ETHNOCRACY AND MULTICULTURALISM: A PRELIMINARY STUDY OF THE CULTURAL ASPECTS OF THE BESEMAH PEOPLE AT PAGARALAM, PALEMBANG

Irmayanti Meliono

Department of Area Studies, Faculty of Humanities, University of Indonesia, Depok 16424, Indonesia

E-mail: irmayanti_m@yahoo.com

Abstract

This paper aims to show that the traditional governance system, *Lampik Empat Merdike* and *Sindang merdike* (free men) established by the Besemah society in the past is the source of enthusiasm and democratic spirit in Besemah ethnocratic society. Besemah people's lives have changed through many different periods, from the megalithic, to the imperial, the colonial and to post-colonial (independence) periods. The kind of change that has taken place is concerned with the society's view of diversity in various aspects, such as culture, knowledge, the world outside the ethnic community of Besemah, and education. Thus, multiculturalism is a unique characteristic of the Besemah community. There are two important aspects of multiculturalism in the Besemah community, namely: (1) interaction and communication between different cultures (Besemah and Dutch), (2) changes in public perception regarding the Besemah from local to global perceptions. These demonstrate that the community has a unique type of multiculturalism based on ethnocracy and the traditional governance system.The research shows that multiculturalism in Besemah society still exists in their daily lives and has a pragmatic function to improve the quality of life in various sectors.

Keywords: Besemah community, ethnocracy, multiculturalism, traditional governance system

1. Introduction

Maintaining an ethnic identity may have both a positive and negative impact. The positive side of keeping one's ethnic identity is that it may help build a fighting spirit, and later, nationalism, which relies on a sense of excellence of the ethnic's image. On the contrary, the negative impact could generate a feeling of excessive arrogance, with a condescending attitude, which assumes that their own worldview is the most righteous. Moreover, it develops into a sense of superiority in terms of ethnicity, culture, religion and language, which tends to expand into a dominating majority. Furthermore, this could be an obstacle to a democratic government, as it eventually produces discrimination, repression and conflict. It is, therefore, important to foster awareness of multiculturalism in a plural society such as the Indonesian society.

Secondly, multiculturalism in Indonesia is a controversial issue, and it always has its currency as an important discourse in research projects. Problems arise when a person or a group of people thinks that they are different from others because of differences of ethnicity, religion, level of education, and political interest. Moreover, these differences may become a reason for ethnic conflict. Although Indonesia has adopted *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, or unity in diversity, as its national motto, in some instances, it is not effective anymore, and it may just be a meaningless phrase for some people in society.

Finally, there is a problem in realizing that the Indonesian people are heterogeneous. Communication and dialogue are needed to reach a consensus based on an agreement and set of rules. In the context of the state, there should be an understanding of the principle of multiculturalism. The paper shows the positive side of ethnicity to develop multiculturalism using the principles and norms developed by the Besemah people in order to formulate policies to respond to the challenge of globalization.

2. Methods

This research uses a qualitative method and multidisciplinary approach. The purpose of using the qualitative methodology is to understand the diverse socio-cultural phenomena of the Besemah society. Therefore, we need a multidisciplinary method in conducting an analysis on the uniqueness and complexity of their lives. This study also uses the

methods of historiography, cultural studies, and philosophy. Historiography is used to describe the changes in the community since the Dutch colonial era to the present. Cultural studies is used to analyze various cultural backgrounds such as religion, way of life, institutions, local knowledge (local wisdom), cultural symbols, human interaction and changes of perception in the society. Whereas, philosophy is used to make a reflection and conduct a critical interpretation of the results of previous research on this society. Also, an observation done in the research location and literature survey for a more accurate data collection are conducted.

The scope of this research is limited to Besemah area, Pagar Alam, South Sumatra. The research data relate to the geo-cultural element associated with the community's behavior in the past as well as the present.

The stages of this research are: (a) reading the texts related to the cultural background and local communities of Besemah at Pagaralam, (b) field research using an observational method in Pagar Alam region in accordance with the topic of the research and field data recording using a camera, (c) analysis of the results from the field as well as from the existing literature, (d) subsequent analysis with a critical interpretation of the way of life, cultural elements and local knowledge of the society, (e) understanding the significance of life, cultural elements and local knowledge of the society, and (e) understanding the meaning of the research results to prove that Besemah's ethnocracy is derived from the traditional government system of *Lampik Empat Merdike* and the principles of *Sindang Merdike*.

3. Results and Discussion

The results of this research are: (a) an understanding of the cultural background of Besemah society in the past, namely the traditional culture and the Dutch colonial culture in the area, (b) understanding the notion of ethnocracy in Besemah as derived from the system of *Lampik Empat Merdike*, a system of traditional governance, as well as the principles of *Sindang Merdike*, and (c) undertsanding the concept of multiculturalism among the Besemah people, which consists of elements from culture, traditional governance systems, Dutch colonialism, and also the local and global perceptions of the community.

 The third result of this research indicates that the concept of multiculturalism in Besemah people has changed the society from a traditional society to a modern society, and the community accepts globalization in various situations and conditions. The results of this research are presented in the following discussion.

Understanding the Besemah People. Understanding the Besemah people's lives must refer to three aspects: geographical location (region), history, and culture. Through these three aspects, the study of Besemah society can be explored and expanded to see its association with ethnocracy and multiculturalism. Geographically, the Pagaralam region, mostly populated by the Besemah people, lies at the slopes of Mount Bukit Barisan and Mount Dempo (Figure 1). Currently, the town of Pagaralam in the Lahat Regency is administratively part of the Palembang Province as stipulated by the local Law No.8, 2001. It is located between 40° Celcius Southern Lattitude (LS) and 103.150° Celcius Eastern Longitude (BT) with area coverage as wide as 63.366 hectares, and it is a cool place producing coffee, and situated in a beautiful panoramic highland. For this reason, obviously, the Dutch Indies government in the eighteenth century was strongly attracted to it and dominated the area consequently.

Moreover, the Pagaralam highland, located between Bukit Barisan and Gumay Mountain at the slope of Mount Dempo, has several Besemah megalithic sites, such as *menhir*, *dolmen*, sarcophagi, *lesung* or rice mortar, and statutes bearing static and dynamic styles (Bedur, 2009: 21-23). The huge number of megalithic heritage (relics) in the area is an indication that humans inhabited the region since at least 2500 years B.C. The Forms of sculptural details and fine relics also show that the Besemah people have known arts and crafts. Artefacts in the form of human statues in the area depict human figures with large bodies, and fat, thick lips (Figure 2).

More importantly, the sites show us that a foreign influence has penetrated the local Besemah culture. As a result, the Besemah people converted into Islam in the

Figure 1. Mount Dempo and the Farm

Figure 2. Megalitic's Human Statues

nineteenth century and were involved in the establishment of the *Syarikat Islam* movement in 1916 (Bedur, 2009: 50-55). In addition to that, the Besemah people still hold onto their belief of respecting their ancestors. Historically, the Besemah people were part of the Palembang Sultanate of the past as the centers of political power, government, culture, and symbolic authority.

There were three constitutive structures of the Palembang Sultanate, namely, the region, area of authority, and role of the clan. Firstly, the region: it was divided into three areas, *Kapungutan*, which was close to the government area, *Sindang*, which was farther away from the center, and *Sikap*, which lies between the *Kapungutan* and *Sindang*. Secondly, the area of authority of the Sultanate: it was a land divided into one that was managed by the princes and another by the loyal aristocrats. The Sultan gave the princes five to twelve villages and allowed them to till the land and feed themselves, as the Sultan did not compensate for their expenses. As long as the princes remained devoted to the Sultan, their offspring might inherit their rights. Thirdly, role of the clan: the Sultan assigned certain tasks for the clans, especially those who lived in *Sikap* and *Sindang* areas. The clan who lived in *Sikap* area had to take care of *gawe raja*, that is, to provide for the financial needs of the Sultan. These people did not have to pay taxes to the Sultanate, and they were free from *tiban ukon.* Meanwhile, the clan who lived in *Sindang* had to guard the border territory and keep the people, especially the Besemah, from running away to Lampung or Banten, while at the same time, exempt them from paying taxes. As time went by, the Besemah people, including those who lived in Sindang were later called the *juray* and *sumbay* (Bedur, 2009: 23-27). The *sumbay* eventually was the name of a new clan that was derived from the *jurays.*

Later in the development, the heads of the *sumbay* and *juray* played a role in implementing their traditional way of handling territorial problems, as well as the other problems occurring in society. As the *sumbay* and *juray* were inseparable in the life of the Besemah society, people named them *ulu tulung,* which means water spring, which could not be separated and mixed, or *dikudak.* The people believed that when they messed a water spring, the water became turbid up to the estuary (Bedur, 2009: 59). However, the people of Besemah appointed a *puyang,* who was charismatic and serving as a model for morality and good example to the people, to head the *juray* and *sumbay.* The relation was hierarchical. When a person was appointed to head the *juray* and *sumbay,* the *puyang* should give his approval. Nevertheless, the role of the *juray* and *sumbay* in some ways has changed. They were not just titles or an extension of the *Sindang* people, but they actually defended both the traditional norms of the society and

those of the clans. The principles of the *Sindang* people have become the norms of the state, as well as the principles to regulate the behavior of the people in the political, social, and cultural areas.

The Ethnocracy of the Besemah People. What is ethnocracy? Firstly, literally *ethnocracy* comes from the Greek, *ethnos*, which means 'society' and *kratos*, 'rules', so it means that the local people rule their life according to certain principles and rules. Based on this definition, the meaning of ethnocracy may also mean a worldview or perception of a certain group of people along with the rules to govern the state or region. Secondly, the perception of ethnocracy may as well cause some concrete forms of action, such as the opposition against oppression or struggle against outside power imposing some intervention. Therefore, the practical implication of ethnocracy may be like one in democracy, especially when democracy also implies an understanding of ruling a state by people. Similarly, in ethnocracy, a group of people that belongs to a certain ethnic group, rules the state. Similar to the principle of democracy, ethnocracy possesses a certain basic principles, such as (1) members of the society has equal access to contribute to the state establishment, and (2) each member of the society has recognized and lived to the universal principle, such as freedom and liberty, which are important elements of the statehood.

However, it is necessary to recognize the Besemah ethnocracy, which goes back to the history of the people (see explanation in section II) and the traditional governance of the Besemah people with democratic principles. The traditional system of government is referred to as *Lampik Empat Merdike*, led by head of the Sumbay. The system has the elements of solidarity, loyalty, and democracy. At that time, people showed solidarity with their leader and defended their territory from foreign occupation. The status of *Sindang Merdike* or "border guard" of society and the system *Lampik Empat Merdike* were destroyed when the Dutch defeated Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin II. Consequently, the Besemah society underwent a change when the Dutch came. They first came to trade, but later they became a colonizer that subdues local chiefs throughout Nusantara, including capturing Sultan Badaruddin II of Palembang in 1821. The superior and more modern Dutch forces managed to conquer the Besemah people after a long war that ended in 1866.

The Dutch took over the Sultanate of Palembang and installed a Dutch regent who allotted a local vice-regent to assist the foreign ruler. At the same time, the colonial government chose an official and several comptrollers to oversee the hinterland of the region. When the colonial government deported Sultan Ahmed Najamuddin IV to Manado, and he later on died, the existence of the Sultanate of Palembang came to an end.

Following this, the colonial government then appointed the former vice-regent of Kasultanan Palembang, Kramajaya, as Prime Minister to administer the Palembang region. Meanwhile, in the hinterland, the Dutch replaced local clan rulers with ruthless divisive leaders.

Moreover, as the people in the hinterland grew to hate the Dutch rulers, Prime Minister Kramajaya who once obeyed the Dutch colonial government, became rebellious. The movement against the Dutch colonial government started when the colonial government imposed its force to suppress the right of the *Sindang* people as a free people. Therefore, the Besemah people fought against the colonial troops that were sent to capture King Tiang Alam who was protected by the Besemah people. The war was inevitable as the hilly landscape was a difficult terrain for the Dutch troops and, in addition to that, the locals had built *kute*, or forts. Unconsciously, this resistance created a strong sense of ethnocracy, which later on, developed a certain attitude and position, or some kind of nationalism to resist the occupation of the Dutch colonial power.

Eventually, the Dutch colonial government broke the treaty. The natives had difficulty obtaining basic necessities, such as salt, tobacco, and clothes, as the colonial government forced the people to pay land and house taxes. The enforcement was contrary to the fact that the Besemah people have never even paid tribute to the Palembang Sultanate. Moreover, the natives had to pay taxes in currency, which was against the custom of paying with produce. This kind of oppression was literally a violation of the 1830 treaty. It shows that the Dutch colonial government was abusive, ignoring the people's rights, and the free will of the natives to run the state, and instead, exercising its power and oppressive practice.

Similarly, the struggle against the Dutch, which nurtured a sense of nationalism, happened when the Dutch colonial ruler broke the 1830 treaty. In the history book of the Besemah people (Gramberg quoted by Bedur, 2009: 91-92), it was stated that the treaty stipulated that (1) the people of Besemah acknowledged the Dutch authority, and on the other hand, the Dutch colonial government respected the locals as free people, or *sindang merdike*, (2) the head of the Besemah people had to report to Palembang once every three year, (3) the Besemah people had to guard themselves and the surrounding areas against robbery and theft, (4) the Besemah people had to surrender any criminals who were fleeing into their territory, (5) there would be no slave trade, and (6) the Besemah people did not pay taxes.

The situation that happened in the past, namely, the struggle against the Dutch, has created the basis and the spirit of ethnocracy in the community. They manage their lives with the *Lampik Empat merdike*'s principle and the *sindang merdike* 's principle (Figure 3). The principle of ethnocracy is in line with the principle of democracy. It talks about life free from oppression and repression, establishment of justice, and a state free from pressure imposed by a powerful external force. People expect a lot from democracy, as it reduces injustice and establishes the organizational systems of the state more rationally. Most people believe in the politics of the democratic system, which associates democracy with liberty, justice, protection, welfare in the social and economic spheres, as well as respect for human dignity. People become disappointed, angry and frustrated when things turn out to be different from what they have expected. The Dutch colonial government should have respected the Besemah treaty. The breaking of the treaty shows that there was an intervention in the life of the Besemah people and oppression by the ruler. The principle of *sindang merdike* and the Besemah ethnocracy vanished.

Democracy and ethnocracy are deemed to have the capacity to encourage freedom of expressions, and this discourse is the main and exclusive target of political action (Haryatmoko, 2003: 92-95). The vanishing freedom of expression among the Besemah people was the result of violence in the resistance movement against the Dutch colonial government. The political action directed toward the opposition against the Dutch colonial government created an awareness among the Besemah people of the need to express a patriotic spirit of statehood and self-identity as *sindang merdike*. Besides the freedom of expression, there are other values such as solidarity, togetherness, and responsibility to safeguard the Besemah's possession, territory and the people who live there.

The Concept of Multiculturalism in the Besemah Society. When we talk about the concept of multiculturalism in the Besemah society, first we need to understand the perception that is connected to cultural background and multicultural understanding. It is to ask whether the Besemah people possess a multicultural conception and if they have applied the concept to their daily life.

In the past, people settled in the region of Sindang and their duty was to maintain the security of the region of the Palembang Sultanate. The community earned the
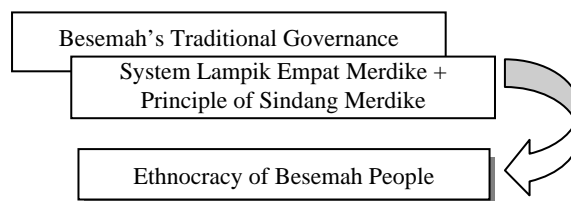

Figure 3: Ethnocracy of Besemah's People

nickname "border guards". The Sultan of Palembang gave a privilege to the people of not having to pay taxes to the king. The status of the border guard was a respectable status that was held by the Besemah people, and they were referred to as *Sindang Merdike* (free men), who were free to work and create. Besemah community leaders elected the head of *Sumbay*. At that time, the Besemah region was an area or place of settlement, inhabited by the Besemah people, and they upheld the orderly nature of the norms established by the leader (the head of *Sumbay*). They also had a sense of solidarity, loyalty to leaders, families and community. The conditions were referred to as *"dimak kapadunye"* and *"Dide beganti"*, featuring the concept of solidarity and loyalty in the democratic life of the Besemah society.

