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Analysis of ethnic violence in Indonesia during the period of new order

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Abstract

Ethnic conflict occurs when there are differences in the physical characteristics and cultural behavior between groups. However, these differences will not lead to violence unless followed by the domination of one ethnic group over another in social, economic, and political aspects. Meanwhile, political conflict occurs when there is

domination from one group that holds political power over another and uses a repressive approach to legitimize its power. This paper examines various arguments that explain how ethnic violence in the province of West Kalimantan, Indonesia, has occurred and to what extent the New Order government policies contributed to the violence.

Keywords: *Sara*, ethnic violence, New Order

Introduction

The centralization of power in the New Order regime in the hands of Suharto was influenced by the concept of power in Javanese culture. This inspired Suharto to run Indonesian rule like the Javanese Kingdom. Although the national development policy was intended to develop Indonesia after the fall of the Old Order regime, this policy was used by Suharto, through his authoritarian regime with a militaristic approach, to maintain his power and benefit his family and cronies. The SARA policy is implemented to ensure that people only discuss the positive side of ethnicity, religion, race, and between groups. Instead of creating harmony in society, this policy has created a certain ethnic (Javanese) exclusivism over other (non-Javanese) ethnicities. Krisnamurthi (2002) ^[9] explains that the SARA politics introduced through repressive forces, either directly or indirectly, is political isolation against ethnic, religious, racial, and inter-group elements in the life of the state and nation. Furthermore, the concept of SARA itself contradicts the principles of democracy because it rejects an understanding of plurality and demands uniformity in a pluralistic society (Mukhan 2002) ^[10].

This article raises the claim that the ethnic conflict that occurred between the Dayak and Madurese tribes in West Kalimantan province, both during the New Order era and the reform era, was not rioting with an ethnic background. Therefore, the author uses the terminology of ethnic violence rather than ethnic riots, because, in principle, the two conflicting tribes were both disadvantaged due to the political and economic policies of the New Order. This claim is strengthened by providing evidence in various arguments that underlie the emergence of ethnic violence. Specifically, this paper examines how the politics of development of the New Order, including ethnicity politics, have created ethnic violence that cost hundreds of human lives and destroyed thousands of community assets. Attention is focused on the ethnic violence in 1997 and 1999, which was the newest and most prominent case of ethnic violence ever to occur in West Kalimantan Province.

Theoretical Framework

Within the context of this research, cultural studies were used to understand and explain media organization coverage toward extreme violence, specifically ethnic violence, which occurred in West Kalimantan Province, Indonesia. By using cultural analysis with a historical context, I argue that the idea of power in Javanese culture strongly affected the New Order authoritarian government and its politics surrounding ethnic violence in Indonesia. Through this research, cultural analysis was used to understand how political changes during the New Order era affected inter-ethnic violence in Indonesia. The case under study was the conflict between Dayak and Madurese in West Kalimantan in 1997 and 1999.

Research Method

The purpose of this study is to look into Indonesian news media coverage of ethnic violence during the New Order and transition periods. Archival research was carried out to provide the contextual background for the research, which included a historical understanding of the New Order era, the Indonesian press, and interethnic relations.

In Indonesia, an in-depth analysis of the political context that influenced national newspaper coverage of ethnic violence was carried out. Textual analysis was used to analyze data gathered from two national newspapers. In Jakarta, interviews were conducted with editors and journalists from national news organizations. The study of a variety of values, politics, and regulation strategies was conducted, and the findings were synthesized to provide an in-depth picture of the press's politics and practices during the New Order and transition eras.

Data Collection

The following fieldwork was carried out

1. Archival investigation

To learn more about the historical background of ethnic violence, archival research was conducted at the National Archival Centre in Jakarta. The study also gathered articles from the Kompas and Republika news media institutions about ethnic violence in West Kalimantan.

