The Role of Civic Associations in Ethnic Conflicts in Medan and Ambon, Indonesia

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Abstract: Various tensions of ethnic conflict had often appeared and disappeared along with the domination of state power throughout the rise and fall of the New Order . From the various regions in Indonesia, ethnic conflicts broke out in the multicultural city of Ambon due to uncontrolled competition for economic and social resources, coupled with other socio-political processes outside of the city. In contrast, ethnic conflicts did not occurred in the city of Medan despite it also had a relatively high competition for resources. The long history of these two regions had a similarity in creating a strong ethnic heterogeneity along with democratisation after the fall of the New Order regime. With the ethnic diversity of these two regions, ethnic conflicts tended to potentially erupt without carrying out any prevention and resolution steps appropriate to the background of the respective regions. This study aims to document the development and activities of the civic associations in Ambon and Medan, as well as to analyse their role in the prevention and resolution of ethnic conflicts in these two regions. This study uses a holistic approach by using various disciplines that are part of the social sciences and humanities clusters. The method used in this study uses a historical and anthropological approach in analysing the comparison of the two regions of study. Civic associations or civil society organisations in Ambon that promote peace and strengthen citizenship played an important role in preventing and resolving conflicts from community initiatives. Meanwhile, the civic associations and civil society organisations in Medan, with their cross-ethnic activities, had driven local democracy, strengthen human rights and promote peace or tolerance, which had positively shaped the plural society in Medan, North Sumatra.

Abstrak: Berbagai ketegangan konflik etnis sering muncul dan menghilang seiring dengan dominasi kekuasaan negara sepanjang naik turunnya rezim Orde Baru. Dari berbagai wilayah di Indonesia, konflik etnis meledak di kota multikultural Ambon akibat persaingan ekonomi dan sosial yang tidak terkendali, ditambah dengan proses-proses sosial politik lain di luar kota tersebut. Sebaliknya, konflik etnis tidak terjadi di kota Medan meskipun kota ini juga memiliki tingkat persaingan sumber daya yang relatif tinggi. Dengan keragaman etnis di kedua wilayah tersebut, konflik etnis cenderung berpotensi muncul tanpa adanya langkah pencegahan dan resolusi yang sesuai dengan latar belakang masing-masing daerah. Penelitian ini bertujuan mendokumentasikan perkembangan dan aktivitas asosiasi kewargaan di Ambon dan Medan, serta menganalisis peran mereka dalam pencegahan dan penyelesaian konflik etnis di kedua wilayah tersebut. Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan holistik dengan melibatkan berbagai disiplin dalam rumpun ilmu sosial dan humaniora. Metode yang digunakan adalah pendekatan historis dan antropologis dalam menganalisis perbandingan kedua wilayah penelitian. Asosiasi kewargaan atau organisasi masyarakat sipil di Ambon yang mengedepankan perdamaian dan memperkuat kewargaan berperan penting dalam mencegah serta menyelesaikan konflik melalui inisiatif komunitas. Sementara itu, asosiasi kewargaan dan organisasi masyarakat sipil di Medan, dengan aktivitas lintas etnisnya, mendorong demokrasi lokal, memperkuat hak asasi manusia, serta mempromosikan perdamaian dan toleransi, yang secara positif membentuk masyarakat plural di Medan, Sumatra Utara.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, as an archipelago consisting of various kinds of ethnicities, religions, and races, makes this country rich in diverse cultures. It is discovered that from the western end (Sabang Island) to the eastern end of Indonesia (Merauke), the government has 17,508 islands, 7,870 of which already have a name, while 9,634 still need a name. Out of the many islands in Indonesia, it is inevitable that Indonesia also has a variety of languages and characteristics of each ethnicity, even with different individual characteristics. The number of ethnicities certainly makes the differences between Indonesian society more diverse. These differences have turned into conflicts in some regions in Indonesia (Rauf, 2001, p. 2; Fisher, 2000).

Conflict is an inseparable part of the lives of Indonesian people. Conflict, in its nature, can be closed and open. Closed conflict is a situation in which many problems are hidden and must be brought to the surface to handle them. A society that appears stable and harmonious does not necessarily guarantee that there is no hostility and conflict. Open conflict is when social conflict emerges, is deeply rooted and honest, and requires various actions to address the root causes and effects. In an open conflict situation, more and more conflicting parties appear, and aspirations develop rapidly like an epidemic. Conflicts take place in line with the dynamics of society. However, there are social valves that can counteract conflicts early so that they do not develop widely. There are also factors in a society that easily spark conflict so significant that it has devastated homes, property, and perhaps the inhabitants of the social system as a whole. In the atmosphere of the social system of Indonesian society, which is very vulnerable to this various turmoil, a little trigger is enough to cause multiple social conflicts (Susan, 2010).

