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## Tolerance From Below: Grassroots Movement and Interfaith Collaboration for Religious Moderation in Indonesia

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### ***Abstract:***

This research explores the role of grassroots movements in promoting communal tolerance in Indonesia, with a specific focus on the Interfaith Brotherhood (Pelita) in Semarang. Using interview, observation and document evaluation methods, this study reveals how Pelita utilizes interfaith dialogue and socio-cultural activities to overcome prejudice and intolerance. The findings indicate that Pelita actively promotes interfaith education, dialogue and advocacy for minority rights, utilizing the power of volunteers to strengthen religious moderation and tolerance within society. This study underscores the role of grassroots communal movements in mainstreaming religious moderation in Indonesia. It highlights the crucial involvement of civil society in consolidating communal tolerance as a response to the dynamics of religious conflict in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** *grassroots, communal, civil society, tolerance, intolerance, Pelita, interfaith*

## INTRODUCTION

The contestation between tolerant and intolerant groups constitutes an inseparable dynamic in the religious landscape of Indonesia. Two contrasting stereotypes characterize religious practices in Indonesia: the first depicts Islam in Indonesia as moderate force contributing to a peaceful nation. At the same time, the opposing perspective portrays Indonesia as a vulnerable state susceptible to extremism, potentially engaging in violent actions against minority groups (Pringle, 2010). Pringle emphasized that the embodiment of moderate Islam in Indonesia is aligned with democratic practice, expressing religious freedom grounded in constitutional values, traditions and principles. However, this moderate community actively challenges intolerant movements and ideologies that threaten religious harmony and freedom.

The challenge posed by intolerance presents a significant obstacle to the strengthening of religious moderation in Indonesia. George (George, 2016) identifies several factors contributing to the emergence of intolerance. Firstly, sectarian conflicts arise from competition among local actors representing diverse communities and identity-based political groups struggling for power at the provincial and district levels. Secondly, the threat of terrorism emanating from Jihadist groups exacerbates these issues. Thirdly, there is a surge in hatred and violence against minority groups, exemplified by obstacles to obtaining permits for church construction and discrimination against the Ahmadiyya and Shiite communities. Sidney Jones (2013) underlines the role of radical groups in fostering intolerance in Indonesia. Lastly, hate-spreading groups, such as the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), have changed, from initially being groups trained to counter government demonstrators to becoming reactionary Muslim groups. In addition, Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, although not directly involved in acts of violence, spreads intolerant views that fuel extremist groups and justify discrimination (George, 2016).

This research aims to fill the research gap in studying expressions, practices and contestations in maintaining religious tolerance and moderation by taking case examples in Indonesia. Among the main topics is the role of religious education in cultivating a moderate perspective, with studies analyzing Islamic religious curricula and activities in Islamic higher education institutions as tools to counter extremism (Hefni & Ahmadi, 2022; Mulyana, 2023; Nafi'a & Gumiandari, 2022; Naim et al., 2022; Purwanto et al., 2023; Wisnarni, 2023). Another topic is understanding religious moderation in the socio-political landscape, examining the inclusion-moderation thesis and how moderate religious parties negotiate their agendas amidst diverse constituencies (Daheri et al., 2023; Musawar et al., 2019). Other research investigates the relationship between religious moderation and conflict prevention (Faidi et al., 2021; Sobirin et al., 2020; Suhendi et al., 2020), the cultural dimensions of religious tolerance embodied in local wisdom traditions, and policies that aim to foster a tolerant religious environment but may have a repressive effect (Buehler, 2013; Rismawati et al., 2021). Several studies explaining moderate religious movements in various different

cultures can further enrich the conceptualization and model of religious moderation (Burga & Damopolii, 2022; Harahap et al., 2023; Rahman et al., 2021).

This study aims to comprehend the response of grassroots initiatives to the issue of religious intolerance, particularly in the context of restrictions on interfaith activities. This study focuses on the Interfaith Brotherhood (Pelita) in Semarang. The initiation of the founding of Pelita began with the intolerant response that emerged after the cancellation of the breaking of the fast (*iftar*) event involving Shinta Nuriyah Abdurrahman Wahid in the courtyard of Christ the King Church in Ungaran. The situation of intolerance and rejection from groups claiming to be representatives of Islamic mass organizations, especially the FPI, was the trigger for the establishment of the Pelita movement. The lamp is a symbol of resistance and positive efforts to promote peace, tolerance and brotherhood amidst differences in beliefs.

This research holds great importance in promoting interfaith harmony and combating bigotry in Indonesia due to various compelling factors. Firstly, present a thorough comprehension of the dynamics of inter-religious conflict, particularly in the framework of canceling and prohibiting inter-religious events. Furthermore, this research holds significant importance for comprehending the role and strategies employed by grassroots movements in overcoming intolerance. This report highlights local efforts to encourage dialogue, inclusivity and understanding between religions, and provides an example for similar initiatives in various communities in Indonesia.

This research methodology includes three main approaches: interviews, observation, and document evaluation. The approach began with interviews with Pelita's founders, with the objective of comprehending their viewpoints on their origins, challenges faced, and strategies implemented to encourage tolerance. Furthermore, the observations will be incorporated into Pelita's many activities to acquire a more tangible comprehension of how they promote inter-faith dialogue and cooperation. Finally, this research also involved reviewing documentation, including publications, media reports, and archives of Pelita activities, to gather data pertaining to the movement's history, objectives, and impact it has made.

The study highlights the significant contribution of grassroots social movements, like Pelita, in advancing religious tolerance and moderation in Indonesia. Pelita was established as a response to the growing religious intolerance, with the aim of promoting interfaith dialogue, understanding, and harmony. The research outlines Pelita's primary strategies, including the implementation of interfaith education programmes, establishment of conversation forums, collaboration on community initiatives, and advocacy for the rights of marginalised communities. These grassroots initiatives are crucial in promoting cultural transformation, endorsing inclusive religious interpretations, and advocating for local context-based policy reforms.

## DISCUSSION

### **Tolerant From Below: Role of Grassroots Movements for Sustaining Harmony**

Jeremy Menchik (Menchik, 2016) explains that tolerance in contemporary Indonesia is a practice of communal tolerance. Civil organizations can accommodate diverse religious beliefs and understandings of social and political practices. This model is different from other types of tolerance, such as mystical tolerance, secular-liberal tolerance, and pragmatic tolerance. Cyrus Masroori defines mystical tolerance - by Jalāl al-Dīn Balkhī (1207-1273) - as an emphasis on theological-spiritual arguments; God created humans in various ways, both Muslims and non-Muslims (Masroori, 2010). Muhammad and many prophets conveyed their revelations and teachings to different people. Humans have a limited understanding of universal truth and faith. Therefore, tolerance is needed so that there is no coercion towards universal truth and faith because diversity is God's creation. Additionally, John Locke had a secular-liberal concept of toleration, which separated private beliefs from public actions. This tolerance limits the State's authority over freedom, land, health and other material things. The state embraces all personal religious beliefs.

Communal tolerance refers to an approach in society that prioritizes the recognition and protection of diverse groups based on religion, ethnicity and culture. Communal tolerance places greater emphasis on the rights of groups or communities rather than individual rights. This is reflected in various aspects of community life, including official recognition of various religious and ethnic groups, as well as the implementation of inter-religious and inter-cultural education and dialogue aimed at increasing understanding and respect across communities. In communal tolerance, active participation in social, cultural and religious activities that cross communal boundaries becomes very important, reflecting a society that not only respects diversity, but also actively involves various groups in dialogue and cooperation (Menchik, 2016).

On the policy side, communal tolerance is supported by legislation and public regulations that facilitate diversity and tolerance at the communal level. Illustrations include laws governing the construction of places of worship, religious education, and anti-discrimination policies. Conflict resolution procedures in the context of communal tolerance also focus on dialogue and mediation between groups, with the aim of finding fair solutions and respecting diversity. In addition, recognition and support for group identity, including language, traditions and cultural heritage, is also an integral part of communal tolerance (Menchik, 2016). This enables each community to preserve and celebrate their heritage, affirming that communal tolerance is not just about 'putting up' with the existence of differences, but is a proactive effort to establish an inclusive environment that appreciates diversity as a valuable asset in terms of social and cultural richness.

Several civil movements are actively engaged in promoting tolerance throughout communities and civil society. Menchik (2016) highlighted NU and Muhammadiyah's advocacy for religious accommodation, particularly emphasizing the differences in criteria in terms of belief compared to social relations criteria. These different perspectives stem from

significant differences between classical and modernist fiqh interpretations of Islamic law, which recognize the importance of social relationships (*mu'āmalāt*), faith (*aqīdah*), and worship (*ibādah*). In matters of state and worship, NU and Muhammadiyah emphasize that every congregation must regulate its internal relations. Instead, the government must play an important role in regulating external matters. The organization's stance on religious activity in the community is crucial to their objective of fostering communal tolerance.

The role of civil movements in building religious moderation has made a significant contribution. Luc Reyhler suggests that managing religious differences requires several conditions (Reyhler & Langer, 2020). First, good and harmonious communication allows for discussion, explanation and correction of rumors or information that is spread and can cause conflict between social groups. The second factor is the efforts made by institutions that handle problems, both formal, such as the courts, and informal, such as traditional and religious institutions, communities and civil movements. Third, peace advocates have the power, resources, and workable plans to stop pro-conflict supporters from organizing large-scale demonstrations. The fourth determinant is the socio-political structure that fosters the establishment of justice within society. This demonstrates that the engagement of civil society movements has played a significant role in fostering tolerance and peace.

The role of civil society movements in religious tolerance is essentially important for several reasons. First, the typology of Indonesian society is a communal society, so the role of religious and traditional leaders is very large in mobilizing and moving society from conflict to peace. Second, values, traditions and cultural systems encourage society to maintain brotherhood based on primordial values. Third, reconciliation, mediation and advocacy strategies carried out by civil society are more easily accepted by conflicting parties because they can communicate effectively in building social justice.

There are two general approaches to dealing with conflict situations. The first involves a political strategy that utilizes state resources, while the second uses a social system that involves the poorest members of society at the grassroots level. Resolving conflicts through a democratic process using government authority is not always easy, as illustrated by the prolonged conflict in Ambon. This conflict, which lasted from 1999 to 2002, increasingly emphasized the challenges in achieving a resolution through established democratic mechanisms (Wibisono, 2021). The government prioritizes repressive and militarization actions which in the end only give rise to reactions of fear and resistance rather than awareness. This conflict resolution model is top-down, with the government as the party at the top and society as the party at the bottom. In the Ambon case, this approach actually resulted in slow conflict resolution (Qurtuby, 2012).

In contrast to the top-down model, the bottom-up model begins with society as the most basic unit. This strategy was also employed at the onset of the Ambon conflict, which sprang from a religious dispute between two prominent faiths, Islam and Christianity. Efforts to resolve this conflict are carried out by holding debates in a fair and open space. To prevent conflicts arising from divergent political interests of policymakers and the law enforcement

requirements of civil society. The presence of community figures such as religious figures represents the role and movement of the community in supporting law enforcement amidst the current turmoil of religious conflict. These figures received a mandate from the grassroots and civil society to accommodate community demands, which would later be conveyed to the government to prioritize law enforcement in resolving religious conflicts in Ambon. This strict law enforcement is intended to ensure that the main perpetrators, conspirators and masterminds of the Ambon-Maluku conflict that occurred then take firm action to handle and try to stop the conflict (Tidore, 2020).

The resolution of the Ambon-Maluku religious conflict hinges on the proactive engagement of many parties, particularly the people. This collective engagement includes journalists, students, religious leaders, lawyers, intellectuals, and local traditional leaders. This substantial support from various groups has encouraged the creation of movements, alliances and social networks has fostered the emergence of initiatives, coalitions, and social networks. This concept, which is gaining popularity across religious, social, political and national dimensions, underscores the important role played by grassroots community groups. The example of the conflict in Ambon two decades ago is proof of the important role of these community-based institutions as agents of moderation (Tidore, 2020).

The role of grassroots movements has been evident since the early formation of Indonesia's identity as a newly independent nation. The national identity of Indonesia was shaped through socio-political contestation that commenced with the formation of the Investigation Agency for Independence Preparatory Efforts (BPUPKI) on April 9, 1945 (Wahab, 2019). Following the rejection of the proposal by representatives of Islamic groups to establish Islam as the basis of the Indonesian state, a committee consisting of nine people was formed on June 1 1945 to complete discussions and reach agreement on national principles. This committee, known as the "Komite Sembilan (Committee of Nine)" drafted the opening of the constitution named the "Piagam Jakarta (Jakarta Charter)". On August 18, 1945, Sukarno and Hatta, the president and vice president of Indonesia, held an informal meeting with several Islamic figures, including Ki Bagus Hadikusumo, Wahid Hasyim, and Teuku Mohammad Hasan. The meeting discussed the objections of Eastern Indonesian figures to the contents of the Jakarta Charter and the request to delete the phrase 'obligation to implement Islamic law for its adherents. After much consideration, the suggestions of Eastern Indonesian figures, especially for the sake of the integrity of the Indonesian nation, were fulfilled, and the seven words were removed from the Jakarta Charter (Zulfikri, 2021, p. 25).

### **Cultivating Interfaith Brotherhood: From Resistance to Resilience**

Pelita is committed to advancing discussions on tolerance amidst challenges from conservative groups. This commitment was seen when they attempted to organize a joint breaking of the fast event in Ungaran in 2016, which aimed to strengthen harmony and brotherhood in Indonesia. However, they faced resistance from several groups such as the

Islamic Defenders Front and Hizbut Tahir. Despite experiencing obstacles, Pelita succeeded in adjusting the event plan by moving the breaking of the fast to the Puduk Payung Village Hall (Aloysius Budi, 2016).

The formation of Pelita as a response to this intolerance movement has had a significant impact: representing civil collaboration in fighting symbolic violence and oppression, acting as a counter movement to intolerance, strengthening awareness and tolerance based on civil movements, spreading the values of religious tolerance and moderation among young people, and advocating for groups prone to. Pelita, as one of the grassroots agents, has a significant influence on the realization of religious harmony in Semarang (Taufiq et al., 2022).

The Pelita program is rooted in several values: brotherhood, volunteerism, and equality. First, brotherhood fosters a spirit of interfaith brotherhood. Pelita recognizes that fundamentally, religion teach the importance of cultivating brotherhood, even among individuals of different beliefs. Pelita's experience underscores the need to create spaces for interfaith encounters based on the foundation of brotherhood.

*"Pelita initially originated from a joint breaking of fast event, originally planned to take place at the Catholic Church in Ungaran. However, it faced rejection from the local residents, despite the attendees eagerly awaiting the commencement of the event. Consequently, the event was relocated to a new venue in the Puduk Payung area, only to encounter further opposition. Eventually, the event was moved to the Gunung Pati area with coordination with the local village officials. Finally, the breaking of fast event was successfully conducted. Stemming from this less-than-pleasant experience, it became the impetus for the formation of an interfaith community, coordinated with the presence of attending colleagues. Coincidentally, some of the attendees were religious figures. Thus, we decided to establish this community. Initially, we named it the 'Persaudaraan Lintas Umat' (Interfaith Brotherhood). After some time, there was a suggestion that the word 'ummat' (faith community) might be associated only with certain religious followers. Consequently, we changed it to 'Persaudaraan Lintas Agama' (Interfaith Brotherhood) to ensure that followers of any religions and other belief system could feel free to join. This community has been established and continues to exist until now" (Setyawan Budi, personal communication, Oktober 2021).*

Discriminatory experiences became the starting point for the idea of forming a community. For example, discriminatory experiences are interpreted as bad experiences that often trigger social conflict. For Pelita, this experience of bias is interpreted as a moment to ground the principle of tolerance in society. Pelita promotes the principle of tolerance to minimize forms of discrimination in the future. Brotherhood is proof of maturity of faith, not the other way around; Religion does not destroy brotherhood. Religious maturity is measured by faith that provides benefits, security and peace.

Second, volunteers are agents of tolerance who work collaboratively and voluntarily to build a peacebuilding community through education, culture and advocacy.

*"The principle of managing Pelita is family-based. Hence, it is more accurate to refer to Pelita as a network. Pelita serves as a platform solely dedicated to facilitating the interaction and fostering harmonious connections across various religious communities, hence welcoming all individuals.*

*Meanwhile, the driving actors are everywhere throughout Indonesia. The reason for our name, Pelita Semarang, is to symbolize our aspiration for this interfaith brotherhood network to expand over the entire nation of Indonesia. The essence of tolerance pervades every aspect of society, albeit under several labels. Due to our notion of kinship, Pelita lacks a formal organizational framework. Indeed, that is customary. I have my own Pelita coordinator and treasurer. In addition to that, every individual who becomes a member of Pelita is afforded equal opportunities to participate. Officially, we do not have members; instead, we refer to them as volunteers. Consequently, we do not have any information to provide on the workings of regeneration, as we do not engage in member recruiting like other organizations. Indeed, the volunteers arrived in abundance. When questioned about their motivation for joining Pelita, many individuals appear uncertain and provide vague responses such as "I don't know" or "I just want to join." The volunteers participated in the event out of a deep sense of personal conviction. (Setyawan Budi, personal communication, Oktober 2021).*

The value of volunteerism encapsulates Pelita's fundamental ideology and operational framework, which underlines the core principle of fostering coexistence among different religious communities. Its ideology revolves around the idea of living in harmony despite different religious beliefs, thus directing Pelita's management to be rooted in kinship to facilitate and foster relationships between various religious groups. The phrase "calling of the heart" means that volunteers are motivated to join Pelita not because of a task but are driven by sincere goals and beliefs, which emphasizes the intrinsic and personal motivation of their involvement.

Moreover, these values underscore crucial aspects of Pelita's organizational structure. Although some volunteers may eventually be recognized as members, the organization does not engage in a formal recruitment process. Instead, the active involvement of volunteers stems from their commitment and genuine enthusiasm for the stated objectives. This voluntary and organic engagement highlights a deep dedication and authentic interest among the members, thereby enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of Pelita's initiatives. This acknowledgment signifies Pelita's success in maintaining a committed and engaged volunteer base without relying on formal recruitment practices. In essence, the statement provides valuable insights into Pelita's distinctive approach, where the commitment to fostering interfaith relationships is driven by shared goals and personal connections, deviating from conventional recruitment methods.

Third, equality, defending discriminated and marginalized communities. The participants provided important points regarding advocacy in the context of religious practices and social issues.

*"Another of Pelita's activities is advocacy. Since we existed, we have assisted the community and marginalized groups several times, especially those who experience religious discrimination. In the past we have assisted cases of church rejection in Telogosari" (Setyawan Budi, personal communication, Oktober 2021).*



He expressed Pelita's commitment to equality, especially in defending discriminated and marginalized communities. The community places significant emphasis on proactive advocacy, encouraging interfaith dialogue, and addressing broader social issues related to inequality and discrimination. Pelita's commitment to equality is clear in its practical programs, which go beyond dialogue to concrete actions aimed at actively defending the rights of individuals who face discrimination. The mention of assistance to marginalized groups highlights Pelita's hands-on approach in promoting equality and contributing to a more inclusive and just society, particularly with a focus on addressing sensitive issues related to religious discrimination.

### **Community-Led Tolerance: Strengthening Bonds Across Diverse Communities**

The commitment to equality is embodied in a holistic program. Pelita actively engages with broader social issues to create a more just and inclusive environment. By providing assistance to marginalized communities and advocating for those facing discrimination, Pelita goes beyond dialogue, aligning its programs with basic principles of equality. Through these concrete actions, this community ensures its values guide its mission and drive meaningful change in its community. The consolidation of volunteers, peace-building programs, and collective advocacy efforts exemplify Pelita's unwavering commitment to fraternity, volunteerism, and equality, forming an integrated and effective strategy that contributes significantly to maintaining social harmony and understanding in Semarang.

Firstly, there is periodic consolidation among volunteers, occurring weekly, monthly and annually aimed at strengthening friendship and emotional closeness. Several routine programs are implemented to achieve this, such as the Interfaith Forum (Format), which involves public dialogue between with representatives from various religions and belief systems to convey insight into the contemporary context from a theological or social aspect.

*"One of Pelita's routine programs conducted on a weekly basis is called "Format" which stands for "Forum antar Ummat" or Interfaith Forum. This program is the result of collaboration between Pelita and JFM radio. The Format takes the form of interactive discussion via radio broadcast, specifically on 102.8 JFM, every Thursday at 10.00 – 11.00 WIB (Western Indonesia Time). This event is broadcasted live through streaming, allowing listeners to directly pose questions to the invited speakers. The speakers are volunteers from Pelita scheduled in turns from various religions and beliefs systems, providing an opportunity for all volunteers to express themselves and share their respective experiences. The objective is to facilitate an exchange of insights, fostering mutual understanding among participants. Once mutual understanding is achieved, the hope is that tolerance will follow suit. Well, that's why in this format we don't always discuss religion and belief. But we also discuss societal issues which is currently booming in society. The hope is that Pelita can provide insight and become an information reference for the general public. (Setyawan Budi, personal communication, Oktober 2021).*

This weekly program also reflects Pelita's efforts to disseminate the spirit of tolerance within the community. By engaging volunteers from various religious backgrounds and beliefs, the Format allows them to express themselves, share experiences and exchange insights. Its radio broadcasts cover religious issues and trending social topics. The aim of this program is to increase tolerance and mutual understanding between communities. The importance of the media as a means of disseminating information was emphasized, with radio broadcasts via JFM (102.8) as the main channel. Through this media, Pelita seeks to reach a wider audience, facilitate the exchange of points of view, and provide insight and information to the public. By involving volunteers with various professional and educational backgrounds, the Format is expected to provide diverse and relevant benefits to society.

Several crucial issues were discussed in interfaith forums which were broadcast to deepen understanding and encourage interfaith cooperation. Religious issues include preparation for the climate crisis, the humanitarian message behind the Assyura tragedy, nation-building through moral strengthening, the love of Christ that fosters brotherhood, and the actualization of the values and teachings of religious moderation towards Indonesia's resilience. Meanwhile, social issues include an introduction to the analysis of the murder case of civil servants in Semarang, the attitude and stigma of the Catholic Church towards PLWHA (People Living with HIV/AIDS), as well as a reflection on Gus Dur's role as the Father of Chinese-Indonesia COMMUNITY. This forum also highlighted cultural aspects by discussing the traditions of celebrating 1 Sura and the importance of offerings (Javanese culture refers to ritual offerings made to appease spirits or gods) as part of the tradition. Apart from that, environmental issues receive special attention, addressing awareness of the climate crisis and reflections on World Environment Day to raise public concern for environmental protection and preservation.

Second, the peace-building program through Pondok Damai (peace camps) serves as a platform for interfaith fellowship, engaging teenagers from various religions, beliefs and ethnicities. Initiated annually since 2018, its objective is to internalize tolerance in the younger generation, promote coexistence, and practice a model of tolerance. Participants visited and stayed several times in different places of worship (mosques, churches, monasteries, temples) and shared religious experiences from several religious, belief and ethnic backgrounds.

*"We have been carrying out this Pondok Damai activity since 2018, with the participants representing various religions and beliefs. However, the majority of participants are young people. Why do we choose young people? Because if it is young people, especially the millennial generation, it will be easier to accept and participate "Activity. Moreover, this activity is carried out for 3 days and 2 nights. We will camp at a predetermined location. Usually, the place is in the courtyard of a place of worship or area of worship" (Setyawan Budi, personal communication, Oktober 2021).*

The Pondok Damai program is an interfaith gathering involving the participation of the younger generation or adolescents from diverse religious and belief backgrounds. Conducted on a national scale, Pondok Damai invites participants from various provinces in

Indonesia, and notably, in 2019 it also involved participants from Laos and Africa. The main aim of this program is to internalize the spirit of tolerance in the younger generation, providing them with the means to create harmony in society. The expected outcome include the integration of tolerance into participants' daily lives, with the hope that Pondok Damai alumni will serve as agents of tolerance by disseminating the spirit of tolerance and exemplifying tolerant practices within their community.

Pondok Damai activities involve field studies at various places of worship and sharing religious experiences between participants from various religious backgrounds and beliefs. The event lasts for three days and two nights, with camping activities at a predetermined location, usually in the yard or area of a place of worship. The majority of young participants were chosen because they were more receptive and involved in an intensive program. Throughout the event, participants were provided with material covering various aspects, such as reasons for choosing a particular religion, sharing unpleasant experiences with people of different beliefs, and sharing pleasant experiences with people of different religions. On the third day, visits are usually made to other places of worship to broaden the participants' horizons.

Apart from that, Pelita also carries out discussions and communications with moderation movement networks, such as Nahdhatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, Elsa, Gusdurian, universities and interfaith figures. Pelita is also active in dialogue with government elements: Mayor, DPRD, Police, etc. This communication helps Pelita in its advocacy work. Because Pelita is an individual-based organization, not an institutional representation, coordination and advocacy are easier.

Third, advocacy. Pelita engages in advocacy to support Ashura celebrations held by the Shia community in Central Java. This initiative involves engaging the audience, coordinating with the event organizers, and responding to objections from the Forum for Islamic Communities in Semarang (FUIS). Pelita collaborates with the Institute of Social and Religious Studies (eLSA) Semarang and the Legal Aid Institute. Following an audience on September 20, 2017, the organizing committee prepared guidelines for a program emphasizing the preservation of Pancasila and the integrity of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI). However, approximately 5-7 days later, FUIS disseminated information rejecting the Asyura commemoration. Pelita and the committee addressed this by preparing meeting materials for coordination with the UTC Hotel management. On September 25, 2017, FUIS sent a rejection letter to the hotel management, and the committee, along with Pelita, conducted a coordination meeting with the hotel authorities. Despite facing rejection from FUIS, the police remained committed to securing the event, referencing the response from the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia regarding Shia practices. Pelita and the interfaith network continued to persuade the police and hotel management to not be influenced by specific organization rejections, ensuring the right to hold the Asyura commemoration, and protect freedom of religion and belief (Elsa, 2017).

Pelita advocates discrimination against marginalized minority groups, as seen from its support for the rejection of the construction of the Indonesian Baptist Church (GBI) in Tlogosari, Semarang:

*"The assistance that has been around for quite a long time is actually assistance to Shia groups who experience discrimination in Semarang. So, we accompanied that for a long time, from 2015 to 2019. More recently, I think we were also involved in assisting the community in Tambakrejo, which experienced forced eviction. The support provided in Tambakrejo primarily addresses logistical needs, food availability and health. The eviction has left some members of the community unable to work. In our mentoring efforts, we facilitate various aspects related to these basic needs, essentially optimizing the resources available within our volunteer pool. Our volunteers come from diverse professional backgrounds, including educators, professors, religious leaders, lawyers, prosecutors, real estate agents, among others. Consequently, we channel their expertise to resolve existing issues. In Pelita, assistance is not always monetary; rather, it extends to the provision of specialized skills and networking, underscoring the importance of leveraging expertise and connections. (Setyawan Budi, personal communication, Oktober 2021).*

