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### **Culture and Religion in Community Relations: A case study on mining community in Belitung Island, Indonesia**

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Culture and religion, embedded and growing in a community, guide the behaviour and life of every member of the community. They also guide behaviours in the relations with other members of the community. Islam is the majority religion of Belitung, whose main livelihood is mining, which has been done for generations. As one of the youngest provinces of Indonesia, Belitung is different and unique for having a low level of conflict than most other mineral rich regions, especially in the context of the relations between companies and the surrounding communities. This study tries to describe the influence of culture and religion in shaping the character and behaviour of the Badau village community in Belitung, and also analyse the relationship between the community and the mining companies that exist in the village. A qualitative approach was used in this study by conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews to eight participants/informants who represent the community and the mining companies. This study finds that culture and religion greatly influence the character, and also determine the low level of conflict, between the community and the mining companies. In addition, this study emphasises the importance of the mining companies' ability to manage and maintain relations with community leaders in maintaining community relations.

*Keywords:* culture, religion, community leaders, community relations.

#### **Introduction**

Culture is the way of life of a society, which has a dominant role in shaping behaviour and also serves as a guideline for behaviour, and is hereditary in nature. The understanding of culture in the context of human life is complex, because it deals with various aspects of human life and is integrated not only in mindset, but also in social actions performed in daily life. Tylor (1970) emphasises that culture consists of various sub-systems, which include: belief, knowledge, law, customs and other skills obtained from the community. A similar trend is also seen from the definition of culture proposed by Sriramesh and Verčič (2012), which considers as "complex whole that includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (p. 11). From these two definitions, it is apparent that culture and belief are closely associated.

In the cultural context, belief gives rise to faith, which is held by adherents as a yardstick primarily for shaping personality. Besides, belief also creates compliance and obedience, especially in understanding the values contained therein for its adherents. The level of belief embraced by a society is determined by faith, compliance and adherence of the majority of its adherents. Indonesia is an example where Islam as a system of belief is held by the majority of the population, reaching 207,176,162 adherents, or about 87% of the total population of Indonesia: 237,641,326, based on the 2010 population census (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2010). Therefore, the cultural and social life of Indonesia is influenced by Islam.

The arrival of Islam and its spread in Indonesia began in the 7<sup>th</sup> century to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, when Islam entered through the trading process undertaken by Arab, Gujarati and Persian traders with the merchants of North Sumatra. Thus, the introduction of Islam to Indonesia is through Sumatra and the first Islamic kingdom in Indonesia was the Perlak kingdom of the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore, historically, Islam grew more quickly and easily in Sumatra, compared to Java, which was influenced by Hindu and Buddhist religious cultures.

Hindu and Buddhist religions are the oldest religions in Indonesia, entering and expanding in the island of Java in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries, however the development of the religion was curbed due to the arrival of Islam. Both Hinduism-Buddhism and Islam went into Indonesia by way of India. Meanwhile Protestant Christianity and Catholicism came into Indonesia not through trade, but through the spirit of colonialism of European countries such as Netherlands, Portugal and Spain. Both religions entered and progressed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, especially in eastern Indonesia such as Sulawesi, Maluku, Nusa Tenggara, Papua and Kalimantan. The number of followers of Protestant Christianity was around 7% and Catholics around 3% of the total population (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2010).

The long history of religious diversity in Indonesia has been through the process of integration in the context of social relations and rule of law, and has raised an interesting dynamic. This diversity is compounded by the existence of 1,340 ethnic groups scattered all over the islands in Indonesia, bringing diverse cultural values. Such diversity creates the nation's identity. Contradictions and conflicts both in the national and local contexts still frequently occur, both on socio-political issues such as: ethnicity, religion, race and inter-group (SARA) or economic jealousy. However, Indonesia has a strong ideological foundation, namely *Pancasila*, which recognizes all of the plurality based on the principle of fairness and equality.

Based on the issues of social conflicts, the Ministry of Interior of Indonesia divided the conflicts into 8 groups of issues, namely: clashes between citizens, security, SARA, social inequality, conflicts in educational institutions, conflicts between mass organisations, land borders disputes and political conflicts. The frequency of social conflicts in Indonesia rose and fell between 2010 and 2014, in which in 2010 there were 93 cases of social conflict, decreasing to 77 cases in 2011, rising again to 89 cases in 2012 and continuing to rise to 92 cases in 2013, and eventually declining to 83 cases in 2014 (Kesbangpol-Depdagri 2015).

One of the provinces in Indonesia with a low level of social conflict is Bangka-Belitung, which is well-known for its natural wealth in the plantation and mining industries. Bangka-Belitung is one of the youngest provinces in Indonesia. It has a great wealth of natural minerals and has been explored since the Dutch colonial era to the present, but the level of prosperity of the people is still low. The province, which consists of the two main islands of Bangka and Belitung, boasts a diverse community in terms of race, ethnicity and religion; however, the level of harmony and tolerance shown by members of the community appears to be relatively high.

The province has historically been known for tin mining, which began in the Dutch colonial era and was continued until the 1980s. Due to depletion of tin deposits, however, mineral exploitation is no longer focused on tin, but on non-metallic ores such as kaolin, sand and quartz. Non-metallic minerals are not considered as strategic by the central government, and therefore the authority to manage such mining is given to the local government of Bangka-Belitung. Kaolin mining is one of these non-metallic mineral mining activities, attracting many investors, particularly in Belitung.

### **Purpose of the Study**

One of the largest kaolin mining regions on Belitung island is in the village of Badau. Most villagers in Badau work as miners/mine workers in the kaolin mining companies that operate in the village, while others work in the farming sector. Mining and gardening work have been done since the days of Dutch colonialism and the skills/knowledge are hereditary, and have become the principal livelihood for the villagers. They need to possess knowledge and a good understanding of the socio-cultural characteristics of the community.

One of the characteristics that stand out in Badau village, apart from the hereditary mining occupation, is the religion of Islam, which is the religion professed by the entire village. Therefore, religious leaders have a dominant role in the context of social relations in the Badau society, and wield a lot of influence in decisions regarding development of Badau village. Religious leaders can be regarded as community leaders in addition to the village head. Therefore, mining companies look to form relationships with the leaders of the community to ensure social stability in the community as well as continuing the existence of their business. In the context of Badau community, understanding the local knowledge concerning the livelihood of mining and also the role of religious leaders are important as they are major concerns to the mining communities. This study aims to describe and analyse **how culture and religion influence relationship in the mining communities?**

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study exposes the dynamics of the relationship between the community and community relations practitioners representing mining companies in an effort to understand the social and cultural characteristics prevailing in the community for development purposes.

### **Literature Review**

Communities often play a significant role in providing companies the social license to operate. As such companies need to build relationships with the communities where they operate, and employ public relations strategies. Grunig and Hunt (1984) state that public relations practitioners have helped organizations to be responsive to the public as they are successful in channelling public feedback to the management. Practitioners have the function of connecting the company with the surrounding community, and thus must have a clear understanding of the meaning of community before delving into details of public or community relations.

There are many interpretations of the term 'community', as it is contextual and used by social scientists of various disciplines. However, echoing the point of view of many scholars, Lee and Newby (1983) states that *geography*, *interaction* and *identity* are the main characteristics of a community. Bowen, Newenham-Kahindi and Herremans (2010, p. 302) expands on this definition, stating that "communities characterized by geography as representation of people who reside in same geographic location without any reference to the interaction among them whereas communities that are classified by interaction represent a set of social relationships that might or might not be based in same place". Meanwhile, communities that are characterized by identity represent a group that shares a sense of belonging, one that is generally built upon a set of beliefs, values or experiences that are shared among the community's members.

As part of the community, the companies are heavily dependent on the support provided by the surrounding community. This dependence is not only related to the existence of the companies, but also any activity conducted by the companies, which either directly or indirectly are related to the surrounding community. Introduction of the social environment around the company is one of the main functions to be performed by practitioners of

community relations of the company. Any approach used by management to engage with a community is referred to as public or community relations.

Community relations has become the main focus for many organisations' public relations department. Altman (1999, p. 46) explains this tendency, stating that "corporate community relations is a management function that is charged to interact with the local communities". As community relations becomes the main focus, community relations practitioners take on the responsibility of maintaining relations with the surrounding community. Fitch (2009) points out that the focus of community relations has shifted towards social and cultural contexts, placing more emphasis on communities and community relations rather than the sole interest of the company. Community relations practitioners are therefore expected to have sufficient knowledge and understanding of the surrounding social and cultural environment.

The meaning of community relations has especially developed with regard to the context of relations between corporations and communities, and thus there has been a redefinition of the concept of community relations with respect to their specific content and form. Boston College for Corporate Community Relations redefines community relations as:

...the state of relations between the company and the communities (local, national, or global) in which it has presence or impact. It encompasses programs which advance the interest of both the company and its communities, such as: donations and contributions of all kinds, employee volunteerism, community-based programs, relationships with civic, professional, and non-profit organizations and corporate citizenship activities (Waddock & Boyle 1995, p. 135).

One of the most important things to community relations practitioners is culture, because culture reflects the rationale, reasoning and thoughts that are embedded in the community. The concept of culture is dynamic, however, especially since culture can change rapidly due to transformations in economical and political conditions, especially due to the impact of globalisation. According to Casmir and Asunción-Lande (1989, p. 288): "Culture has been defined in many different ways by many different people, ... can initially be identified as a process involving relations between human beings in a given environment for purpose of interaction, adaptation, and survival". The cultural understanding of Casmir and Lande shows that human beings cannot be separated from their surroundings.

Community relations practitioners, before commencing a relationship with a community, must understand the culture of the community. An understanding of culture and knowledge that includes a good recognition of the patterns of thought and behaviour will form a solid foundation for community relations. This can be achieved through becoming acquainted with the patterns of thought and behaviour that exist in the community.

One particularly important part of the cultural is systemic knowledge, as it is the basis of thinking and behaving. Livelihood patterns existing within a community are mainly influenced by the characteristics of the natural environment. Generally speaking, livelihood, which is also a part of knowledge in cultural system, is passed from one generation to the next. The system of knowledge related to livelihood is commonly known referred to as 'local knowledge.'

Local knowledge can essentially be any form of knowledge derived from socio-cultural values existing in a particular community. According to Taylor and de Loe (2012), local knowledge can also be understood as knowledge that is held by non-scientists based on their local experience, wisdom and practices and that is adapted to the local the ecosystem, for example, the knowledge to detect the content of soil. Agrawal (1995, p. 416), a political

and environmental scientist, asserts that local knowledge is "a knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society and this knowledge is passed down from generation to generation, in many societies by word of mouth". Due to its hereditary nature, and also because it is part of culture, a livelihood system is not easily changed in a drastic manner.

In addition, a part of the cultural system that is frequently used as basis and guideline in thinking and behaving is religion. Religion plays a significant role in the life of local communities as it is a culturally inherited belief system. According to social development researchers Deneulin and Rakodi (2011, p. 47), religion is "an institutionalized belief system which unites a group of believers around social practices instead of spirituality that concerns the individual possibly in socially and historically isolated way".

The role of religion is not only to shape the character of the community, but also to bind members in social relations and even in political activities, especially in decision-making processes. According to Lim and Putnam (2010), religion determines the nature of an individual's relationships with other individuals; religion also enforces the maintenance of relations and social bonding between individuals bound by such religion. The proximity of relationships based on religion will affect an individual's understanding of the meaning and purpose of life, which will in turn affect development processes. Therefore, Deneulin and Rakodi (2011) emphasise that religious groups hold that social progress and political economy must be based on their belief system.

In Indonesia religion is a part of cultural and social life. According to a 2010 statistical report from the Central Agency on Statistics, Indonesia, 207 million out of 238 million people, or around 87% of Indonesia's population, cite Islam as their religion (Yusuf 2015). Therefore Islamic values dominate Indonesian society. In many countries where the majority of people are Muslims, Islam dominates their social life. Permani (2011), a researcher in welfare studies, discusses the roles of religious institutions/organisations in developing Indonesian society, finding that pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) act as agents of change. They are especially important in encouraging social progress through education.

Good relations between the community relations practitioners, who represent the company, and the religious leaders of the village, who act as community representatives, eases the process of achieving deals and agreements. The role of religious leaders is very important, especially in representing the interests of the surrounding community. However, the interests should be those of the general public, not only those of the leaders.

In the Indonesian context, where Islam is the majority religion, the role of Islamic religious leaders is dominant, especially in rural communities. The role of Muslim religious leaders in addition to bridging the community's interests, can also be the glue in social relations within the community. Religious leaders are required to have more than just religious knowledge, but also knowledge of the conditions and the economic potential of the community. Jewkes and Murcott (1998) provide a critical view of community representatives, viewing them as individuals who have not been elected, but rather are appointed on the basis of implicit criteria that are weighed tacitly and unevenly. Community representatives, besides the village head, are usually those who are considered 'respectable', i.e, more influential and powerful in society. Therefore, as one of the community leaders, religious leaders have a responsibility to provide an understanding not only of Islam, but also of the characteristics of the community as part of the mining communities.

### **Research Method**

This study used a qualitative approach because this approach is considered the most appropriate to answer the research questions and also illustrates the importance of

understanding the culture and religion of the mining community in Badau. This approach is also used to obtain an overview of how community leaders, who represent the Badau community, attempt to meet their community's interests by interacting with the community relations practitioners, who represent the mining companies.