Conflict is always mediated to an end the warring groups. It becomes destructive if it is not immediately solved. Kenneth Boulding coined the term "conflict resolution" to name a study of resolving conflict (Matijević and Ćorić Erić, 2015, pp. 151–162). Conflict resolution is a way to minimise ethnic tensions, ethnic conflicts and political tensions. Conflict resolutions across the globe are facing a number of conflicts, social, economic, political and ethnic and other types of conflicts are prevalent. Conflict resolution is a peace-building, peace-keeping and peace-making. It can play a vital role in creating awareness among people of the world that only in a peaceful world can they arrive and develop themselves.

Conflict resolution is the best instrument to minimise and mitigate conflictual into peace and building process. It is the best mechanism towards social justice, peace, harmony, cooperation and world brotherhood. And also, it is believed that conflict resolution is the best weapon for humanity and can protect people from war. In other words, it is the protector, guardian and custodian of the peace, harmony and social justice world brotherhood across the globe (Paffenholz and Spurk, 2006; Honton, 2017). Conflict resolution is often related to civil society organisations. There are many definitions of these organisations. The role of civil society organisations in strengthening democracy, political awareness, people's participation, women's rights, and human rights has been studied across the world. In addition, in societies torn apart by ethnic conflicts, these organisations actively take part in reducing conflicts. They are also tireless in initiating, campaigning and promoting peace and minimising ethnic violence (Marchetti and Tocci, 2009, pp. 201–217; Biakarts, Kontinen, and Millsten, 2003).

The concept of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) has emerged from International Relations or, more specifically, Development Studies. NGOs are defined as self-governing, private, not-for-profit organisations that are geared to improving the quality of life of disadvantaged people. The NGO concept is significantly broader than the other two concepts. It includes organisations that provide welfare and development aid, do advocacy work, are active in development education and networking, or conduct research (Lorens, 2015).

In Indonesia, the involvement of CSOs such as non-governmental organisations in strengthening democracy, human rights, income-generating, and customary land advocacy has been a long-standing process. NGO activists come from various backgrounds, such as students, labour activists, journalists, religious organisations, and others. The birth of CSOs was a political reaction against the authoritarian regime. Historically, labour movements, peasant protests and social movements have always been connected to political issues (Norén Nilson, Savirani, and Uhlin, 2023). Since the eruption of ethnic violence in some satellite town in Kalimantan and Sulawesi, especially West Kalimantan, CSOs which its activities have been closed to local society, witnessed hundreds of dead victims as the results of ethnic wars as a continuation of national elite rifts and local economy and ethnic conflicts were very active to seek alternative ways to campaign peace among conflicted ethnic groups to re-

duce ethnic violence (Smith, 2005)

According to Wirawan, conflict is one of the essences of human life and development and has diverse characteristics. Humans have gender differences, social and economic strata, legal systems, nations, ethnicity, religion, beliefs, political schools, as well as their culture and purpose. In the history of humanity, this difference has always caused conflict. Conflicts cannot be avoided and will always occur as long as these differences exist. Conflict resolution is an effort to deal with conflict and build new relationships that can last long among hostile groups. At the same time, inter-ethnic conflicts are interpreted as a form of natural contradiction produced by individuals or groups of different ethnicities (ethnic, races, religions, groups, etc.) because they have differences in attitudes, beliefs, values, or needs (Wirawan, 2010, p. 1).

The occurrence of conflicts between villages in Indonesia is only an example of how straightforward things can ignite the emergence of mass amok and riots involving the conflicting parties and the entire village. Indonesian people who have lived for hundreds of years in harmony between neighbours and between villages can change each other to attack each other and destroy the homes of other villagers who are considered their enemies. As the institution in charge of security and order in society, the government is critical in creating a harmonious atmosphere between various groups. However, if social control by the government through its legal instruments does not work, social control in other forms will appear. The local government must communicate and mediate with its citizens and provide social counselling about losses due to village disputes. In addition, it also needs to be socialised in various ways to avoid various possibilities of provocation. As far as possible, it is also necessary to try joint activities between villages that allow citizens from different villages to foster positive communication relationships. This can undoubtedly be an attempt to avoid conflicts that often occur in Indonesia (Susan, 2010).

Many researchers are currently examining the conflicts in Indonesia. Some of the previous studies on violent conflict incidents that occurred mainly from 1990 to 2003 can be seen in the works of (Varshney et al., 2008). Another study on inter- and intra-religious conflicts over the past few years can be seen in the works of (Ali-Fauzi et al., 2009). Many other studies, especially literature on conflict and violence in Indonesia, have been published over the past decade, written by non-Indonesian scholars and researchers.

Several studies related to conflicts in Indonesia occurred in the reform era (Sri Hartatik & Shintasiiwi, 2021). In contrast, in the previous period, the topic of Soeharto, the subject of this study, was limited and even prohibited by the government. The Soeharto regime does not allow public publications and discussions about ethnic, religious, racial, and intergroup conflicts. This is known as the SARA policy. The fall of the Soeharto gave birth to new freedom that allowed publishing books and articles about social conflict (Agustono, 2008).

