

# POLITICAL DISCOURSES OF CONFLICT IN NORTH MALUKU

1999-2000

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***Abstract:** In his research, Christopher R. Duncan stated that one of the longest running conflicts in the post-Suharto era occurred in the eastern part of Indonesia, in North Maluku Province. This paper will explain the impact of the conflict during 1999-2000 in recent days. What are the real factors that caused the conflict? North Maluku has a lot of issues regarding the separation with Maluku province and is a new province. In the recent days, North Maluku is so famous for their internal issue like demonstration, ethnic conflict because of their ego and brawl everywhere by the students. The stereotype that native people who live in the Eastern part are harsh, rude and always fight with each other make people who live in the Eastern part are famous for the conflict.*

***Keywords:** North Maluku, ethnic conflict, separation, demonstration*

**Abstrak:** Penelitian yang dilakukan Christopher R. Duncan menyatakan bahwa salah satu konflik berkepanjangan pasca Era Suharto terjadi di Indonesia bagian timur, yakni Provinsi Maluku Utara. Paper ini akan membahas dampak yang muncul saat ini akibat konflik yang terjadi pada 1999-2000. Apa faktor yang menyebabkan terjadinya konflik tersebut. Maluku Utara mempunyai banyak masalah terkait pemisahan degan Provinsi Maluku dan pembentukan provinsi baru. Saat ini, Maluku Utara terkenal dengan masalah internal mereka seperti demonstrasi, konflik etnis karena ego dan perse-lisihan antar remaja. Stereotipe tentang penduduk asli di wilayah timur yang cenderung kasar, tidak sopan dan selalu bertengkar satu sama lain membuat orang yang tinggal di wilayah Timur terkenal dengan konfliknya.

**Kata-kata kunci:** Maluku Utara, konflik etnis, pemisahan, demonstrasi.

The Maluku Islands were formerly administered as a single province. However, in 1999 it was split into two provinces, with North Maluku being created out of the northern section of the province of Maluku. It covers the northern part of the Maluku islands. The provincial capital is Sofifi Peoples work as the civil servant as they live in the city. Meanwhile, peoples in countryside work as fisherman and farmer. Ternate is the center of the

city in North Maluku because the center of the economy is there even right now they want to build the same in Sofifi but it still needs a lot of time to develop. Moreover, North Maluku is still under developing province and still a small province in Indonesia based on the geographical and the location also.

The social identity concept really indicates how people in North Maluku situation

is, who a person is, how she or he is socially defined. It is about categorical characteristics (such as gender, age, and ethnic background) that position or locates people in social space. Our identity as a member of an ethnic group, a particular culture, or one or the other ex is a designation placing you by what you, in a particular respect simply are taken to be (Verkuyten, 2004:43). North Maluku is very diverse and they got much influenced by other countries such as Portuguese as this country occupied North Maluku for a long time and also influenced by the Arab culture.

## **CONFLICT IN NORTH MALUKU**

### **1999-2000**

Talking about North Maluku, it cannot be separated with the history itself. North Maluku was well known as the history of ethnic conflict which gives the impact of the history of Indonesia. Between 1999 and 2000 the province of North Maluku was hit by the violence that displaced around 200.000 people a third of the province population and killed thousands of people. The conflict in North Maluku started in August 1999 when a violent dispute between Kao ethnic (mixed Muslim and Christian) and Makian ethnic (Muslim) migrants on Halmahera sparked off a wave of intercommunal violence between Christian and Muslim across the region (Hermkems and Timmer, 2011).

North Maluku consist of many ethnic and many islands, mostly the population are Muslim and some other city the people are Christian. We cannot say that the conflict is caused by of religion diversity because there are a lot of factors that influenced the conflict

in North Maluku. However the diversity can also bring negative impact since people want to find their real identity.

In that time, how the conflict goings-on is still a nightmare for all the people who live in the conflict areas. The economy crisis was not only the problem happen at that time. People who lived in North Maluku especially Ternate as the capital city of North Maluku were afraid to go out of their houses because it was not safe. It was a nightmare for the people and they only pray that this conflict will stop in the end.

At a glimpse, the conflict seems to be a religious and ethnic conflict. The Kao (majority Christian) and the native Makian (majority Muslim) were fight against each other. But on my opinion based on futher analysis on the conlict, it seems that the political factor is actually the main reason. Both of the groups were trying to take over the power in North Maluku especially Ternate (which is the capital city in that time) and Tidore because they are ruled by the King.

The Kao version of events claims that on the Sunday morning of October 24, 1999 the Makian invaded Kao. According to this version, a small group of approximately one hundred Makian went to a checkpoint established between the two sides and asked for permission to harvest their copra (coconut) on the other side of the border. The authorities let them through. Later, they joined other Makian who had traveled through the interior for a planned invasion of Kao. They were quickly confronted by a small number of Muslims from Kao who had been assigned to watch the border between the two groups.

The Muslim Kao held them off until reinforcements arrived after church services had ended. The Kao then launched a counterattack that destroyed numerous homes in Malifut. On October 25, 1999 the Kao continued their attacks until the entire population of Malifut fled to Ternate or took refuge at local military installations. Once the Makian were gone, the Kao set fire to all sixteen villages, leaving only the mosques untouched. The Kao were vehement in asserting that they did not destroy a single mosque, despite the Makian destruction of churches in Sosol and Wangeotak in August 1999. The Makian version of the October event claims that once the people of Kao had assembled an arsenal and mobilized enough forces (upwards of seven thousand people from the neighboring sub-districts of Tobelo, Ibu, etc.) from outside of the sub-district, they attacked without provocation. The attack caught the people of Malifut by surprise, and they were overwhelmed and forced to flee to Ternate (Duncan, 2005).

The issue of politics and natural resources becomes a highlight of the politics after the announcement of the national government in Jakarta to expand the area and influence the interest of the local Makian if the territory expands and will stop the claims of the Kao about the territory. In this conflict, the third Sultan who ruled in North Maluku, such as the Sultans of Ternate, