

# Amalgamation as a Strengthening Ethnic

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**Abstract.** Mixed Marriage or Amalgamation is a unique reality in the development of culture in Indonesia. In the midst of ethnic diversity in Indonesia, it is possible for amalgamation to occur, so that understanding one another is a condition for harmony. This study aims to discover how individuals' social identities are formed in the primary group, that is in families who do amalgamation and how are individuals' social identity in amalgamation pairs. This study uses a qualitative exploratory research method with phenomenological studies from the perspective of Tajfel & Turner's Social Identity theory. The results of this study are the symbols of Tong Ngin Fan Ngin Jit Jong in Bangka community as the principle of inter-ethnic equality of the individual's social identity in mixed marriages, while the act of losing personal identity as a member of one ethnic group (depersonalization) is occurred in the West Kalimantan due to conflict background ethnicity past.

*Keywords:* amalgamation, social identity, ethnicity

## Introduction

Since the beginning, a multicultural society is created to provide a broad space for various group identities to carry out their life independently so that a cultural system and social order is expected to be able to become a cornerstone of peace for a nation (Marta, 2018). This is evidenced by the diversity and wealth of the Indonesian nation as a large nation with a population according to the Central Bureau of Statistics in 2010 of 237,641,326 people, including the largest population after the People's Republic of China, India, and the United States (Indraswari & Yuhan, 2017:1).

Indonesia has an old saying "*gemah ripah loh jinawi*", where life with abundant wealth is not only of natural products, but also a diversity of ethnicities, languages, religions, beliefs, and customs. This is reinforced by data from the joint of Central Bureau of Statistics (Badan Pusat Statistik) and Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) in 2013 which identified 633 large tribal groups presented in a book entitled *Demography of Indonesia's Ethnicity* (source: BPS). The diversity of backgrounds in Indonesia makes the nation a challenge, where maintaining

harmony is an important key to the life of the nation and state.



Figure 1. SDGs (Source: news.un.org)

Globally, there are Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which contain 17 goals, in figure 1 where point 16 explains the importance of harmonization in coexistence that results in peace, justice and strong institutions. It is then elaborated in the importance of promoting a peaceful and inclusive society for sustainability development, providing access to justice for all and building institutions that are effective, responsible and inclusive at all levels of social strata (Barbier & Burgess, 2017:7).

President Jokowi Widodo delivered his message about the wealth of Indonesia which must be maintained by unity. It was

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conveyed through his speech at the National Dharma Santi event of the Saka New Year's Nyepi Celebration 1940: *"Differences are not a barrier to living in mutual respect, helping each other out and build solid social solidarity. All these differences and diversity must be bound by true brotherhood, togetherness, and a strong awareness that we are countrymen and seafarer"* (Kemensetneg, 2018).

Soleman & Noer (2017:1964) suggested that to maintain such national harmony, the government created a work program called Nawacita, which is the nine points of goals to strengthen diversity and Indonesia's social restoration. The nine programs of Nawacita show the commitment of the Indonesian government in creating a peaceful country and full of harmony for all Indonesian people.

Juliani, Cangara & Unde (2015:74) states that intercultural communication is communication process basically done among people from different cultural backgrounds. Cultural aspects in communication such as language, cue, non-verbal, attitude, belief, character, value, and mind orientation can be a big difference that often causes communication distortion in a society with different culture. Assimilation is a social process that arises when a group of people with different cultural backgrounds intensively interacting for a long time so that gradually their native culture change and form a new culture.

Marriage is the initial foundation for the formation of a family and in community life, marriage and family are very important primary groups (Yuliati, 2012:145). In some parts of Indonesia, ethnical differences do not become a barrier for people to carry out mixed marriages, commonly referred to as amalgamation. This marriage then gives a different ethnic view about a particular ethnicity because each ethnic group is unique and historical (Ulfa, 2015). This amalgamation process, that can then be seen as the reality of mixing culture (assimilation) in society, is an advanced stage of coping with the wrong perspective of responding to differences in individuals or groups of people, whose actions then focused on common interests and goals (Soekanto, 2010:73 in Fajri et al, 2016:2).

Pramudito (2017) explained that legally, mixed marriages regulation in Indonesia still follows the rules of mixed marriages conducted by different countries. According to the Indonesian Mixed Marriage Society (PERCA) Institute, data on intercultural

marriages, especially with foreign citizens, have not been clearly recorded. On the other hand, ethnic differences in domestic marriages are not yet available.

Judging from the Central Statistical Bureau latest data, as many as 27,975,612 people or 11.77% of the total population of Indonesia make a lifetime migration. It can be concluded in the interim that the probability of intercultural or ethnic differences in marriage is possible at a level relatively high due to lifelong migration carried out by a number of residents in Indonesia (Pramudito, 2017:78).

The ethnic of Chinese and Malays in the Bangka Belitung Province represent harmony through the symbolization of Tong Ngim Fang Ngim Jit Jong, which means 'indigenous Malays, and Chinese descendants are all equal', so that the bonds that the Bangka people feel is historical since it was initiated by relationships between two ancestors to date; even if there is amalgamation between Chinese and Malays, their different religions are not a problem for them (Satya & Maftuh, 2016:20-22). On the other hand, behind the dark story of the Sambas conflict in the past, there was an amalgamation between Malay and Madurese communities in West Kalimantan which formed a harmony (Subro, 2011).

Amalgamation undergoes a process of forming a social identity in groups where a person understands himself to be a member of a family (group). Saloom (2016:2) explains that social identity gives an entry point of external things (group understanding) into an individual's thoughts and feelings so that they become internalized and forming an identity. A family is the primary group that teaches an individual how to interact, communicate, express opinions, reject opinions, and learn about other agreements in the group (Tutiasri, 2016:82).

Social identity is defined as a personal self in social interactions, where the self is everything that can be said about himself/herself, not only about his/her own body and physical condition, but also about his/her family (wife/husband and children), home, work, ancestors, culture, friends, and others (Fadila, 2013:74). The concept of social identity is a place for a group of people to construct the cognitive, feelings and behavior of their members. In addition, the group is considered to have the same social identity and competing with others in achieving positive uniqueness (Huda, 2014:33).

This study aims to discover how individual social identities are formed in primary groups of amalgamation families so that the existence of ethnic groups' initial identities is obviated from the groups. On the other hand, apart from being a primary group, families also become in-group where individuals unite and produce harmony. Social identity theory as part of one's self-concept depends on the importance and relevance placed in a group membership that belongs to the individual (Turner & Oakes, 1986 in Mckinley et al., 2014:2). This theory shows that the individual's drive for positive identity and appreciation influences the social comparisons they make (Tajfel & Turner, 1979 in Mckinley et al., 2014: 2).

### Research Methodology

This study uses qualitative research methods that are explorative since they have a dual nature, complex, dynamic, and the truth of reality is dynamic (Mulyana, 2013:147). In addition, qualitative research has a process of understanding based on methods that investigate social phenomena and problems in human life. In this approach, the researcher makes a complex picture, examines words, detailed reports from the respondents' views, and conducts studies on natural situations (Creswell, 1998:15 in Arkandito et al., 2016:46).

This research is also supported by the phenomenology method proposed by Husserl as part of qualitative studies, which is the study of knowledge originating from consciousness or how to understand an object or event by experiencing it consciously (Littlejohn, 2003:184 in Hasbiansyah, 2008: 166). Therefore, the object of this research is two families who performed amalgamation. The research area is in two regions, namely Benteng Village, Bangka Belitung Province and Pontianak City, West Kalimantan Province. This study uses in-depth interview data collection techniques in which the subject is the community that conducts mixed marriages in Bangka Belitung and West Kalimantan. As additional resources, the researcher also draws based on additional related documents.

### Symbolizing the Harmony of the Indonesian Community

Learning from Indonesia, a country is rich in culture, there are several regions that

have a symbol of mutually agreed harmony to realize equality between community groups. Pela Gandong culture of Moluccan people, for example, interpret social ties not only across tribal boundaries but also, in this case, the unity perceived as the basis of true sibling fraternal relations, even the meaning of this symbolization is arranged orally and in writing (Malatuny & Ritiauw, 2018: 37).

Bali, which is one of the centers of the world's tourist destinations, has boosted the tradition of harmony between Hindus and Muslims. When Hindus celebrate Galungan and Nyepi holidays, Muslims provide fruit or snacks and vice versa (Pageh, 2017:243). On the other hand, the ethnic of Chinese and Malays in Bangka have a symbol of Tong Ngin Fang Ngin Jit Jong, which means 'indigenous Malays, and Chinese descendants are all equal' so that the ties that the Bangka people feel is historical since it was initiated by relationships between two ancestors to date (Satya & Maftuh, 2016:22). Dayak ethnicity is one of the indigenous ethnic groups of the island of Borneo having its own philosophy of harmony. Krissusandi Gunui who is the Director of the Dayaklogi Institute explained further:

*"Almost all Dayak people have a philosophy of humanity, for example, Jalai sub-tribe in Ketapang region has a term like this "Temuai Diumbai Makan Manyagak Diayuhkan Baras" it means that people must be called and fed until full. But if he comes from a Dayak tradition, say from a Muslim group, if someone says that he is given rice he will cook it by himself because it might not fit our tradition but we prepare a place and house for him to live. That is why it is not surprising if one or more sub-ethnic groups can integrate their lives into Dayak tradition and people because from the very beginning they have a philosophy of life saying they accept other people," said Krissusandi Gunui (interview conducted January 12, 2019, 11.06 WIB)*

Since a long time ago, Dayak culture as one of the biggest ethnic groups turned out to have a philosophy which at the same time became a symbol of harmony "Temuai Diumbai Makan Manyagak Diayuhkan Baras" interpreted by people who always accept anyone who comes to be fed until full, signifying the harmony that exists in accepting whoever comes. In this case, the Regional Government of West Kalimantan (PEMDA KALBAR) feels that it is necessary

to accommodate the harmonious values of various ethnic groups as symbols to be used as joint strength regardless of the different backgrounds to create harmony.

Various symbols are inherent and become the basis of every community in each region to respect one another. This *Fernonema* not only create harmony between ethics and religions, but even the openness of the community has also encouraged mixed marriages. This study describes an amalgamation process as an effort to bring each other's cultures from different communities through tracing the social identity of each individual in the provinces of Bangka Belitung and West Kalimantan.

### **Amalgamation in Malay and Chinese of Bangka Belitung**

Chinese ethnicity is often associated as a minority ethnic immigrant in some parts of Indonesia. In the New Order era, there were various kinds of discrimination against ethnicity such as the prohibition to conduct religious activities, beliefs, and customs. However, since the Reformation, former President Gus Dur made the Indonesian government system recognized the existence of the Chinese as part of this Republic (Marta & Suryani 2017:79). Long before the reformation and Gus Dur's policy, in the Province of Bangka Belitung, there were symbols of *Tong Ngin Fang Ngin Jit Jong* which meant that Malays and Chinese were all equal had deep meaning for the people of Bangka. It is possible for ethnic Malays and Chinese to amalgamate to maintain mutual harmony. The symbol of *Tong Ngin Fang Ngin Jit Jong* indirectly invites awareness that encourages or forces individuals (the Bangka community) to study the structure, group dynamics, and change themselves to be more suited to the primary group, in this case, the family, so that when there are thoughts on equality there is no burden for the Bangka people to do amalgamation (Cinoğlu & Arıkan, 2012:1124). This has been done for generations so that harmony can be created within the Bangka community.

"When I was in elementary school, I made friends with Malays. Now I am working at the mine and there are also my fellow workers of Malays ethnic. I like fishing and find many Chinese Malay friends who are fishing together. Yes, basically, we are always together. Similarly, during holidays, we visit

each other. Malay ethnic Chinese are mutually friendly," said Mr. Bombom (interview 22 October 2018, at 18.30 WIB)

Mr. Bombom is one of the people in Bangka who feels the harmony since he stepped on an elementary school. Even almost every holiday, Malay and Chinese people visit each other. One of the primary motives for seeking social identity is that one's needs to reduce feelings of uncertainty related to or directly about themselves and their identities (Hogg, Abrams, & Brewer, 2017:4). As it is known that Bangka is one of the largest tin mining areas in Indonesia so that people individually reduce uncertainty by carrying out the interaction process while working in the mine where most of their employees came from Malaysia and Chinese.

The harmonious relationship also comes from mixed marriages. Sukri, a man of Malay ethnic descent and Ayin, a woman of Chinese ethnic descent, was one of the couples who did amalgamation. Ayin, the wife, interacted a lot with Malay people while working as a cracker maker. Ayin's husband, Sukri, interacted with the Chinese ethnic when he worked as a miner and on a fish chart. Many Chinese and Malays ethnic are involved in the same profession. Aside from that, Sukri also had daily interactions with most Chinese people.

"I used to work as a cracker maker, where many Malay and Chinese also worked making crackers. From there, we knew each other, we got together as fellow workers and be friends. My husband also likes to hang out with Chinese ethnic and has many Chinese friends." Said Ayin (interview 24 October 2018 at 17.30 WIB)

During the relationships, conflicts can and may occur at any time, especially for the relationships of the future husband and wife. Cultural differences become a challenge, but not with Sukri and Ayin. Ayin's family, especially her parents, feared the drinking behavior of Ayin's future husband and took this as their heavy consideration, meanwhile Ayin as the only child in her ethnicity is not a major obstacle.