Based on the discussion above, this article will discuss the role of citizen associations in preventing ethnic conflicts in Medan and Ambon. In Medan, the activities of cross-ethnic citizen associations and civil society organisations that promoted local democracy, strengthened human rights, and promoted peace (tolerance) influenced the plural society of this city. Meanwhile, citizen associations or civil society organisations promoted peace in Ambon and strengthened citizens who played essential roles in preventing and resolving conflicts from community initiatives.

METHOD
This study aims to document the development and activities of the civic associations in Ambon and Medan and analyse their role in the prevention and resolution of ethnic conflicts in these two regions. Sources were collected from field research in Ambon, Maluku and Medan, North Sumatra. We conducted interviews with actors involved in the violence in Ambon, such as the peace provocatours known as Pela Gandong and NGOs and civil society organisations in Medan, North Sumatra. In addition, written sources were collected in the form of journal articles, books, research reports and publications related to this study. The collective memories and written sources collected were then analysed using a holistic approach involving various disciplines. This study uses a holistic approach using various social sciences and humanities cluster disciplines. The method used in this study uses a historical and anthropological approach to analyse and compare the two regions of study. Civic associations or civil society organisations in Ambon that promote peace and strengthen citizenship were essential in preventing and resolving conflicts from community initiatives. Meanwhile, with their cross-ethnic activities, Medan's civic associations and civil society organisations had driven local democracy, strengthened human rights, and promoted peace or tolerance, positively shaping the plural society in Medan, North Sumatra. This research is certainly in

line with Lederach's thinking that civic associations must be able to change relationships and reframe peace situations. A sustainable, transformative approach must be applied so that the relationships of the parties involved, with all that is covered by the term at the psychological, spiritual, social, economic, political, and military levels, can be resolved (Lederach, 1997).

MEDAN-NORTH SUMATRA

Structural changes took place in the world during the early 1990s, which impacted the rise of democratisation, the promotion of human rights, advocacy on environmental issues, and the economic strengthening of local communities in the Third World or underdeveloped nations. This global change significantly impacted Indonesia, affecting its political system. At the same time, the Soeharto era tended to spread violence and fear among the people (Colombijn & Lindblad, 2002; Casci, 2006), political policies changed by the 1990s that opened up the opportunity for a wave of democratisation to occur (Huntington, 1995; Potter & Goldblatt, 1997; Makmur Makka, 2002; Hiariej et al., 2004). This wave of democratisation accelerated the growth of civil society organisations from Jakarta to various regions, thus constructing a different political environment than the previous period.

Along with the wave of democratisation, NGOs (non-governmental organisations or ornop, which is an abbreviation of organisasi non pemerintah) in Medan began to emerge with various advocacy activities such as campaigning for human rights, democracy, strengthening the people's economy, and so on. Women's NGOs also paid attention to strengthening women's right to politics. The growth of NGOs with various activities spread across regions sparked a vibrant political life in North Sumatra (Emiyanti, 2001). The development of NGOs was getting bigger and bigger, giving rise to civil society organisations (Grugel, 2002; Kohno, 2003). The impact of this democratisation slowly made people aware of their deprived rights to political participation, which made them demand to be more involved in policy-making in various regions.

The spread of the democratization wave has fostered the development of civil society organisations and NGOs, popularly referred to as ornop or Lembaga Swadaya Masyarakat in regencies (kabupaten), districts (kecamatan) and villages (pedesaan). At the time in Medan, among the NGOs that emerged in the region were Wahana Informasi Masyarakat (WIM), Kelompok Sosial Kerja Perkotaan (KKSP), Yayasan Bina Keterampilan Pedesaan Indonesia (BITRA), Yayasan Sinar Tani Indonesia (Sintesa), and Lembaga Bantuan Hukum (LBH). Meanwhile, at the district level, KSPPM, Sadaahmo, and Yapidi, among others, were established, whose activities ranged from strengthening democracy, human rights advocacy, and improving the local economy, environment, and land use (Agustono, 2008).

Looking into the history of the social formation of the people of North Sumatra, one can see that the foundation of civic associations and civil society organisations was in the early twentieth century, a time known as the era of movement. This was because, during that time, organisations, associations, or gatherings of upper-middle-class people, represented by the emergence of educated people, had incorporated ideological orientation in their various movement organisations. These movement organisations were oriented toward communities, religious institutions, political parties, labourers, journalists, teachers, and workers' associations, which advocated nationalism and the damage of colonial economic exploits that had stunted the necessary cultural and economic developments, which further caused poverty, backwardness, and powerlessness (Agustono et al., 2021). These organisations were led by educated people who had received their education from colonial schools. However, upon graduating, they had no desire to work in the bureaucracy of the colonial government. Hence, together with the people, they organised such movement organisations to spread and advocate resistance against foreign powers. From then on, the roar of nationalism emanated from the people to liberate their nation from the clutches of colonisation and exploitation that had drained their economic resources, and only for the profits to be brought back to the Netherlands.

North Sumatra, known as East Sumatra before independence, had the same situation where educated people established organisations, gatherings, associations, press, or unions as their political vehicles against colonialism, plantation owners, and feudalism (Agustono et al., 2024). Movement organisations were growing day by day against colonial capitalism, as well as the plantation owners and local rulers who enforced feudalistic laws and practices, which had continued to exploit and ravage the development of this region's economic and political structures. The emergence of such organisations as a medium for the people's struggle against foreign power would then become the inspiration for forming civic associations, which gathered citizens to

overcome, assist, and resolve civic issues.

Along with the sociological development of society, coupled with national movement organisations, gatherings, associations, and civil society organisations, they also emerged, as well as youth organisations, professional associations, hobby associations, clan organisations, cultural organisations, and so on. In the 1990s, various organisations, gatherings, or associations were established with various segments of their activities, including public community associations with activities of common interests carrying specific themes. This is not to mention the emergence of youth organisations with various activity orientations. In addition, non-governmental organisations have also been established that work in the sectors of pluralism, diversity, tolerance, and so on, which have enlightened this region's political and cultural universe (Agustono, 2008).

The growth of civil society organisations, associations, or gatherings was open, except for those affiliated with religion, whose management would be from their respective religions. Civil society organisations such as WIM, BITRA, and Serikat Petani Sumatera Utara (SPSU) were the three organisations that strengthened citizenship in the 1990s. Various other organisations, such as Persatuan Sepak Bola Medan (PSMS), Dewan Kesenian Sumatera Utara (DKSU), Persatuan Wartawan Indonesia (PWI) Medan, Angkatan Muda Pembaruan Indonesia (AMPI), Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama (FKUB) North Sumatra, Pemuda Pancasila Sumatera Utara, Sumut Bersatu, Koalisi Masyarakat Sipil Lapangan Merdeka, and many others, had their management to consist of diverse ethnics and religions instead of exclusively catering to a single ethnic or religion. Civil society organisations have become a medium of face-to-face interaction for people of diverse backgrounds to carry out the mission and goals of their respective organisations (Agustono, 2008).

The ethnically diverse communities in Medan have been competing for economic and political resources in the public sphere since pre-independence, and the level of competition is still relatively high to this day. The competition for positions in the city government and local universities had been relatively high. Moreover, ever since the voting system for the position of Mayor in Medan had been through direct election in 1999, the road to becoming the leading person of the city had become increasingly difficult and even put much emphasis on religion as the main criterion to become at least a candidate. To gain support from parties and voters in such a multicultural city, the mayoral candidates could not rely on parties with a management dominated by a particular religion, but required support from inter-ethnic and inter-religious parties. Likewise, a winning team should have no domination of certain ethnic and religious groups so that it is free from any form of chauvinistic spirit of certain groups. An inclusive-based winning team would facilitate communication with many people better without being burdened by social barriers. In addition, if such a team won the election, the elected mayor's patrons or supporters would take strategic positions in the city government, which would be ethnically and religiously diverse. A power distribution like this would proportionally balance the distribution of strategic positions among the followers ethnically and religiously, reducing the potential for socio-political tensions among the elected mayor's followers (Agustono, 2008; van Langenberg, 1982).

Medan, whose population consists of many ethnic groups: Javanese, Mandailing, Batak Toba, Angkola, Karo, Simalungun, Pakpak, Acehnese, Minangkabau, and Chinese, would indeed have relatively high competition for economic and political resources in the government and public sphere. The high competition between ethnic groups could be seen each time strategic positions in the government were determined, which would always bring about the most suitable individuals to fill such positions. Whenever the circulation position changes in the city government, political tension is raised over who would occupy the strategic position. For example, if the regional head were a Mandailing, the strategic positions in the government would usually be held by Mandailings as well, or at least a close friend. However, the preference of choice occupied essential positions based on certain ethnicities, and not all positions were controlled. There were still opportunities for other ethnic groups to occupy positions in the city government. By not dominating the strategic positions of a particular ethnic group, it opened up opportunities for different ethnic groups to compromise and work together, which became the basis for bureaucratic stability in the city government (Agustono et al., 2022).

As narrated above, many organisations in Medan accommodated clans, professions, hobbies, youths, athletics, religions, ethnicities, districts, communities, NGOs, and many others with branching activities that became a medium for inter-cultural interactions of people from different backgrounds. The variety of organisations did not deter problems from occurring. For example, numerous

youth organisations such as Angkatan Muda Pembaruan Indonesia (AMPI), Forum Komunikasi Pemuda Purnawirawan Indonesia (FKPPI), Pemuda Panca Marga (PPM), Komite Pemuda Nasional Indonesia (KNPI), Ikatan Pemuda Karya (IPK), and Pemuda Pancasila (PP), among others, would have different interests from one another. Despite being a suitable medium for inter-ethnic youth activism, they often compete, especially in the economic aspects such as parking, housing, entertainment, and business locations. In Medan, youth organisations often physically compete for economic avenues as a source of organisational income (Agustono, 2008).

