences in Hindu philosophy is *Ikang Dharma ingaranan widhi* which means “dharma (faith) is God.” [22] The derivative concepts of *dharma* are *silu*, *yadna*, *tapa*, and *brata*. Please contain decency and high character. *Yadna* means selfless sacrifice. As for *tapa* doing taboos.

In contrast, *brata* means reducing lust and not living excessively or extravagantly. [23] Thus, Pancasila is the core of Indonesian character used as the nation’s ideology. At the same time, the concepts of *yadna*, *tapa*, and *brata* are not raised in ideological issues but to support all national and state life activities. Some of these terms can be found, such as *Budi Dharma* and *Tri Brata*. Since the Reformation era, this state process has been challenged where Pancasila was no longer so “important.”

Since then, several areas of conflict that have the SARA have emerged. All the harmony fostered in the name of Pancasila is a feeling of sorrow in this country. Some parts of Indonesia began to rise to fight the domination of Javanese culture. Several religious and ethnic conflicts came to the fore. [\[24\]](#)

The concept of *regional autonomy* emerged. The relinquishment of this authority is then understood as limited to a discourse of power, not the handover of cosmic discourse in the region to its people. Due to the centralization of the government, which is Java-centric, regions in Indonesia are given the right to regulate their internal affairs. After that, a new term emerged, namely *local wisdom*.

The symptom of seeking *local wisdom* is a new symptom to unite this nation. Previously, *local wisdom* was only under the blanket of local culture; now, this blanket is about to be removed to be drawn as part of *national wisdom*. In the past, *national wisdom* was the application of wisdom from the core of Javanese culture.

Then, the majority culture began to open up to the cores of local culture because the culture that dominates this nation can no longer strengthen the sense of national unity and integrity. At the same time, there is another *international wisdom* known as cosmopolitanism [\[25\]](#) as the fruit of the concept of globalization. In the name of cosmopolitan, the foreign culture can block national wisdom and *local wisdom*.

Culture and National Identity

The fabric of harmony to be implemented in Indonesia has three challenges.

First, it is necessary to formulate the meaning of culture and national identity to design the multiculturalism paradigm in Indonesia. M. Sastrapratedja mentions that there are four components in building a national identity, namely: (1) self-image as a cognitive map, (2) the history of a nation, (3) national culture, arts, literature, music, (4) language, and (5) characters. [\[26\]](#)

Second, it is necessary to redefine the concept of multiculturalism in the Indonesian context. This concept originated from the study of social sciences and humanities that developed in the region, where cultural imperialism was used as a shield. Therefore, *multiculturalism without culture* needs to be understood because in Indonesia, what is going on is a cultural contestation at local, national, and international levels.

Third, when it comes to exploring the multicultural aspects of local culture, in truth, the government does not carry the desire to uniform the understanding of this nation on a cultural philosophy of the majority group.

The Cultural Landscape in Aceh

It will be seen how the role of harmony in life for the people of Aceh will be seen. In this province, the cultural landscape uses three layers. In the outer layer, it can be seen that the factors are *sea – river – rice fields*. It must be admitted that the three landscapes have witnessed the social history of how culture reproduces in Aceh. In the historical context of Aceh, the culture that came from outside took place at the seaside, namely ports, villages, and kingdoms. Here the culture of the people and the king seem to complement each other.

The river becomes the primary tool where symbolic aspects from outside enter the second landscape, namely *the river – hills – forests*. Here, the people have started accepting culture from the third layer and being a medium for the culture that emerges from the third layer, namely *hills – forests – mountains* which is the deepest area in Aceh, where they are the last shield of Acehnese culture.

Therefore, the deeper we go, the stronger we find Acehnese culture. The Acehnese culture is getting softer further out or up to the shoreline.

In Aceh, the pattern of naming villages by taking nature shows how the Acehnese cosmology is. The terms *cot* (hill), *blang* (rice field), and *krueng* (river) are to indicate that the development pattern of the Acehnese people will not be far from hills, rice fields, and rivers.