"Opposition from parents was there but not because of ethnicity. The conflict arose because the husband had a drinking habit and the wife was the only daughter in her family. However, the relationship was still approved and when their daughter was born, the relationship got better. When you



get married, you still use two customs: Malay ethnicity (Ijab Kabul) and Chinese ethnicity (evening receptions and meals are mandatory for the ethnic Chinese). But, so far there is no conflict from me. "Said Mrs. Ayin (interview 29 January 2019 at 17.00 WIB)

The Bangka community, individually, has been tied to the value of equality, so ethnicity is not a barrier. Cinoğlu & Arıkan (2012:1124-1125) describes individuals who do not need to distinguish themselves from other members so that group homogeneity is formed. This makes the difference in mixed marriages, which it is not a barrier for every Bangka community to maintain harmony.

For the sake of respecting each other's culture, the marriage ceremony uses two customs so that the occurrence of cultural acculturation in which religious ceremonies are held with the Malay culture (Ijab Kabul) while the wedding reception uses Chinese culture of eating together. Mixing culture is not a barrier in building a family, except for the religion, so that the aspect of homogeneity only comes to ethnicity. Sukri considered more about the convert of Ayin's beliefs (religion) when the amalgamation had been done rather than her personal ethnicity identity.

"There is no conflict from my parents as long as Ayin converts to in Islam (Malay ethnicity has a strong religion). Children are also want to marry Chinese or Malay ethnic groups as long as they follow Islam. If I am used to associating with Chinese ethnic, I am also used to participate in large ethnic Chinese events such as Chinese New Year, worship of the grave. Early in living a married life with Ayin, she often visited her parents. So, I already know my wife's parents." Said Sukri (interview 29 January 2019 at 18.00 WIB)

Individually, Sukri sees that trust cannot be separated from individual identity. In this case, in the eyes of Sukri, Islam has a characteristic that deserves to be preserved and consistent with. (Hogg et al., 2017:5) describes group members who will continue to protect and promote group distinctiveness, in this case, religion itself.

Figure 2 describes the individual pulling himself to the symbol of Tong Ngin Fang Ngin Jit Jong, which has been a history of unifying ethnicity in Bangka Belitung so that the social identity of the community merges with this symbol. Individual interpretations of the symbol Tong Ngin Fang Ngin Jit Jong made the indecency of each individual to

conduct mixed marriages which were one of the factors maintaining inter-ethnic harmony in Bangka Belitung Province.

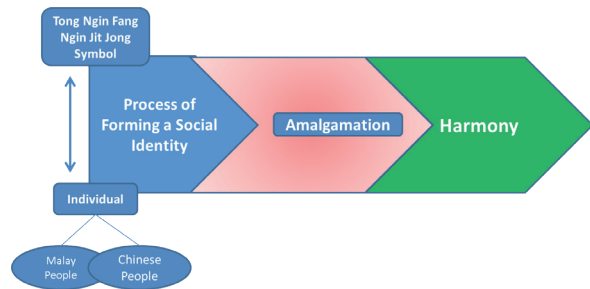


Figure 2. Amalgamation Model of Bangka Belitung Community (Source: Research Processed)

### Amalgamation of Malay and Madurese in West Kalimantan

The history of West Kalimantan is inseparable from the ethnic conflict which is one of the biggest conflicts in this country. According to Asriati dan Bahari (2010:147), this fact creates a negative stigma for West Kalimantan because it is considered a conflict-prone area or an unsafe area, resulting in investors' reluctant/not interested in investing their capital, limited employment, rising unemployment, slowing economic growth, and declining the level of community welfare. Sambas Conflict is a conflict involving Malay and Madurese ethnic groups that occurred in 1999, which caused a physical impact of around 48,000 people had to be displaced in several shelters in Pontianak City and Pontianak Regency (currently a Mempawah Regency) (Ulum, 2013:26).

Two decades have passed, the process of reconciliation between the two ethnic groups is still ongoing. The changing times that continue to move dynamically do not rule out the possibility that there are different realities of the two ethnicities that had conflict in the past. One of the realities occur is an amalgamation, which is a mixed marriage between ethnic groups who have had conflicts before. Misjaya, a descendant of the Sambas Malay ethnic group, married her husband who is Madurese ethnic descent. The decision to marry a man of Madurese descent was inseparable from the background of Misjaya's childhood which had a harmonized life with various ethnicities.