Various other organisations were established with activities promoting tolerance, diversity, pluralism, tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, economic strengthening, cultural heritage, etc. These organisations can be called civic associations that function as a communication medium for the community to discuss and debate various national issues. The management of civic associations is often cross-ethnic, religious, and class, which makes it easier for various community groups to interact and meet each other face-to-face (Agustono, 2008).

Meeting and gathering with each other face-to-face is a characteristic of civic associations. For this reason, activists and workers of civil society organisations often carry out jointly designed agendas and activities. By carrying out the agenda and working with the associations, the residents were seen as agile in openly discussing anything. In the 1980s-1990s, during the formation of NGOs in Medan, North Sumatra, these NGOs would organise forums to discuss and resolve significant issues such as land (agrarian), environment, urban areas, economic strengthening, people's organisation, and so on (Agustono, 2008).

Medan residents live scattered from one area to another. Around Medan is a Toba Batak village; in Sei Mati, there is a Mandailing settlement, a Malay settlement in Matsum City, and the Javanese live in Tembung. Settlements like these give rise to ethnic segregation. Ethnic segregation settlements date back to the colonial period in North Sumatra, where plantation industry owners placed plantation workers' residences based on ethnic lines (Agustono et al., 2022). The effects of past settlements are still ongoing today. Although there are settlements based on ethnic lines, until now, there have never been any ethnic tensions, let alone physical standards, between ethnic groups.

Likewise, the presence of youth organisations that were considered vulnerable to being infiltrated by destructive elements has never had any physical

altercation on a massive scale involving other people outside their groups that might ignite tensions between youths. There had only been minor fights among these youth organisations, such as between IPK and PP, due to disputes on economic avenues (such as parks, markets, entertainment venues, and infrastructure developments). However, the fights were quickly settled by the presence of security forces and peace conferences among the organisations' leaders. This would mean that even youth organisations understood and were quick to respond to calm their members down as a means to avoid provocations that could trigger riots and involvement in anarchic actions. Thus, if there is an attempt to provoke riots or provocations that will disrupt the city, the youth organisations will quickly find out. That is why every youth organisation tries hard to refrain from being provoked in any situation. If a youth organisation tries to play with fire in a commotion, other youth organisations will quickly find out (Agustono, 2008).

Before the May 1998 riots in Indonesia, there was a series of provocations in Medan to influence the public into rioting and looting. However, the provocations did not work and were not welcomed. Hence, Medan was spared from mass riots. Not long after the provocation did not work, in other areas, especially Jakarta, riots broke out, and mass looting was the trigger for the downfall of the Soeharto regime. However, competition for economic and political resources continued, and mutual understanding and tolerance of ethnic plurality built up in every ethnic group. Each ethnic group still maintains and carries out its customs and culture (Agustono, 2008).

AMBON-MALUKU

The study mentions the Ambon-Maluku ethnic conflict. However, this report does not explain in detail the outbreak of the Ambon-Maluku conflict because there are already several studies on the origins of the bloody conflict that had caused hundreds or thousands of deaths, so there is no need to repeat the cause of the conflict that occurred in 1999-2003 here (Wilson, 2005; van Klinken, 2001). This report will also not explain the Ambon-Maluku conflict from the religious war that involved the fighter groups of Christian (Laskar Kristus) and Muslim (Laskar Putih) amid the ethnic conflict in Ambon, as such a study had been carried out elsewhere (Qurtuby, 2015).

When the ethnic conflict in Ambon erupted, which some had called an Ambon ethnic war, most of the community groups, religious leaders, pastors,

and churches were involved in the increasing tensions of ethnic conflict that had started as a mere scuffle between a Christian driver and a Muslim passenger that had escalated into a religious conflict. In various places, pastors and churches played an essential role in the escalation of such religious conflicts. Likewise, a Muslim fighter group called Laskar Jihad entered Ambon and fought against Laskar Putih, which made the religious conflicts in the region worse. The conflicts became further widespread because both sides had used the internet to widen the conflict arena by posting photos, messages, words, slogans, and provocative remarks, which catapulted the Ambon-Maluku incident to not just a nationwide issue but a global one as well (Bräuchler, 2003).

Amid this religious war, not all components of society were dragged into the mainstream of brutality and massacres against each other. However, individuals or community groups such as Muslim and Christian religious leaders, journalists, academics, and cultural leaders had joined non-government institutions and civil associations to initiate peacemaking (Qurtuby, 2015).

Muslim and Christian leaders in the village of Wayame in Ambon held informal meetings on behalf of individuals to establish communication and find a peaceful way for both parties to decrease the outbreaks of violence and bloody conflicts. The peace initiators that started the peacemaking initially came under pressure from each religious group to stop the efforts of conciliation, especially from the Muslims, since there were many casualties from their side. They had many doubts as their spirit of fighting for revenge was soaring. One of the peace initiators was the commander of the Laskar Putih, who led the war against the Christian fighter groups (Qurtuby, 2015).