2. In-person interviews

In Jakarta, interviews were conducted with political experts and journalists from national press institutions (Kompas and Republika newspapers), which were the sources of the articles about ethnic violence. The interviews were carried out in order to gather information that would help to strengthen the analysis of the news coverage and provide a more in-depth understanding of the political and organizational contexts.

Result and Discussion

West Kalimantan: Critical Overview

Although the ethnic violence in West Kalimantan involved the Dayak and Madurese tribes, this incident could be seen as an ethnic conflict between immigrants and the indigenous population. While ethnic and cultural differences can lead to miscommunication, they do not automatically lead to ethnic dislike or lead to violence. 'Ethnic differences' can also create a new understanding between two ethnicities if they share recognized values and live on equal terms. According to Kleden (2001) [8], inter-ethnic relations will trigger violence if ethnic differences are followed by dominating one particular ethnic group over another, both economically and politically. If this domination is followed by political pressure from stronger groups or high inequality in the use of economic assets and resources, it will lead to resistance from oppressed groups and trigger violence.

In the context of imbalance, the natural resources of West Kalimantan province have been exploited for the financial interests of Suharto's cronies and certain elites in Jakarta. As a result, the indigenous people (Dayak tribe) were marginalized. After frustration at being ignored by the government, the indigenous population still has to face the fact that the Madurese, as government-sponsored migrants, are well served by the government through the transmigration program. They slowly began to take over the land, resources, and jobs that the indigenous people used to work on. So the Madurese are seen as a representation of 'external power' that seeks to take over what the indigenous people claim to be their land, resources, and environment. In this context, attempts to analyze and explain the political and historical background of ethnic violence in West Kalimantan are carried out.

Kalimantan is the home of the Dayak tribe. In West

Kalimantan province, the Dayak population reaches 41 percent of the total population of 9 million. The Dayak tribe consists of more than 200 sub-tribes with various cultures, customs, and languages. Many of them live in the interior and have not been touched by the modernization process. The Dayak tribe has a sound forest management system. Their systems are based on sustainability and respect for plant diversity, not just economic value. They cultivate rice but also depend on forest products, especially fruit and rubber.

The Madurese, on the other hand, have a solid social stratification. They recognized four classes: workers, merchants, civil servants, and aristocrats. Madura's arid geographical condition makes many of its residents work as salt laborers on the beach, while the illiteracy rate reaches 57.5 percent (Sudagung 2001) [11]. The harsh reality of life forces the Madurese to migrate to other islands for a better life. This is also why many Madurese choose to join the government's transmigration program. The high level of illiteracy and low levels of education resulted in a limited understanding of the Madurese tribe in their new area.

Ethnic violence involving Dayaks and migrants from the island of Madura took place in West Kalimantan at the end of December 1996 and lasted six weeks. Several reports state that it all started with disputes between Dayak and Madurese youth. Immediately after the two Dayaks were stabbed and the family's reports to the police did not get a positive response, the Dayaks organized a war ritual against the Madurese community, killing residents and committing sadism against the dead victim. About 20,000 people were evacuated and 500 people, primarily Madurese, died, and 3,054 houses were burned and destroyed (HRW Report 1997) [7]. Some Madurese chose to return to the island of Madura, moved to the place of their relatives in West Kalimantan, and the rest were placed in barracks and shelters in Pontianak City.

In March 1999, further ethnic violence broke out along the coast of Sambas Regency. The Dayak and Malays attacked the Madurese. The rioting started when a Madurese refused to pay the transportation fee to a Malay driver, which broke out into a fight. The riots resulted in the loss of many human lives and destroyed property. The official death toll recorded shows 186 people (154 of whom are Madurese), while 81 people were injured and 53 were seriously injured. Meanwhile, 2,161 houses were burned, 2,022 belonged to Madurese (IDP Project Document 2000).