"At a very young age, we had already familiar with a variety of tribes. Here in Pontianak, we have more families from Chinese, Malays, Madurese, and there are

also Dayak friends. It feels good when my friends also have other friends, not only from our own tribe but also from different tribes so that we can learn a lot from each other. We also learn their languages a bit to be able to understand what others say and feel no difference." Said Misjaya (interview February 20, 2019, at 16.54 WIB)

Unlike the Bangka people who experienced joy when doing amalgamation due to the equality between Malays and Chinese, the Misjaya couple had to experience various conflicts because the husband's ethnic background was at that time became a target of Sambas conflict which made him unable to go home with his family. Up to that point, the Misjaya had to sacrifice their feelings by embracing the fact that their parents had passed away and missed their funeral process due to the raging conflict.

"... She did not dare to go back there because she married a Madurese. A Madurese husband wanted to go back there too but the wife was afraid there was a danger. But then, they were able to go home after that because there was nothing terrifying happened again. The woman had to stay there for a few days and then back here. Unfortunately, it turned out that there was another conflict. The woman's parents died at that time but not because of the conflict, they were sick. The woman did not dare to go home when her parents died since the conflict escalated again". Said Misjaya (interview February 20, 2019, at 16.54 WIB)

At present, the situation has recovered a lot. This is evidenced by the fact that the Misjaya family visited his family in Sambas Regency, which was once a conflict area, even Misjaya's husband of Madurese ethnic background could come to visit the area. Information obtained by Misjaya that there are still some issues regarding the danger of Madurese ethnic to cross the Sambas area did not discourage Misjaya and her husband to stay in touch with each other.

"... for now, it is possible for the Madurese to go back there. There are people who have settled there, especially the ones who married earlier, Madura with Sambas". Said Misjaya (interview February 20, 2019, at 16.54 WIB)

The 25-year journey of life with her husband made Misjaya understand that humans basically have different traits. When there are some parties who generalize

someone's character within a group, there will be stereotypes that actually inhibit a relationship. Misjaya's residence is in the Madurese neighbourhood and they adapt well to their environment; even Misjaya is currently fluent in speaking Madurese in daily life.

"Initially, in the Malay community itself, there were some who viewed the Madurese as a strong-headed person, a person who has many wives, and a person who loves to hit without necessary. However, if they are matured enough, they would tell the other way. Those traits are not the fault of their background tribe but due to the personality of each person. If someone is rude, it is his personality and the basis of his personal nature, not the ethnicity's traits heritage." Said Misjaya (interview February 20, 2019, 16.54 WIB)

Misjaya has proven that not all individuals can be of equal value. What Misjaya did was depersonalization in his ethnic group as Malay ethnic women. According to Social Identity, depersonalization means loss of one's personality which supports the existence of a group (Hogg, Rast, & van Knippenberg 2012: 262-263). At that point, group membership is the main goal, and the role that individuals take in that group becomes less important, such as Misjaya which prioritizes her family life with husband who is Madurese ethnic compared to large groups who are still struggling with the existing stereotypes.

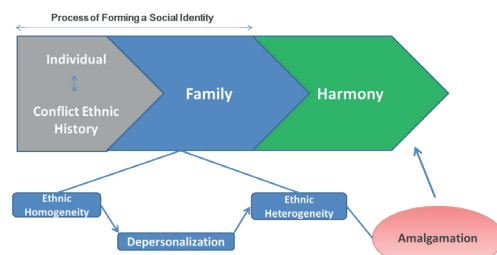


Figure 3. Model of Amalgamation Community in West Kalimantan (Source: Research Processed)

In figure 3, ethnic societies are identified with historical origins of ethnic conflict which creates inter-ethnic stereotypes so that some individuals represent their social identity by withdrawing from ethnic groups (depersonalization) to engage in mixed marriages with different individuals ethnic. This depersonalization action brings positive things by breaking down the stereotypical wall between couples who conduct amalgamation

to produce seeds of harmonization between individuals of different ethnicity.

## Conclusions

The harmony between ethnic groups in Indonesia is a good example in the midst of many issues that can create disunity. An individual's social identity becomes important in a primary group such as families who experience mixed marriages or amalgamation. The symbol of Tong Ngin Fang Ngin Jit Jong has unconsciously become the binder of the people of Bangka in taking every decision, but on the one hand, it is only limited to the rules of ethnicity.

On the other hand, amalgamation couples in West Kalimantan are still classified as vulnerable with the ethnic identity of each individual when weighing from past ethnic conflicts. Individuals who carry out amalgamation must be prepared to experience a depersonalization process where the primary group (family) becomes the most important group rather than identity as an ethnic community. Academically and theoretically developing in the future, in-depth studies and communication models on other factors that will build harmony in Indonesian society are needed. Amalgamation, in this case, proved to be one of the factors that united different groups to break down the stereotypical walls that had developed so far in the community.

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