The commander of the Laskar Putih previously had close ties with Laskar Jihad under the leadership of Abu Jafar Talib. His close relationship with Laskar Jihad, which was twisted into Laskar Jahat in the cyber world (internet), had opened up access to weaponry from this fighter group to strengthen the Muslim army to fight the Red Army (Laskar Kristus). After the religious leaders (ustads and pastors) carried out peacemaking messages, the former Laskar commander often met and promoted peace from one village to another and from one mosque to another. Every time he went to the mosque, the former commander of the Laskar Putih, whose name was familiar among the Muslims, called on them to stop the civil war (Bräuchler, 2003).

Similarly, the way of peace was always conveyed during Friday prayers and sermons to stop the civil war. This former commander of the Laskar Putih worked with other Islamic leaders to visit Muslim villages to carry out messages of peace to Muslims in Ambon. Sometimes, they would spend the night in certain villages to convince Muslims to make peace with each other to avoid more significant casualties on both sides. While spending the night in the villages in the mountainous region, the communities received their message for peace well. However, they were still on guard in case of any attacks by other parties at night or in the early morning (Bräuchler, 2003).

Likewise, pastors did the same thing by visiting Christian villages to calm and invite their citizens not to be provoked by fake news that could accelerate their emotions into fighting with other residents of different villages. From house to house or through churches, the peace messages were echoed by the priests and other cultural leaders to reduce the tension of violence among residents. The religious leaders would not only promote peace in their respective communities. Many times, Muslim and Christian leaders would work together to promote peace, such as visiting villages of different religious domination and even sleeping under the same roof together (Saimima et al., 2023).

One record had given an account of a peace mission at a Muslim village. Amid the rising riots in Ambon, a Christian was sent to a Muslim village for a peacemaking visit. Although he refused at first because he was afraid that something terrible would happen if he entered a Muslim village, he complied in the end after being pressured by his community. He visited the Muslim village anxiously, but after communicating with the Muslims there and stating the purpose of his visit, they accepted him. They insisted he stay longer to promote peace. He even sobbed when the villagers let him go after completing his mission. When the Christian man returned, he told his wonderful experience to his community. He continued to do so until such a story became an impetus for peace-making among the different religious groups in Ambon (Saimima et al., 2022).

The work of peace advocates amid conflicts, riots, and local political turmoil was not easy because suspicion often arises with anyone when people experience any socio-political abnormalities. It also took much energy to reconcile the conflicting parties with a clear heart and mind. Extra work was needed to influence the community so that the initiation of peace could be entirely accepted. Various ways were used to advocate for peace, including

peaceful propaganda so peace could be accepted quickly to avoid prolonging the conflicts. The more protracted and prolonged the conflict, the greater the number of victims. In Ambon, people who tirelessly promote peace between ethnic or religious conflicting parties are called peace provocateurs (provokator damai) (Novaldy & Kusumaningrum, 2018).

The term peace provocateur was assigned to those who are severe yet sarcastic about promoting peace to groups with conflicting religious perspectives. Usually, the connotation of a provocateur is damaging because it makes people more easily moved to make a fuss or riots carried out by people chasing political gains when riots explode. The presence of provocateurs with the minds of troublemakers could damage the current social order. In contrast to the role of provocateurs that are never clearly manifested in every riot, peace provocateurs are real, not hiding, let alone playing cat and mouse with the population. Peace provocateurs are people who have high integrity and commitment to peace. Peace is harmony and serenity in life. Therefore, if someone promotes peace, he is classified as someone who educates his life and thoughts to create a balance in the universe. Peace provocateurs in Ambon consisted of religious leaders, cultural leaders, democracy workers, diversity advocates, and people involved in participatory communities or civic associations. After the ethnic riots escalated, they worked to strengthen civic associations, which came down to convey a message of peace to the grassroots to stop religious animosity (Novaldy & Kusumaningrum, 2018).

Peace provocateurs not only consisted of religious leaders and traditional leaders but also extended to campus academics. Several academics from the Universitas Pattimura, Institut Agama Islam Negeri Ambon, and Universitas Kristen Indonesia Maluku, to mention a few, would emerge as peace provocateurs when the Ambon riots erupted. They communicated and implemented peace agendas or programs in urban and rural communities. Those who were loosely part of civic associations would always visit villages to advocate messages of peace. They held prayers together simultaneously but in different places according to their respective religions. They also always communicated with regional security managers (police, army, marines, and so on) to coordinate interfaith activities involving the community. They also often went down to the grassroots to fight political provocateurs, fake news, and rumors that provoke violent acts. Campus academics often had different opinions on secu-

rity management from those of security forces. This campus academic emphasised initiating peace from below and always conveyed that the peace campaign should involve people in conflict. They prioritise community involvement in decision-making to end the protracted violence (Novaldy & Kusumaningrum, 2018).

Peace provocateurs have extended to other groups or communities, such as independent journalists or newspaper agencies, with a spirit of peace. At the time of the war of words, be it in cyberspace or the physical world, leaflets, false news, and hate speech appeared and spread uncontrollably. Likewise, media coverage that was previously biased and provocative had slowly been countered by joint activities with journalists to defuse such ethnic tensions (Novaldy & Kusumaningrum, 2018).

Independent journalists invited art workers, cultural activists, and individuals who wished to voice peaceful provocations. Because they mostly live in Ambon, coordination in joint peace campaign activities was often carried out. A cultural worker cum journalist invited individuals or communities to discuss the news about the Ambon riots. The news tended to be biased, partial, and provocative, so in the end, it ignited the flames of hatred. The discussions discussed local media coverage of the Ambon Maluku issue. From the results of this discussion, a peace journalism training was held involving the editor-in-chief of the local media. Peace journalism training slowly became a snowball in the local media, turning what was previously provocative news into constructive news. Constructive coverage in the print media encourages the spread of peace campaigns (Ohorella & Santoso, 2021).

Discussions held by peaceful communities that were part of civic associations were encouraged to transmit peace initiatives to those who were peace provocateurs. Art workers, cultural activists, journalists, and so on often gathered or held meetings to discuss the situation of prolonged unrest. Many victims on both sides fell; if this situation is prolonged, it will bring about an even more significant number of victims. Witnessing the Ambon situation being torn apart in ethnic and religious violence cannot be allowed to continue like this because it will give birth to protracted hostility and grudges (Ohorella & Santoso, 2021).

The Ambon riots had not only resulted in the loss of life and property and changing hands of land ownership as a source of livelihood, but it also caused the economy to fall apart. In traditional markets, necessities of life were increasingly scarce:

no one sold any fish because fishermen did not go to sea, mosques and churches were burned, and city transportation was not functioning. Communication between residents was filled with mutual suspicion, especially between people of different religions, due to a loss of trust in one another. People were increasingly looking for a living because the informal sector's economic activities had stopped due to evacuating to save their families (Ohorella & Santoso, 2021).

Seeing the uncertain situation that made life more difficult for peaceful provocateurs made peace provocateurs more motivated to organise community or individual components to campaign for peace. They held joint prayer activities, discussed the position of paper media in the Ambon riots, sang peace songs, held peace journalism training, and visited communities of different religions, spreading love for peace, among others (Novaldy & Kusumaningrum, 2018).

Civic associations from various segments of society joined hands to go down to the grassroots. They educated the public by organising joint activities to reduce the tension of the riots that crushed Ambon-Maluku. From the narration of the activism of the peaceful provocateurs, civic associations plunged themselves into reducing the burning conflicts within the local community. This emphasised that in the riots, the civic associations that covered various elements of society did not stand idly by but took a role in promoting peace. To carry out their primary mission, they established relationships with security forces (army, police, and so on) as a way to spread their big mission to a broader audience. Although the security forces (military and police) were the primary security guards, in the second riot, they were not neutral. This security unit sided with Islam and Christianity. Borrowing the informant's language, during the day, the security forces (military and police) appeared neutral, while at night, they took sides according to their respective religions. They became part of the religious army at night (Novaldy & Kusumaningrum, 2018).

In terms of peace, the Ambon people had a local wisdom called pela gandong, which means loving each other like brothers and helping each other without religious distinction. Pela gandong has been a long tradition practised from generation to generation among the Ambon-Maluku community (Batmomolin, 2000). If two villages have a pela gandong bond despite having different regions and religions, and if there are social activities such as building mosques and churches, they will come to help each other because they feel like they are close

relatives. The pela gandong bond is a tight brotherhood that uplifts a sense of camaraderie between different communities. This socio-cultural medium can become an arena for solving problems if the community faces problems. From the past until now, the local wisdom of pela gandong has still been upheld (Saimima et al., 2023).

When communal riots swept through Ambon, which destroyed the community's social structure, cultural leaders attempted to make a peaceful reconciliation through the wisdom of Pela Gandong. Pela Gandong was continuously promoted and campaigned by peace provocateurs, including cultural leaders, for the cessation of the riots that had torn inter-religious relations in this region. The people of Ambon, with different religions and ethnicities, called for peace between residents fighting to defend their respective religions. It was aware that in these communal riots, most people were only dragged and indoctrinated without knowing what was going on behind the political turbulence. Indoctrination or provocation would destroy villages quickly if there were instructions. Suppose the indoctrination that sharpens inter-religious animosities is allowed. In that case, the community will be torn apart in a vast sea of disputes, which may eventually spread to the slaughter of one's religion. Due to the declining social capital of the community as a binder of brotherhood, peace provocateurs and cultural leaders turned on pela gandong to reconcile and reduce communal riots. By activating pela gandong, which is called us brothers and sisters as the foundation of local wisdom, slowly pela gandong became a medium of peace to reduce the tension of communal riots (Saimima et al., 2023).

Before the ethnic war broke out, the community applied pela gandong in their daily life so that the brotherhood atmosphere would be firmly attached. However, when the ethnic war broke out, it felt like the pela gandong was not working in giving a sense of security and calm because, in many places, there was destruction, damage, and killing spree between people of different ethnicities and religions. The forced expulsion of Muslims represented by the Bugis Buton and Makassar ethnic groups, along with massacres, took place around the city of Ambon. At the beginning of the slaughter, the pela gandong form appeared as if it were silent and did not function, considering the large number of victims that had fallen. However, the peace provocateurs campaigned for brotherhood and peace movements along with the growth of peace initiatives. They revived local wisdom as a medium for peace in conflicted communities about ethnicity and reli-

gion. Slowly but surely, the promotion of pela gandong as a resolution of religious and ethnic disputes raised optimism for the reduction of ethnic riots. In the direction of reconciliation, the pela gandong was made into local knowledge to resolve conflicts. As a result, pela gandong had to be proven to some extent and believed to reduce ethnic conflicts (Saimima et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

As narrated above, various activities have established many civic associations or civil society organisations in Medan. Some were based on ethnic groups, some prioritised youth activities, and some were engaged in culture. Some additional civic associations included the Majlis Adat Budaya Melayu (MABMI), Himpunan Keluarga Besar Mandailing (HIKMA), Partugha Maujana Simalungun (PMS), Putra Jawa Kelahiran Sumatra (Pujakusuma), Badan Musyawarah Masyarakat Minang (B3M3), Aceh Sepakat, Persatuan Batak Islam (PBI), Keluarga Besar Muslim Karo (KAMKA), and Forum Kerukunan Umat Bearagama (FKUB). Meanwhile, youth organisations included Pemuda Pancasila (PP), Ikatan Pemuda Karya (IPK), Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam (HMI), PMKRI, PMII, PMKRI, GMKI, IPMI, and Forum Komunikasi Ketua Lembaga Adat (Forkala). Although there were organisations with managements that the government formed, culturally, their presence was central to reducing ethnic tensions. This could happen because of the mutual interaction in each organisation. If there was a potential for ethnic tension, civil society organisations were agile in identifying the roots of ethnic tensions. Inter-relationships among civic associations or civil society organisations are still ongoing and nurtured by civil society activists. Thus, the inter-relationships of civic associations became a medium for reducing ethnic tensions.

In Ambon, before the outbreak of the ethnic war, inter-ethnic and religious relations were relatively good, including relations between residents and immigrants: Bugus, Buton, and Makasar. Some had lived for a long time and had inter-ethnic marriages with local communities. However, this did not mean that Ambon was free from conflict. The public sphere in the informal sector (traditional markets, public economic activities, and competition for certain types of work) continued to be plagued by economic competition. Things like this triggered social tensions, though without significant upheavals. Recognising the situation of the Ambon people, peace provocateurs, in various ways, facilitate and campaign for peace.

When this communal riot occurred, the local community and cultural leaders explored, revived, and applied the local wisdom of pela gadong as a medium for conflict reconciliation. So far, community (ethnic) groups in the archipelago have had local knowledge or local wisdom with various functions ranging from preserving the universe (environment), gathering plants for body medicine, maintaining social order and community behaviour, and guiding decision-making (deliberations) in the community. However, implementing such local wisdom was declining and not working like it used to in the past.

In Ambon, at the time of the rumbling wave of communal violence, pela gandong was implemented amid community groups that were hit by massacres between religious groups. Pela gandong was driven to function and reach society, which ended with increasing awareness among community groups without distinguishing between ethnic and religious brothers. Brotherhood was the essence and spirit of the traditional wisdom of Pela Gandong. The growing spirit of brotherhood caused communal violence to be reduced through pela gandong.

However, this did not mean that after the establishment of peace in Ambon, even as a commitment to perpetuate the spirit of brotherhood, peace was genuinely embedded in the hearts of Ambon. Social problems such as division and segregation of ethnic settlements would still yet to be resolved. Before the communal riots in residential areas, people of different ethnicities and religions opened the ties of communication between plural citizens. However, after the peace reconciliation, the segregation of ethnic settlements widened. There were alternating religious-based settlements. If there is a Christian settlement whose residents are all of the same religion, then next to this settlement is a Muslim settlement, all of which come from different religions but have different ethnic groups. This religion-based settlement closed inter-ethnic communication, thereby weakening social interaction between the Ambon people. In the future, it is necessary to organise religious-based settlements towards inclusive community-based settlements to increase Indonesian nationalism and diversity in the city of Ambon, Maluku.

Ethnic experiences in Ambon, Maluku and Medan, North Sumatra, demonstrate the heterogeneity and diversity that exists in Indonesia. This diversity has been shaped by long-standing relations between ethnic groups in Ambon and Medan. Ethnic conflicts can arise if they are not managed by

the community, potentially escalating into ethnic violence. Medan, North Sumatra, serves as an example of how relationships built among various community associations can act as catalysts for ethnic tensions. Meanwhile, the role of the peace provocateurs known as Pela Gandong in Ambon, Maluku, following ethnic and religious violence, has instilled a spirit of brotherhood among the people of Ambon, Maluku.

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