Before the two ethnic violence occurred, there were several ethnic riots in West Kalimantan, especially since 1967. It should be understood that ethnic violence in West Kalimantan is not related to separatism or instability as has occurred in other provinces in Indonesia such as Nangroe Aceh Darussalam and Papua. In addition, the view that simplifies the conflict between Muslims and Christians or Catholics obscures the real source of violence. Why is conflict between Dayak and Madurese tribes easy to occur in West Kalimantan Province? Why did the conflict only occur between these two tribes? What factors cause this conflict to become a latent conflict?

Roots of Ethnic Violence

As explained briefly in the introduction, the author argues that this is all related to the actions of the New Order government, which politically and economically manipulated the issue of ethnicity as a strategy to maintain its power. Considering the ethnic violence that has occurred since 1967

and has occurred more than ten times, it is too simplistic to explain this violence due to ethnic differences. In this context, the authors propose four arguments to explain ethnic violence in West Kalimantan: *politics, the process of marginalization, the transmigration program, and forestry policies.*

Political Arguments

There are several important issues related to political argument. *First*, before forming the New Order regime, history shows that many Dayaks held essential positions in local government structures. Pontianak Municipality was once led by Agustinus Djaelani (1958-1963), Sanggau District by MTM Djaman (1958-1963), and Sintang District by GP Djaoeng (1958-1967). JC Oevang Oeray became Governor of West Kalimantan (1959-1967). However, since Suharto was elected president in 1967, not a single Dayak figure has held an important position in the government system (Berita Buana 6/2/1997). The central government's leadership was determined by the central government, Javanese, who had a loyal background to Suharto. Politically, this indicates the weakening representation of the political interests of the indigenous (Dayak) ethnic group.

Changes in local government structures were an essential part of the New Order regime's strategy. Confrontations with the Malaysian government in the early 1960s and the 'cleansing' operation that displaced ethnic Chinese into coastal cities in 1967 had awakened the elite in Jakarta to the importance of the province's strategic position. To protect border areas, the central government has deployed troops in all areas directly bordering Malaysia. Several barracks and military bases were built in four districts: Sambas, Sanggau, Sintang, and Kapuas Hulu. Since then, appointees from Jakarta have occupied almost all crucial positions in the government structure. It was common in the Suharto era when military officers were appointed to be governors or regents. Although the government claims that the military deployment in West Kalimantan is to secure the border, it was possible that another reason was to secure the interests of the New Order government in the province.

The second political argument is the development of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which are oriented towards the interests of the Dayak tribe. NGOs are believed to have contributed to increasing political awareness among the Dayak tribes. This, for example, was conveyed by Davidson (2003) ^[2],

Although these NGOs neither incited nor engineered the violence, these activists fostered a complicated yet tangible awareness of deprivation among disparate communities. Tapping into a consciousness of Dayak grievance, they encouraged, facilitated, and provided how frustration could be productively molded, articulated, and ultimately, could confront state authority.

These NGOs conduct research, seminars and publish journals and books that bring to the surface the political, economic, and social issues that have marginalized the Dayaks. These various activities raise awareness among Dayak people to articulate their interests to the government. When the government did not respond well and tended to use violence and implement unbalanced policies, the Dayak tribe rose to provide resistance as an oppressed group. The development of this understanding may have contributed to a much larger scope of ethnic violence in 1997 and 1999 than previous ethnic violence. Furthermore, when the reform euphoria reached West Kalimantan, the Dayak tribe could find the

perfect moment to express their oppression.

Other political issues relate to general elections and the New Order regime's efforts to mobilize people to vote for Golongan Karya, the political vehicle for Suharto's New Order regime. At the same time, the villagers must support the government by choosing Golongan Karya because the villagers are considered floating masses who cannot be involved in political parties. This condition is the seed of dislike for the government.

Meanwhile, Madurese, who are followers of Nahdathul Ulama (NU) has chosen the Islamic party, which since the 1970s has been represented by the United Development Party. Thus, there is a possibility that conflict between Dayak and Madurese tribes remain at a high temperature as a diversion from the consolidation of power within the Islamic Party, which is a competitor to the Golongan Karya.