The conditions in the past with the Dutch colonialism in the region caused the Besemah community to either directly or indirectly recognize a foreign culture (Dutch) through language, power, knowledge, technology, and education in the region. For example, The opening of a tea plantation and factory near Mount Dempo helped people to learn about tea and its processing into beverages. Another example is formal education systems such as the elementary, junior high and high schools were shaped by the Dutch influence. In their political life, the Besemah society struggled to maintain the principle of traditional government against the Dutch rule. As the result of the defeat by the Dutch, the people of Besemah had to pay land tax and house tax, and it was very harmful to the Besemah community.

Such situations led to the existence of multiculturalism, which was formed by the views of their lives. Multiculturalism is a mosaic of Besemah cultures. As a mosaic, the elements of multiculturalism is obtained because of, for example, the social situation and conflict against Dutch colonialism (in those days), as well as the differences of opinion between the Dutch government and traditional governance Besemah. This socio-cultural phenomenon and situation led to the emergence of a nationalistic attitude in society in its struggle against the Dutch and, at the same time, created the image and existence of the Besemah community.

There are two issues related to multiculturalism in Besemah, namely: (1) a focus on the interaction and communication between different cultures (Besemah and the Dutch), which caused the emergence of the unique style of multiculturalism in the Besemah society, and (2) the change experienced by the community in terms of their multicultural uniqueness, from a local perception to a global one. After the independence, the Besemah people (living in the territory of the Republic of Indonesia) saw another change in perception. They expanded their horizon by adopting the insights of multiculturalism that focus on the pragmatic and functional values of cultural influences from outside the Besemah society.

With regard to cultural perceptions, Van Peursen (1976: 8-12) said that a society has three perceptions: mythical, ontological, and functional. The mythical perception says that every society believes in something that has magical power, which originally derives from nature, or ancestral spirits. Man feels trapped by this magical power. Meanwhile, the ontological perception as the next step, states that he can step outside the power of magic and distance himself from the natural power through a concrete and rational way. Nature may seem to be a world that needs to be in a close relationship with human because it gives something that is useful to human. The next step is the functional perception, in which human recognizes that the world that he sees can give a meaningful contribution once we discover its function. Man and the world are open to and complement each other because each has functional elements to support the other.

Along with this research, we can also make an analogy of the situation and condition of the Besemah society. Human, in this case, the Besemah people, have three perceptions as well, that is, the mythical, ontological, and functional. The mythical perception happened in the past, during the megalithic era. The people's perception focused on the natural power, or ancestral spirits. On the other side, along with development, the Besemah people also experienced a change of perception, from ontological to functional perceptions. These two may happen at the same time, especially when the society was aware of the power of nature and its potential. The natural environment at the slope of Mount Dempo has become tea and coffee plantations. The plantations are the source of the economic income to the people of Pagaralam. The Besemah people have inherited ontological and functional perceptions about nature for the benefit of all, when they knew how to nurture, respect, and till the land so that nature (for examples: tea and coffee plantations, tourism resorts) may become potentially beneficial for them.

Applying the ontological and functional perceptions, we may assume that the perception of the Besemah people has changed or shifted, and they have adopted a new one, that is, by opening themselves to the current trend of mindset, which may be possibly different from the existing view. It is, for example, accepting the advancement of information technology, education, and the advice of experts in leading the Besemah society towards improvement. One of the interesting phenomena is the new awareness of multiculturalism that believes in a way of life of the people motivated by the diversity of local cultures. This literal understanding of the word, multiculturalism, implies that it respects the ways of the people of any society in the world and that it could help build a sense of nationalism, and even also construct imperialism and colonialism.

In light of the perception of the Besemah people on multiculturalism, the writer has started her argument with mythical, ontological and functional perceptions. With these three views, especially the ontological and functional, the Besemah people have institutionalized these views into actual practice to respond against the surroundings, such as studying in institutions outside the Besemah region, like in big cities in Java, and learning to be entrepreneurs. The result is the returnees are expected to give a positive effect to the Besemah society by contributing to the development of the region. However, some decide to remain in the new place. In contrast, there has been a strong primordial bond to this day that there is a continuing contribution given to the development of the Besemah society in Pagaralam (Figure 4).

On the other side, the multicultural discourse of the Besemah society has an interesting aspect to observe. It is the aspect of cross-cultural phenomenon, which opensup new opportunities and space for the people. Crossing the border to arrive in a different country and culture through migration, the Besemah people may carry their megalithic heritage, literature, worldview, lifestyle and technology. The voyage from one place to another by many means, such as by foot, commerce, temporary settlement, or permanent stay, colonization, slavery, and many other ways, would eventually establish the cross-cultural phenomenon.

To underline the aspect of diaspora, a new community of immigrants is born and raised in the new place. According to Georgiou in Budianta (2008: 31), diaspora connects a certain ethnic group or cultural entity of the people who have emigrated to the generation who is born in the new place. In the era of globalization, the movement of a people is not only physical and material, but it also occurs in the virtual sphere using the technology of electronic communication. Since the introduction of the local Law No. 8, 2001 on the formation of administrative towns, the people of Besemah have created a website about the Besemah region, where the Besemah people who live outside the
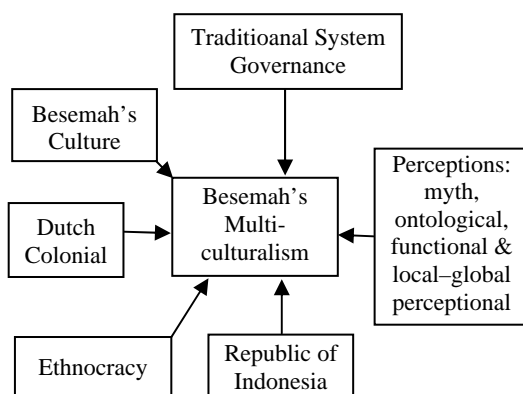

Figure 4. Besemah's Multiculturalism

region can find information about their hometown and contribute to the cross-cultural aspect of the society.

Thus, the Besemah's views about multiculturalism have changed, from a local view into a global outlook. Besemah's multiculturalism has a unique and dynamic element that originates from the culture, history of struggle against the Dutch, social and cultural values, functional values, and globalization.

Dialogue of Ethnocracy and Multicultural Perception of the Besemah Society. Dialogue happens when there is an interactive communication, completing one another, so that we can obtain a significant advantage on the condition of the Besemah society. Similarly, dialogue will also enable one to learn from others, such as their thinking, and progresses that they have achieved. Therefore, as a learning process, the Besemah society who has applied its ontological and functional perceptions, may develop themselves through discussions and seminars with people outside the region.

Basically, one may understand the cultural norms of or outside the group. It is the process of learning about transference of culture and it is socialization. The process may be fast or slow, to make the society progressing in a creative and innovative way to lead to invention in science and technology. In due course, this will cause a cultural transformation through the transference of knowledge, technology and information.

As mentioned before, the principle of ethnocracy in the Besemah society, on one hand, at that time, around the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, ethnocracy has caused a spirit of nationalism to resist the Dutch colonialism and the Japanese occupation. On the other, ethnocracy has supported the presence of the spirit of liberty following a democratic system to run the state; in this case, it is the system of government of the Pagaralam people. In the current context, the principle of ethnocracy is promising when the state promotes to raise the qualification of the people, not only to educate the people to fulfill the internal need, but to prepare them to compete with other people. Ethnocracy in itself has certain characteristics, to control the application of democracy in the local institutions of religion, culture and language.

Furthermore, this situation or condition may also become a means of control of the system itself as the Besemah people have applied a multicultural perception on its social reality. To start the practice, firstly, we need to explain and understand culture, its characteristics, inculturalization, and secondly, we will be able to analyze multiculturalism and establish a multicultural awareness. As a perception, multicul-turalism should be able to address differences, and how they are accepted naturally, since it is not supposed to cause discrimination.

Differences of opinion may emerge when a situation allows a plural and heterogeneous society to be discriminative, unjust, and apathetic towards cultural identity and the rights for individual freedom (Taylor, 1994: x-xi).