From several villages that I have visited throughout Aceh, it shows the village structure of the Acehnese people when *Puga nanggroe* (building the country) or *cah ra'uh* (opening roads) around the hills are made of rice fields (*blang*), then between the rice fields and villages are limited by a small river (*al*).

An expanse of rice fields should not be erected any buildings except the lake for a place to rest. After *alúy*, there is a road for residents and then a residential area. Finally, between the settlements, a new road was made that connects one village to another. [\[27\]](#)

Therefore, anthropologists try to understand the Acehnese culture in the second and third domains. John R. Bowen, for example, tried to describe the culture and religion of the Gayo community. [\[28\]](#)CS Hurgronje tried to “compete” Aceh’s identity in two landscapes, namely the first and third landscapes. [\[29\]](#)From here emerged the terms *Aceh Coastal* and *Aceh Inland*. The pattern is that the concepts of *ureung tunong* (Southern people) and *ureung baroh* (Northern people) are raised.

The feeling of ethnic friction in Aceh is unmistakable, especially if socio-political issues take up the cultural segment. This conflicting cultural identity has indeed occurred since the Dutch era. However, efforts to strengthen the three cultural landscapes cannot be made.

There has been a shift in cultural or customary authority within Acehese society. At the same time, the religious authority began to be fragmented into various groups. This situation led to disharmony among the Acehese, especially in terms of the region and the origin of the cultural landscape.

This situation led to an internal conflict that was regional in Aceh. People who occupy something must be seen from the origin and tribe carried in their blood. The adhesive aspects of the Acehese, namely *customs* and *religion*, do not seem to be able to unite the Acehese people.

Thus, the concept of *a local son* or *local person appears* at the level II regional level. This division process continues to occur on socio-cultural issues and has also penetrated socio-political issues.

The Conflict

Since the collapse of the New Order regime in 1998, several Aceh problems have been 'resolved.' From the context of regional autonomy and special autonomy, the religious and customary authority has been returned to the people of Aceh.

The first issue that was 'returned' was Islamic sharia. Meanwhile, the second issue is customary authority, where 13 traditional institutions in Aceh have been re-functioning. [\[30\]](#) As the highlight of this effort is the existence of *Wali Nanggroe* as a protector of the Acehese people, especially in the field of customs. [\[31\]](#)

However, the effort to unite the Acehese people with this 'returned' model has not been completed. This is because the process does not start from the grassroots but goes through a *top-down process*.

In addition, each of these efforts is always related to political and security issues. However, conflicts are not so prominent at the grassroots level, except for sentiments triggered by problems blocked by efforts through political power.

Because the effort has not been completed, handing over authority has been completed through laws and qanuns. So the indigenous peoples can take several initiatives based on common ground in finding the *identity of the Acehese* in the contemporary era. Indonesia carried out the *Javanization process* for more than 30 years, but these efforts 'failed.'

The failure was due to excessive domination that was not approved by the cosmology in this country. Western countries that carry secularism cannot influence the level of culture and

spiritualism. In other words, aspects of the spirit that exist in *culture* have not been able to be dammed by the power of secularism. So that the new form of the power of spiritualism is not in religion but culture; in this case, Aceh can make efforts to redefine the meaning of culture in the post-modern era.

The process is currently taking place in Aceh. Internally, the typology of culture is fragmented regionally. It is heading towards an elastic culture. Regionally there is a trans-localization process, decentralized, the culture is heading towards the integration process, towards other cultures, there is a process of interdependence, and in terms of power, there is a contestation. [\[32\]](#) Here, Acehese culture is embedded in customs and religion, in which there is a unifying spirit. [\[33\]](#)

Therefore, in principle, indigenous peoples in Aceh are a religious community. So, there is no power to re-separate between adat and religion because everything has become one. This unification process then becomes the frame of harmony. As long as cultural issues are not brought into the realm of political intrigue, the cultural spirit incarnated in religion will always form a harmonious society.

Thus, in the context of Acehese society, harmony among indigenous or traditional communities is not a very crucial issue. However, currently, the fragmentation of Acehese life is more directed at non-cultural or non-customary issues. As a result, indigenous peoples are more preoccupied with unproductive issues.