Process of Marginalization

During the reign of the New Order regime, West Kalimantan province became a source of finance for all interest groups in Jakarta, both civilian and military. Exploitation by the state has marginalized local people socially, economically, and culturally. As part of this effort, the local government relocated the indigenous people who lived in the interior and lived nomadic into one permanent place. Through the 'rural area restructuring' program, villages with less than one hundred people were consolidated into 1297 new villages (Sudagung 2001) ^[11]. The motive is to make it easier for the government to carry out development programs and the modernization process. Another motive is to unite Dayak tribe members into several villages, hoping that mass mobilization for general elections will be easier.

This program significantly changes traditional leadership patterns and structures where the power of ethnic group leaders is deprived and given to village heads who are administratively an extension of the government. The leaders of this ethnic group only play a symbolic role in their community. This policy undermined the tribal structure of the indigenous population and the power of customary laws.

In 1960, the government issued Agrarian Law no. 5, which aimed to change the dominance of the state over land ownership (IDRD 1998) ^[7]. Its main objective is land reform by limiting land ownership. This law is supposed to protect indigenous peoples' customary land rights. The New Order government declared that all land without a certificate belongs to the state. This policy effectively removed Dayak tribal land.

Through the Agraria Law and the hinterland restructuring program, the New Order government politically took over the land and forests on which the lives of the indigenous population depended. This policy can be seen in constructing the Trans-Kalimantan road, where people's land is taken over without compensation. Thus, the indigenous population was marginalized by the development process of the New Order, which in its application had neglected the rights of the indigenous population. Even though, in reality, the construction of this road is fraught with problems because the construction costs are prohibitive. This fact has made the crystallization of hatred against the government even more robust.

Transmigration Program

Since the early 1970s, the province of West Kalimantan by the central government has been the primary destination for

the transmigration program along with several other provinces in Sumatra and Papua. The New Order government created this program due to the rapid population growth and uneven distribution of the Javanese-outer Java population. This imbalance in population distribution is more or less related to the tendency of the Suharto government to adopt the Javanese royal government pattern in which the economic, social, and governmental systems tended to be centralized. So that development is more dominant and rapid on the island of Java than on the islands outside Java. This is a unique attraction for people outside Java to try their luck on the island of Java. When the population density level finally got higher, what happened was the transmigration of the native Javanese out of Java. This has led to an understanding of 'imperialism' in Javanese society towards people outside Java. With a policy pattern that tends to be *top-down* and has an aggressive style, there is no alternative for residents outside Java to accept this condition.

To support community members who had just arrived in the transmigration area, the local government provided houses, land for farming, and livestock. The government has also built supporting facilities such as schools, health centers, and cooperatives, but little compensation is given to the indigenous population. This condition raises the emotions of disappointment and anger of the indigenous population. Although they were involved in this transmigration project, things did not go well because they were not equipped with the knowledge and training that could help them change from traditional shifting cultivation practices to cultivating crops and farming on the same land. This means that the involvement is solely to dampen the emotions of the indigenous people and is not a scenario to make indigenous people a part of this big transmigration project.

In addition, there is a crucial matter that the government does not consider, namely, transmigrants are not provided with information about the area where they will live, and they are not equipped with sufficient information about the area, local communities, culture, and social norms. Furthermore, many of them come from low-income families and have low education. The government believed that they could find cheap labor for planned infrastructure projects while the indigenous population was not involved. The characteristics of transmigrants, such as the Madurese, which tend to be exclusive, do not concern the government. Consequently, conflicts often occur between migrants and local residents because of the lack of effort to understand the indigenous population with all its characteristics, which the ruling regime has not attempted. Another factor that also affects is the existence of a type of '*bedol desa*' transmigration, which transfers all residents of one village on the island of Java to transmigration locations on another island. Psychologically, this has a destructive impact on the development of the social life of the community. The villagers who were displaced, because they already knew each other, eventually created exclusivism among them. They are reluctant to mingle with marginalized indigenous communities because their land was taken 'forcibly' by the government. This resulted in social jealousy, and ultimately, indigenous people saw immigrants as representatives of central government power.