Likewise, the dialogue between the principle of ethnocracy and multiculturalism happens when people are aware of the need. People look at the reality objectively, instead of subjectively. Objectivity emerges when one understands in a rational way the various phenomena in different sectors of society, such as education, economics, religiosity, culture, which eliminates any attempt for local-centrism. One needs to appreciate and respect differences as a rich source of wisdom for the Besemah people. Consequently, some learning processes are to take place and raise a multicultural awareness using various sources and real actions.

As this research deals with cultural diaspora, it turns out that apparently it extends to hybridity, postcolonialism, and cultural studies, focusing on pluralism, especially cultural hybridity, or ethnic identity observed through cultural products, such as traditions, crafts, lifestyles, clothes and language. In the Besemah society, cultural diaspora is very close to hybridity, as a postcolonial culture faces a certain situation in the local culture. This causes a new kind of identity which reveals certain characteristics in lifestyles, clothes, and perceptions, such as natural conservation to keep the heritage of natural environment, preserve megalithic sites, and respect the history of the Besemah people by tracing their genealogy to the kingdom of Sriwijaya. On hindsight, the sign of cultural hybridity is marked by the willingness of the local Pagaralam government to show the natural and rich cultural heritage, as well as the history of the Besemah people through geo-tourism, historic tourism, and equitourism, all of which are introduced through cyber publications. It was eventually inevitable a long time ago when the Dutch came to establish coffee and tea plantations in Pagaralam, and as a result, introduced cross cultural processes.

Nevertheless, directly or indirectly, the cross-cultural processes between postcolonial and local cultures have occurred since a long time ago. The processes affected this area, both locally as well as abroad. Therefore, the Besemah people, who once applied the principle of ethnocracy, fought against the Dutch colonial government, and now it has shifted its paradigm to multiculturalism.

4. Conclusion

The Besemah traditional system of government, namely *Lampik Empat Merdike* and *principles Sindang Merdike*, (free people) served as bases to defend their land against the Dutch. They were also the principles

and spirit that have grown in Besemah people's lives. In addition, there have been changes in Besemah's public life, from lives in the megalithic period, the Sultanate of Palembang, the Dutch colonial period, to the postcolonial period (independence). These changes have an impact on the identity of the Besemah people.

In addition, cultural differences that have already existed will continue to represent a difference of meaning and vision of systems in Besemah's public life. Thus, they will form the totality of existence of Besemah society with all of the capacity it possesses. Another important thing is the existence of cultural relations with other cultures, which caused a dualistic view of social issues, namely, (1) the Besemah people still retain their local culture, and (2) they grew into a dynamic society, as they are quite open in accepting the existing differences.

The tendency to defend one's ethnic identity causes both positive and negative impacts. Ethnic identity could enhance the spirit of nationalism, which is founded on excellence, but in certain ethnic identities, it increases the sense of ethnic arrogance, which leads to an assumption that their point of view righteous in all situations. In light of statehood and democracy, ethnocracy, which is based on the politics of ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identities, may become a negative force. It allows discrimination against minorities, repression, and continuing conflicts, unless the government encourages a necessary responsiveness towards multiculturalism in the pluralistic Indonesian society.

This phenomenon has also led to the growth of multiculturalism in the Besemah society, namely multiculturalism that focuses on the interaction and communication between different cultures, and where people's perception undergoes changes, from local to global perceptions. These changes will also bring changes in public perception of the Besemah people, from a mythical perception to a functional and pragmatic perception.

The results of this research indicate that the concept of traditional society has evolved into modern society, as the Besemah people accept globalization in various situations and conditions.

Today, the region has changed and become the Besemah city governed by the norms of the Law no. 8/2001, and is led by a mayor. Indirectly, the uniqueness of the Besemah community's multiculturalism has become a foundation for the development of the city of Pagar Alam and the society in accepting openness in some respects. The Besemah people are open to members of the other ethnic groups, such as Javanese, Bataks, Chinese. Such relationships support communi-

cation and cultural interaction, and other fields such as education and commerce. Currently, the community opens itself up to the development and construction of its territory. The pragmatic and functional outlook manifests in situations such as cultural tourism and economic activities.

This research also indicates that the concept of multiculturalism in the Besemah people has changed from traditional society to modern society, and the community accepts globalization in various situations and conditions.

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