

The Concept of *Welas Asih* Through Face Negotiation as Intercultural Competence

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Abstract

The act of *welas asih* or mercy is a necessity to create peace and harmony within Indonesia's multiculturalism. This article attempts to develop the concept of *welas asih* aiming to forgive the unforgivable which often occurred during the multicultural conflict as well as enhancing intercultural competence. The article overviews the face negotiation approaches in intercultural dialogue as a non-formal learning environment. The dialogue covers cultural conflict resolution in Indonesia, with a goal of intercultural competencies and building a better intercultural friendship. The research uses qualitative method and literature review analysis of related articles such as ethnicity conflict, face negotiation and forgiving. The result of this study shows that communication's facework strategies in face negotiation are the best predictors in developing the act of *welas asih*. Total forgiveness after transgression is well accepted for establishing a better friendship-relationship. This discourse shows that the usage of face negotiation is essential in creating harmony, understanding cultural difference and eliminating prejudice within college students' friendships

Keywords

cultural conflict resolution; face negotiation; forgiving; intercultural competence; *welas asih*

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's intercultural conflict does not happen recently, but since late 1990s, the country had suffered from intercultural conflict (Bertrand, 2004) and is still ongoing especially between ethnicity, religion, race and inter-group relations (SARA). This intercultural conflict is often based on racism, prejudice and controversial history resulting in social discrimination, violence and segregation (William & Johnson, 2011) and Indonesia is no exception. SARA conflicts in Indonesia have become commonplace given the history of Indonesia which was established on communal unity (Tomagola, 2005). The SARA conflict made Indonesia disintegrate and far-off from the symbols of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* or unity in diversity. Occasionally the conflict fosters a sense of hatred,

revenge that is deeper between cultures, ethnicities or certain religions. The rise of SARA-based conflicts shows that the peaceful atmosphere in Indonesia is still far from being realized (Abdilla et al., 2019). For this reason, efforts are needed to form an understanding of conflict reconciliation based on *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* and intercultural competence through intercultural dialogue.

Multiculturalism does not only stand for domestic issues but also in the international society. Multiculturalism leads to issues of *phobia*, or *xenophobia* regarding differences as stated by Raymond Taras (Hill, 2016). This of course, becomes a barrier

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due to fear and suspicions towards people or group that are seen as strangers in one's own culture (Hill, 2016). Taras stated that the fear of differences formed anxiety and disturbance within society that undergoes cultural changes resulting in the vulnerability of minorities and prejudice by the majorities (Hill, 2016). Intercultural dialogue is the basis for multicultural understanding and the framework of intercultural cooperation (Kochoska, 2015). The process of intercultural dialogue involves openness, response, and polite refutation between individuals, groups or organizations that have cultural differences and views (Kochoska, 2015). This intercultural dialogue creates a space for exchanging views on cultural differences verbally as well as developing knowledge, understanding, and respect (Bortini & Afshari, 2012). The dialogue will help in providing an understanding of cultural differences and lead to peace-building (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2015). This activity is carried out through students' communication participation in discussing conflicts and differences between cultures in Indonesia, which aims at developing cooperative environment and the desire to resolve political, social, and cultural tensions. Students are chosen in this study as they are agents of change and future generation. Through intercultural dialogue, it is important for students to develop a critical thinking towards multicultural issues, as well as appreciation atmosphere and willingness to tolerate differences in order to create a peaceful coexistence and harmony (Rochwulaningsih, 2015) through Indonesia's multicultural issues as part of their intercultural competencies. The dialogue does not focus on agreeing or disagreeing, but rather on understanding the conflict situation in Indonesia from various perspectives to create a framework and promote peace and harmony to improve ways of living together through difference (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2015). This intercultural dialogue activity will create a safe but critical space where the learning process can occur and help students in developing intercultural competencies (Bortini & Afshari, 2012). This will facilitate the students in interacting and

building friendships between ethnicities, religions, and cultures. The success of intercultural dialogue has resulted in the arising student movements that reject discrimination based on SARA in several universities in Indonesia (Effendy, 2017; Nurnisa, 2017). Unfortunately, few kinds of researches address intercultural competence in the aftermath of problems and conflicts that result in the presence of disappointment, fear, hatred and anger. This article aims to bridge that gap through the idea of *welas asih* that will be applied to intercultural competence so that post-conflict forgiveness can be done earnestly. Also, this article will look at the communication perspective through face negotiation to be applied in the act of *welas asih* and intercultural competence, as a development for intercultural competence research, especially in Indonesia.

Welas asih is an attitude to promote forgiveness and to dissipate revenge for the sake of improving relationships and reconciliations (Afif, 2019). *Welas asih* is a delicate matter as it reflects one's humanist side (Afif, 2019). Efforts to foster *welas asih* are obtained through face negotiation that sees and predicts the facework of individuals of different cultures in responding to disputes or conflicts (Ting-Toomey, 2009). In face negotiations there are face loss and face threats, which often results in conflict escalation due to the lack of understanding of differences. *Welas asih* is included in the face restoration effort, which conducted after the acknowledgment of suffering due to face loss and face threat. The concept of *welas asih* emerged as forgiveness often done but lacking in the comprehension of meaning and consequences every time the word 'forgives' arises (Afif, 2019). Therefore, when associated with the context of intercultural conflict, forgiveness only momentarily reduces disputes as there is no awareness of the true meaning of forgiveness. True forgiveness creates *welas asih*, as an ability to forgive things that are difficult to forgive (Afif, 2019). *Welas asih* provides an improvement to self and relationship, as well as treating pain caused by previous transgressions (Zhang et al., 2015), thus essential in

interpersonal and intercultural relations (Merolla & Zhang, 2011). The process then requires communication assistance (Cumings, 2013) that can be obtained through intercultural dialogue.

With that, this article seeks to conceptualize *welas asih* with a face negotiation approach that sees facework as an act of communication by the students in intercultural dialogue when discussing SARA conflict issues that occurred in Indonesia. The concept of *welas asih* will develop an attitude that supports students' intercultural competence especially post-conflict which is shown by the ability to forgive the unforgivable, tolerance, empathy, respect, solidarity and openness. The face negotiation approach will show how *welas asih* is applied and included in the intercultural competence.

Face Negotiation Theory

There have been many attempts made by researchers to understand the problems and conflicts in terms of intercultural relations, one of which is to apply face negotiation (FNT) in research. Up until now there have been many discussions about this theory, many however only been conducted in countries such as the US, European countries, African, China and even Japan (Adegbola et al., 2018; Anthony & McCabe, 2015; Imai, 2017; Lim, 1994). There are limited reviews of FNT in the case of Indonesia as the country is multicultural.

FNT is the work of Stella Ting-Toomey and her research association (Neuliep & Johnson, 2016). FNT is used in a variety of discussions in intercultural research, where the results of these studies are very useful in innovations of communication science (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003). FNT has main assumptions in the development of its theory such as (Ting-Toomey, 2009): 1) every human being in various cultures always strives to maintain and negotiate faces in various communication situations; 2) the concept of face becomes problematic in emotional situations and in situations where the identity displayed by the individual becomes questionable; 3) collectivism and

individualism culture, as well as a culture of power hierarchy, shape the facework style of the individuals involved; 4) values in a collectivism and individualism culture, shape individual choices in determining face concerns toward self, others or mutual; 5) the dimension of values is closely related to relational factors, situational and the individual, affecting the usage of facework in certain cultural situations (giving uniqueness); 6) the ability to do facework as well as interactions between cultures is also determined by knowledge of cultural sensitivity, and the ability to communicate with different cultures.

Face refers to the self-image that one's wants to show in front of others in a certain situation (Littlejohn & Foss, 2010). The FNT developed by Ting-Toomey is used to see how cultural differences shaped one's behavior towards conflict. This theory is also used to discuss intercultural barriers and how individuals from diverse cultures overcome these barriers and reach agreements to respect and communicate with each other (Infante et al., 2010). Cultural differences can provide experiences that interfere with relationships, disrupt even create conflict due to differences in values, norms, facial orientation and goals between individuals who are of different cultures (Ting-Toomey, 2009). Many of FNT researches discussed the difference of conflict approach between individualistic and collectivistic cultures (Neuliep & Johnson, 2016; Park & Guan, 2006; Guan & Lee, 2017), in which the results showed the difference in facework selection when facing conflicts.

Facework is verbal and non-verbal messages that help individuals maintain or restore the 'loss' of the face and to build the 'pride' of the individual's face (Ting-Toomey, 2009). Research on facework in addition to discussing intercultural conflicts, also discusses interpersonal relationships as interpersonal relationships can be both intimate and professional (Ting-Toomey, 2009). Facework will affect an individual's orientation towards face concern, that is, whether the problem solving prioritizes self, others or mutual, and this also affected by

self-construal, such as being independent or interdependent. Self-construal can result in a positive or negative approach (Zhang et al., 2015). Positive is a picture that is desired to be liked by others, while a negative face is the desire to be independent and free from other people's rules (Ting-Toomey, 2009). The success of using facework is certainly different between individuals and between cultures, depending on one's knowledge of cultural sensitivity, and the ability to communicate with people from different cultures.

METHODS

The purpose of this paper is to bring a conceptual act of *welas asih* or mercy in the forgiving process as intercultural competence. This will be conducted through a face negotiation approach during intercultural dialogue. The method of the research is qualitative with literature reviews. The five steps (Cresswell, 2012) used in this research are: 1) authors identify key terms in search for the literature consisting of articles and books related to *welas asih*, face negotiation, friendship, cultural conflict, and intercultural competence; 2) locating the literature in which the authors attempted to distinguished different ideas from each article and databases to be used in the article; 3) critically evaluate and select the literatures that are related to the article; 4) organizing the literature and last; 5) writing a literature review to be included in the article. The result of this paper described how the principle of *welas asih* in forgiveness and its application in a face negotiation during intercultural dialogue as an attempt in enhancing intercultural competence of students.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Welas Asih and Forgiveness

Welas asih is an emotion that can initiate forgiveness, break the chain of revenge and hate for the sake of improving relations (Afif, 2019), it is also an essential element in forgiveness. *Welas asih* is a part of forgi-

veness, but forgiveness is not part of *welas asih* as forgiveness can take place without *welas asih* (Afif, 2019). Afif (2019) describes differences of *welas asih* and forgiveness as follows: 1) *welas asih* does not regard time and location, and this attitude also does not regard to whom *welas asih* will be given, it can be to those who are hostile or loving the individual giving *welas asih*. Forgiveness, on the other hand, is shown by the existence of violations and involves healing wounds and apologies. Forgiveness, in other words, involves the relationship between the victim and the violator; and 2) forgiveness can be given to people who are still alive and have died, but *welas asih* can only be given to those who are still alive.

There are several models of forgiveness, and *welas asih* is located in the total forgiveness model, which is the real goal of forgiveness. Solomon Schimmel (Afif, 2019) said that forgiveness is a process that takes place in the private realm (intrapersonal), interpersonal or a combination of both and the forgiveness model will be discussed in the Table 1.

Forgiveness is an emotional condition related to human cognitive and is a decision taken in terms of interpersonal relationships (Afif, 2019). Therefore, the real forgiveness process must pass through the following steps (Afif, 2019): 1) communicating suffering; 2) remembering past violations; 3) stopping anger; 4) emotional healing process; 5) efforts to improve relationships; and 6) efforts to create new relationships. These processes must be performed to create *welas asih*. *Welas asih* does not depend on human emotions but it is an emotional process, in which success is demonstrated by 1) informing the victim that they no longer feel feelings such as anger, disappointment, and disclosure to the offender; 2) building a commitment to oneself to release feelings of anger, disappointment, and the closure of past painful events, 3) provide access to or for offenders to be responsible and assist offenders in freeing 'debt' of guilt against victims (Dietz, 2018).

Table 1. Forgiveness Dimensions and Characteristics

Type of Forgiveness	Forgiveness Dimension	Forgiveness Characteristics
Hollow Forgiveness	Interpersonal actions without intrapersonal commitment	Forgiveness occurred temporarily, affected by the amount of intrapersonal commitment and depth of emotional injury caused by violators. This forgiveness is vulnerable to relationship damage when the victim recalls their emotional injury
Silent Forgiveness	Intrapersonal commitment without interpersonal action	Emotional healing of the victim has occurred intrapersonal but is not continued by efforts to improve relations. Violators kept in dark of their mistakes and forgiveness.
Total Forgiveness	Intrapersonal commitment with interpersonal action	There are commitments to emotional healing and establishing a better relationship between the victim and the violator. This is followed by a sincere attitude and responsibilities from both sides
No Forgiveness	Without intrapersonal commitment and interpersonal action	Victims and violators are equally not committed to forgiveness and relations improvement

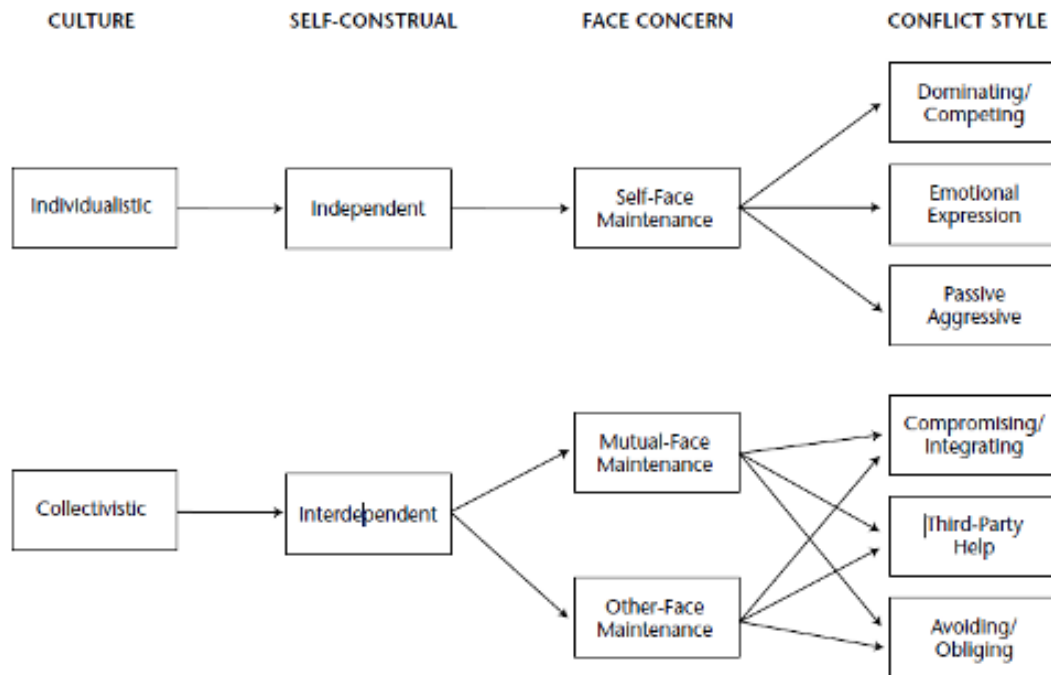
Source: Baumeister, Exline, & Sommer, 1998

Face Negotiation as Communicative Approach in Cultivating *Welas Asih*

The process of forgiveness and cultivating *welas asih* must apply the main fundamentals of the verbal and nonverbal communication process. In discussing conflicts between cultures, students will certainly be faced with face loss, face threat and face reconciliation, as the intercultural dialogue is often characterized by tension, anxiety, feeling awkward, defensiveness and misunderstanding (Broome et al., 2019). Therefore, one needs the ability to predict the facework of these students by looking at: 1) the culture adopted, both individually and collectively; 2) self-construal such as independent or dependent on the existence of others; 3) face concern, attention to the face in solving problems; 4) predicting conflict management styles (Griffin, 2012), as can be seen in the Figure 1.