For this reason, in the future, the indigenous community needs to formulate a new life strategy for the Acehese people. This strategy is a new force in carrying out several things:

1. The formulation of harmony seeks to explore every aspect of spirit and spirituality in society. Then these abstract ideas it is transformed into a system of thinking.
2. The symbolic power in the lives of the Acehese people needs to be used as a binding force for fellow Acehese.
3. The Acehese need to pay attention to issues on local policies and how these policies contribute to *national wisdom*.

Because post-reformation, there is a solid effort to support the life of this nation from the rich cultural treasures that exist in the country.

Conclusion

From the description above, several things need to be underlined:

1. The Indonesian people are heading towards discovering the cosmological treasures in cultures throughout the archipelago. This moment is a gateway to entering cultural

interaction as an effort to create a multicultural society.

2. In this study, it has been found that this nation fails to impose one culture of the majority group against the cosmological paradigm of other cultures in the archipelago.
3. We must think about how to create multiculturalism to think about forms of cultural offerings that do not free this nation from cultural imperialism.
4. The people of Aceh can become a model and capital for the development of a multicultural society because the development of the community, in the end, is to bring together the spirit of religion and culture in one breath, where there is no separation between religion, culture and people's lives.

- [1]The meaning of culture can be read in(Bustamam-Ahmad 2012) (Keesing, 1974)
- [2]Read also(Harun, 2009)
- [3]About Java, see (Magnis-Suseno 2003). (Hadiwijaya 2010) (Simuh 1999)About Sundanese, read (Darsa and S. Ekadjati 2004) (Mustapa 2010) (Sumardjo 2006). About the Dayaks, see (Maunati, 2004). Readings on cultural mapping in Indonesia can be read in(Koentjaraningrat, 2007)
- [4] (Ibrahim, 1997)
- [5]See, for example(Werbner, Reproducing Multicultural Nation 2002) (Khan, 1991)
- [6] (A. Phillips 2007, 11)
- [7] (Geertz, 1980)
- [8] (Lombard, Nusa Jawa Silang Budaya: Warisan Kerajaan-Kerajaan Konsentris 2008)
- [9] (Hadiwijaya 2010, 15)
- [10] (Geertz, 1960)
- [11] (Olthof, 2007)
- [12]See the history of the kingdoms in Java (Riana, 2009) (Shashangka, 2012)
- [13]Look(Koentjaraningrat 1986)
- [14]Read Puppet philosophy in(Haryanto, 1988)
- [15] (Trimurti 1985, 43-44)
- [16] (Trimurti 1985, 45)
- [17] (Trimurti 1985, 46)
- [18]Read the teachings of Ronggowarsita (Ronggowarsito, 1997)
- [19]About Prabu Jayabaya, read(Hadiwijaya 2010, 37-46)
- [20]Read, for example(Carey, 2012)
- [21]Read the history of the Pancasila controversy in Indonesia (Ismail, 1999) (Abdillah, 1999)
- [22] (Puniatmaja 1985, 33)
- [23] (Puniatmaja 1985, 33)
- [24] (Bumualim and Hermanita 2002) (Trijono, 2004)
- [25]About this concept, read(Kahn, 2006) (Leonard, 2009)
- [26] (Sastrapratedja 2012, 144)
- [27]See further explanation in (Bustamam-Ahmad 2012).
- [28] (Bowen 1993) (Bowen 1991) (Bowen 2012) (Bowen 1995)

[29] (C. S. Hurgronje 1996) (S. Hurgronje 1985)

[30] The institutions are Aceh Customary Council; *imeum mukim*; *imeum chik*; *keuchik*; *tuha peut*; *god eight*; *imeum meunasah*; *keujruen blang*; *Panglima laot*; *glee/uteun handler*; *seuneubok tips*; *weekdays*; and *harbormaster*.

[31] Read (Bustamam-Ahmad 2012d) (Bustamam-Ahmad 2013b)

[32] (Arbuckle, 2010)

[33] (Bustamam-Ahmad 2011b)