Pelita has helped several cases in Semarang. Some of these are cases of rejection of the establishment of a church in Telogosari and assistance to Shia groups who face discrimination in Semarang. Pelita has also provided assistance regarding the eviction of people in Tambakrejo. Pelita volunteers have diverse professional backgrounds, including teachers, lecturers, Kyai, religious figures, lawyers and prosecutors. Pelita's assistance is not always financial. Although money or funds are sometimes required, the assistance involves skilled personnel and networks. Pelita Volunteers contribute their skills and connections to help groups facing hardship or discrimination, not just providing financial resources. This assistance can take the form of legal advocacy, moral support, and other efforts to protect the rights and interests of groups in need.

### **Beyond Tolerant: Fostering Inclusivity through Communal Tolerance**

Pelita's approach to addressing discrimination is not only through formal activities, but also by promoting dialogue and awareness through education, culture and advocacy. The Pelita Initiative reflects the theory of communal tolerance in which community members, as volunteers, become agents of tolerance, working together to create an environment conducive to peace and coexistence. This practice underscores that tolerance is not merely a passive concept, but an active action in building an inclusive and diverse society.

Pelita has succeeded in manifesting a maturity of faith that not only provides benefits, security and peace for adherents of their own religion, but also for other people, regardless of differences in beliefs. These initiatives encourage changes in social perceptions and pave the way for a deeper practice of tolerance, where people not only avoid conflict but also actively build relationships of mutual respect and support. Pelita presents an example of

how grassroots movements can bring about significant change in society, challenging intolerant norms and practices, and supporting inclusivity and harmony between religions.

Pelita offers an interesting and complex narrative. As a movement that seeks to promote tolerance and cooperation between communities, Pelita has taken important steps in encouraging dialogue and understanding across religions and cultures. However, from the perspective of communal tolerance theory, there are several critical areas that require further attention. First, although Pelita has made efforts to increase inclusivity and representation of various minority groups, there are still challenges in achieving broader and deeper representation. This is important, considering the rich social and cultural diversity in Indonesia.

Second, a bottom-up approach with the principle of communal tolerance in prioritizing community initiatives. However, challenges arise in Pelita's interactions with broader political and social structures. Pelita needs to not only focus on local communities but also seek to influence public policy and national discourse. Here, Pelita may need to develop a more comprehensive strategy to ensure broader and more sustainable impact. Furthermore, Pelita's reliance on volunteers raises questions regarding the movement's long-term sustainability and effectiveness. While community participation is key in communal tolerance, long-term sustainability requires the development of more established structures and resources.

## **CONCLUSION**

The role of grassroots movements in consolidating communal tolerance can be interpreted as a method that embraces religious and cultural diversity by emphasizing dialogue and direct involvement in social, cultural and religious activities that strengthen inter-communal bonds. In this case, Pelita plays a role in confronting prejudice and intolerance, actively promoting interfaith education, dialogue and defending minority rights, by utilizing volunteers to strengthen religious moderation and tolerance in society. Initiatives like this highlight the ability of civil society movements to overcome the obstacles of intolerance and play a crucial role in fostering a more inclusive and harmonious society.

Nevertheless, grassroots movement face challenges and limitations in fostering the sustainability of tolerance due to several reasons. Among these are dependencies on volunteers and leadership. Without a stable structure or resources, the Pelita initiative may encounter difficulties in achieving long-term sustainability. In addition, Pelita has limited geographic reach, resistance from established structures, difficulty achieving broad representation, and the complexity of interactions with political and religious policies, both at the local and national levels. Further research is deemed necessary to explore Pelita's strategy and collaboration as a regional community with policy makers and other organizations on a national scale. Furthermore, research related to the role of similar communities in other areas is also very necessary to obtain a more comprehensive

understanding and as a comparison of the effectiveness of strategies for building inter-religious harmony from other social movements.

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