From the above description, we can understand that face concerns of individu-

als are different and are associated with face loss, face threats and face reconciliation, in which individuals might focus more on managing self-face, other face or even mutual face. These faces will show one's conflict management style. Students might choose to avoid discussing conflict, obliging to others or acting passive/aggressive in conflict dialogue. This attitude, of course, will not create a successful intercultural dialogue. So by using face negotiation, these attitudes can be anticipated and carried out so that students may develop a critical attitude and thinking. With this, students can conceptualize actions and changes for conflict resolution (Holmes & Milo, 2016) and cultivating *welas asih*. Therefore, a guidance of a third party such as teacher, lecturer or even a mediator is needed to help students in expressing their thoughts and feelings regarding conflict dialogue; compromising and finding a solution that can be implemented in conflict; integrating problem-



Source: Griffin, 2012

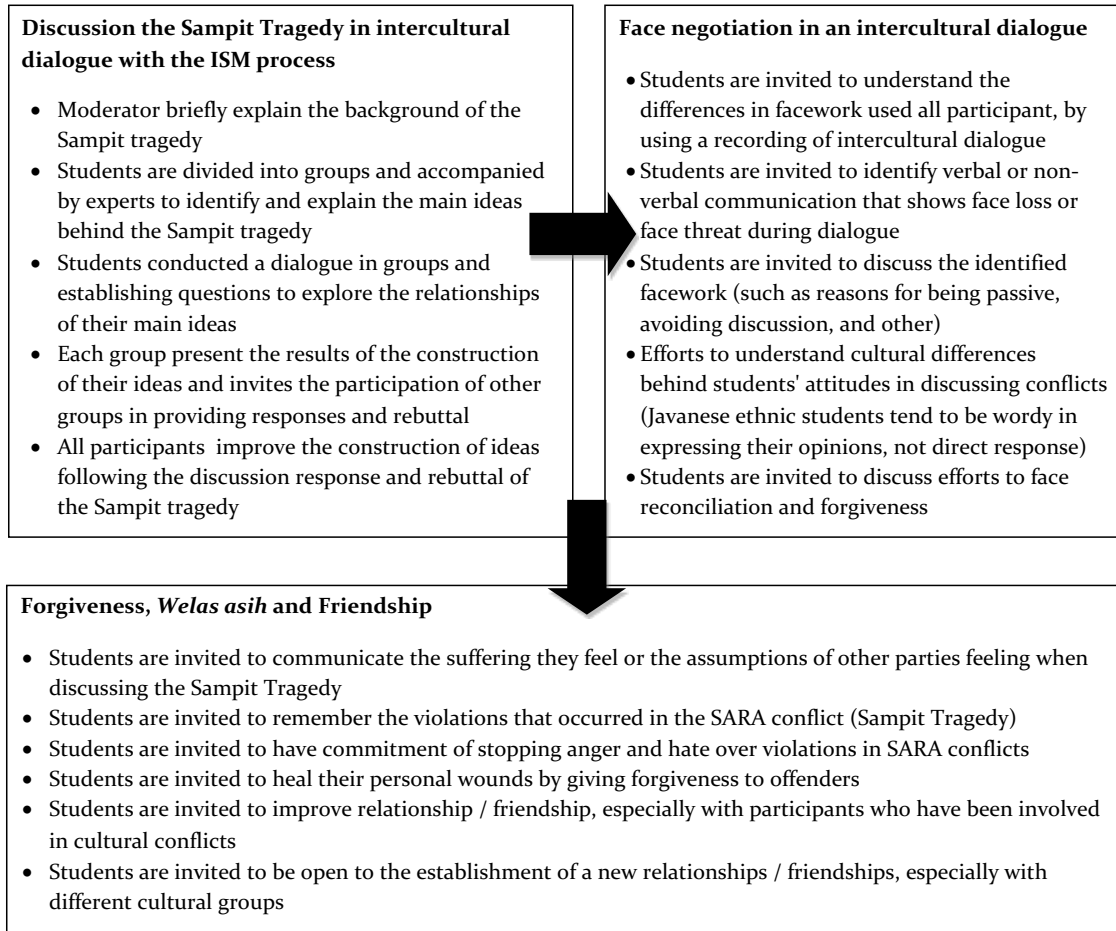
Figure 1. Face Negotiation Model based on Ting-Toomey hypotheses