The data collection for this study was done using a purposive sampling method and conducting in-depth interviews with informants. The primary data collection is complemented with secondary data obtained through observation conducted by researchers. This study involves six participants consisting of: three community leaders, two kaolin mining company officials and one community member.

Data processing and analysis were also performed in accordance with qualitative research guidelines, such as grouping and categorisation via a coding process. The researcher then attempted to see how the codes related to each other, and analysed them in relation to the theories and concepts used in this study. To guarantee the validity of the data, a process of triangulation as deployed in qualitative research was implemented.

This study also has a limitation because the researcher is not a Muslim, so that the understanding of the values of Islam is not deep. Therefore, the interpretation of the researcher is focused on understanding the Islamic values that are universal.

### Discussion

This study found that the social relationships created between the Badau communities are very close, and this is caused by several factors: high degree of homogeneity in the community especially concerning religion and livelihoods, as well as the central role of community leaders in making decisions to meet the community's interests, taking into account the socio-cultural characteristics of the community. The strength of the character formation of the Badau community, in terms of behaviour, social interaction and efforts to mutually cultivate a sense of friendship, is inseparable from the role of Islam, which is implemented by the religious leaders or institutions, such as through Koran education facilities and religious teaching conducted in the mosques. The people of Badau are very obedient and disciplined in their five times daily prayers and Islamic values are socialized among people from an early age.

The fact that Islamic values are very important in the formation of character of the Badau community, introduced at an early age, is clearly stated by **Sumi**, the wife of a miner in company A, who said that "Mosque and Koran education facilities are important here, not only for worship but also for education of children and meeting place for community members to catch up". Islamic values underlie the social life of the Badau community, and act as a fundamental guideline for establishing basic laws and regulating the behaviour of each member of the community. According to Deneulin and Rakodi (2011), religion is an institutionalized system of beliefs that unites a group of people. It is not based on their individual spiritual beliefs, but around social practices that are detached socially and historically. From this definition it appears that religion plays an important role in influencing the attitudes and behaviours of followers.

The influence of religion in forming a close family relationship appears not only in Badau village, but also in the whole society of Belitung. **Elis**, head of administration of company A illustrates this situation "In Belitung, everyone is like a family member, with the people from the same village or from other villages and we are educated by our religion to give respect to each other". Islam provides an understanding of the meaning and purpose of life in order to create tranquillity.

The existence of mining companies in the village creates social dynamics that arise in the context of relations with the local community. Both mining companies and the

communities see this relationship as mutual in terms of strengthening the economy, especially regarding the provision of jobs. **Neti**, a teacher who is regarded in the community as one of the female figures of Badau supports that "by working in the mines, many families can afford to educate their children to higher levels, and it can be seen that all children in Badau go to school. It is expected that these children will finish high school as well". This situation shows that the presence of mining companies is considered sufficient to support the economy of the citizens, and also the mining companies obtain support from the Badau community especially regarding employment.

This relationship also cannot be separated from the role of religion. According to Lim and Putnam (2010), religion determines the nature of an individual's relationships with other individuals; religion also enforces the maintenance of relations and social bonding between individuals bound by such religion. Social cohesion among Badau community members is the key to the creation of a positive social network based on their religious identity. Islam is the 'glue' of all social activities. According to Lim and Putnam (2010), the social networks that are formed due to their affinity to religion will influence the individual in their understanding of meaning and purpose of life and will lead to self-development.

The findings of this research also indicated that the involvement of local religious leaders plays a major role in encouraging not only community participation, but also company participation in the form of contributing funds. Religious leaders encourage the participation of community members not only in spiritual but also in social activities. This has been clearly recognised by **Zuly**, a prominent Islamic religious and community leader in Badau, who explained that

I am often visited by people who have problems to be asked for my advice, usually about family problems. Sometimes the residents come to me when they are need of funding both for feasts and customary celebrations, or sometimes also to repair roads or mosques. Usually I try to ask for these funds from mining companies around the village.

In addition, the mining companies do not hesitate to give donations. Islam, which is embraced by the entire community of Badau, establishes basic values in residents' lives and acts as a guideline for every member of society. This is why the approach taken by kaolin mining companies through community relations practitioners towards the community starts from understanding the values existing in the community, approaching religious leaders who also act as informal leaders, as well as trying to fulfil the needs for social facilities, especially concerning religion both in terms of physical development and funding.