Forestry Policy

The New Order regime, through a policy that supposedly protects customary land, has used its power to take over these customary lands for the financial gain of the elite in Jakarta

by granting permits to exploit natural resources. Many of these elites were members of the Suharto family, business associates, or companies with links to the military. To legalize its actions, the government issued Forestry Law no. 5/1967, which recognizes state and private land. The explanation section emphasizes that state land is included as customary land owned by ethnic groups (IDRD 1998) ^[7]. With the issuance of this law, indigenous people automatically do not have rights to customary land.

Furthermore, the problem arises because it is challenging for the indigenous population to find land certificates. After all, the land has been passed down from generation to generation. The law does not recognize customary land belonging to ethnic groups.

Most of the land was converted into rubber, palm oil, and timber plantations or allocated to foreign mining companies. About 2.3 million hectares of land were allocated by the New Order government for commercial plantations, making West Kalimantan the second largest plantation area after Riau (the Jakarta Post, 2/3/1997). The irony behind all this is that after their customary land was taken and their natural resources were exploited for the welfare of certain groups in Jakarta, the plantation owners preferred to use Madurese as laborers in their industry because they needed money after having just arrived from the island of Madura and were willing paid cheap.

The impact of the project based on forest management has resulted in environmental damage and cuts off the economic resources of the indigenous population. This development project in Kalimantan has taken over the agricultural land of the Dayak tribe and cut down rubber, coffee, and fruit trees which are the economic crops of the Dayak tribe. This is especially true for the New Order government accusations that the Dayak people's shifting cultivation system had caused fires that scorched forest areas. The facts show that the Dayak people's land shifting pattern is also accompanied by forest preservation. This should be remembered because indigenous people have done it from generation to generation. David Boyce, an agricultural consultant from Australia, believes that the indigenous people are the primary victims of this government forestry project.

Meanwhile, non-governmental organizations blame plantation and timber companies as the primary source of forest destruction. They believe that the fires originate from clearing land by burning for the benefit of palm oil plantations (ICE Case Studies 97). The government's criticism has increased solidarity among the Dayak community as a marginalized group. Forestry policy arguments show that Suharto's New Order government exploited natural resources in West Kalimantan without considering the existence of indigenous people whose lives were highly dependent on forests.

Based on the four issues above as arguments, it can be concluded that the New Order regime politically and culturally used the concept of SARA as part of its strategy to maintain power in West Kalimantan Province. This concept is disseminated through various political policies in the name of national development. The government's policy of sending transmigrants from Madura island to West Kalimantan province and the slow anticipation of the outbreak of unrest raises the question of whether the New Order government wanted to stop the ethnic violence occurring. By allowing violence to occur, the government wanted the indigenous population to turn their attention to the issue of unrest rather

than the government's exploitation of natural resources. Meanwhile, the conflict between the Dayak and Madurese tribes can be observed as an attempt by the indigenous people to fight oppression by the central government. So that the conflict that occurred is more accurately said to be ethnic violence than ethnic rioting because the conflict occurred not because of ethnicity but more because of the political economy policy factor of the New Order, which involved the issue of SARA in it.

Conclusion

Thus, the ethnic violence or violence with racial nuances in West Kalimantan and Indonesia in general during the New Order government and after did not always relate to ethnicity. On the contrary, it correlates with the relationship between economic and political power. The excessive dominance of the state over a particular ethnic group without considering and acknowledging the existence of that ethnic group economically, politically, and culturally provides a trigger for the emergence of tensions. The migrant group, which the government very well supports, is finally considered a threat and representation of the dominant power, namely the state. The violence between ethnic groups that eventually occurred should not be seen in the context of inter-ethnic conflict but as resistance to political and economic domination that had suppressed the indigenous population.

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