solving towards conflict resolution based on win-win solution; mediating when the dialogue heats up and having the ability to deliver the controversial issues related to SARA conflicts in Indonesia. The third-party must have a neutral ground on conflict discussion and must be able to act based on facts rather than personal opinion (Abdilla et al., 2019).

Intercultural Competence and Building Friendship in Practice

The process of building intercultural competence through dialogue that raises issues of SARA conflicts in Indonesia must emphasize the principles of readiness to discuss conflicts based on facts rather than personal feelings, respecting others and openness to a new perspective (Bortini & Afshari, 2012). According to Kochoska (2015) the success in developing intercultural competence is shown by 1) the ability to create a cooperative environment and without coercion in efforts to overcome problems related to cultural, social and conflict interests; 2) developing and having knowledge of history, cultural backgrounds, social, and political contexts; 3) developing and having an attitude of respect, openness, empathy and unity; 4) the ability to think critically and broad perspec-

tives as to understand issues that are closely related to cultural conflicts; 5) effective communication skills and ability to adapt in different cultural situations (Kochoska, 2015). In regards of this matter, the process of intercultural dialogue takes a research sample of using the Interpretive Structural Model (ISM) aimed at creating an inclusive dialogue environment among students (Broome et al., 2019). The four processes for ISM according to Broome et al. (2019) are as follows: 1) identify and explain the collection of ideas that will be raised in the dialogue session; 2) identify the questions that will be used in exploring the relationship with the ideas raised; 3) invite participants to explore the relationship between ideas raised by using relational questions and; 4) show and review the results, and provide opportunities for participants to improve the structure of ideas that are collected and established. An evident picture of the application of *welas asih* with face negotiation as an intercultural competence in an intercultural dialogue can be seen based in the figure below, in which the authors took example of SARA conflict of the Sampit tragedy in 2001:



Source: ISM Process (Broome et al., 2019); Face Negotiation (Ting-Toomey, 2009; Kochoska, 2015); and Forgiveness and *Welas asih* (Afif, 2019)

Figure 2. The Scheme of *Welas asih* Cultivation with Face Negotiation Approach

Figure 2 showed the process of conflict discussion raised in intercultural dialogue. The ability to conduct a critical thinking, ability to communicate feelings, opinions, openness, and empathy for other cultural perceptions are obtained through dialogue process, as well as comprehension of face-work usage by participants while responding to conflict discussions. After that, students are invited to express their forgiveness to establish the act of *welas asih* through total forgiveness. This process is important as an attempt in creating intercultural competence for students, as well as eliminating prejudices, stereotypes, and ethnocentrism among diverse communities, which will minimize the occurrence of cultural conflicts (Abdilla et al., 2019).

CONCLUSION

The act of *welas asih* supports intercultural competence. *Welas asih* is the ability to forgive the unforgivable, a trait that shows one's humanist side. *Welas asih* is obtained through total forgiveness. The forgiveness-granting is a communication process of conflict resolution. It can be done through the approach of face negotiation as an attempt to understand and predict how people in different cultures behave to conflict. Through intercultural dialogue one's intercultural competence as well as cultivating the act of *welas asih* can be obtained. This process is important as an attempt to resolve cultural conflicts that often occur in Indonesia. In this dialogue students are invited to understand the facework of individuals from different cultures, communicating their diffe-

rences, being critical, being open-minded, being respectful and being prepared for a total forgiveness process. The success in cultivating *welas asih* in students' intercultural competence will help eliminating actions such as prejudices, stereotypes, and ethnocentrism among the diversity of communities as well as preventing cultural conflicts, which will bring great impact within local, and even to international relations.

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