The central role held by religious leaders, especially in applying for funding for the construction of religious facilities and channelling funds, provides them with additional authority, especially in terms of financial management for funds provided to the villagers. This authority is often abused by religious leaders, especially to improve their socio-economic status compared to other inhabitants of Badau. This is coupled with their deep level of religious knowledge that makes the religious leaders very influential on the residents, especially in creating social stability. Social stability is used as an excuse to bridge the relations between the companies and the community, and to open up opportunities to gain personal benefit, rather than making changes for community development. This is happened according to Jewkes and Murcott (1998) because of community viewing community representatives as individuals who have not been elected, but rather are appointed. Mining companies also take advantage of the role of religious leaders especially to meet their interests. Religion is treated as a **gateway** by the companies; which led the relations built with

the religious leaders merely serve the company's business purposes, and not in the context of community development.

Local knowledge is also part of culture, in that there are aspects of knowledge and livelihood that are embraced and possessed by the community. Mining and farming are the main occupations of Badau community's members. Both occupations have been passed down for generations and are closely linked with the surrounding natural environment. Both are carried out using local knowledge. Based on the findings from this study about local knowledge possessed by the people of Belitung in general and Badau in particular, two forms of knowledge can be identified, namely local soil knowledge and knowledge concerning mine techniques.

Mining companies still depend significantly on the knowledge of Badau villagers, especially regarding natural resources relating to soil. This fact is reinforced by **Sutanto**, the director of company A, who says, "The people of Belitung have been working in mining for generations, so they are already skilled in the occupation". Mining continues to be conducted relying on simple, traditional tools (generally made of wood), dependent on natural processes and uses heat from the sunlight. They are based on hereditary knowledge and the experience of previous generations. This is supported by **Rahadian**, a mine worker in company A, who said, "It was my parents who taught me mining and the only skills I have are mining and planting." This knowledge, according to Agrawal (1995, p. 416), is indigenous knowledge. He asserts, "indigenous knowledge is also known as local knowledge, the unique knowledge possessed by a given culture or society and this knowledge is not gained by formal education but passed down from one generation to next generation, and also mostly through mouth to mouth".

Local knowledge is required by the companies, especially in terms of the kaolin drying process. The process is clearly explained by **Sutanto**, the director of company A, who said, "We could use a dryer to accelerate the drying process, but the quality of the results obtained is not as good as kaolin dried naturally using stacks made by the workers." This statement shows that the natural drying method using sunlight and the use of traditional working equipment gives much better results.

Several Badau community members have the knowledge and the ability to detect the location of kaolin deposits of a high quality. This capability is unique, as it is only owned and understood by Badau villagers who have extensive experience in mining. **Tris**, the director of company B, explains that:

We bought this location from the previous company because the company cancelled its operation. We also did not ask for help from people who have the ability and knowledge to detect the content and quality of existing kaolin deposits. After drilling, it turned out that the quality (brightness) of our kaolin was not so good.

This knowledge reflects an in-depth understanding of the environment by the people living in it. Local soil knowledge is part of local knowledge and therefore it is also very important to pay attention to the environmental aspect.

The ability of mining companies through community relations practitioners in developing relationships with religious leaders, and also customizing the way in the processing of kaolin with the local knowledge possessed by the community, maintain the stability of existing social relationships. However, the pattern of this relationship cannot guarantee sustainable community development because it is only oriented to the interests of mining companies and also religious leaders, who are oriented on self-interest, or in the physical construction of Islamic religious facilities.



### Conclusion

Islam as the sole religion of the Badau community is the guide for members of the community in thinking and behaving. This situation puts Islamic scholars as community leaders, having the same influence as other Badau community leaders such as the village head.

Mining is one of the oldest occupations in Badau, and this has been hereditary. Knowledge of how to mine and understand the natural environment has become a local knowledge, which also is part of the culture that is believed by members of the community as it relates to livelihood. The local knowledge possessed by the people is already believed to be the best knowledge in terms of mining.

An understanding of the social and cultural conditions of the Badau community is absolutely necessary for mining companies in order to maintain their existence. Most of the mining companies operating in the village understand this condition. It is therefore essential for mining companies to build mutually beneficial relationships with religious leaders, especially to be able to build relationships with the community. The impact of this relationship is the creation of a stable condition. However, this relationship does not give a positive impact to the overall development of the Badau community (except concerning religious facilities) as it is only oriented to the economic interests of mining companies, and also of religious leaders.

The mining companies also recognize the importance of local knowledge possessed by the Badau community especially with regard to the processing of kaolin, and this gives a positive impact for the quality of the product. Therefore, mining companies can easily obtain this knowledge without having to make large investments in terms of procurement of equipment and innovation in knowledge. It is also beneficial for the mining companies. So in other words, the relationship that is created in the mining communities in the village could go well because of the ability of the mining companies to understand the social and cultural character of the Badau community to achieve their goals, without having to pay attention to the process of community building.

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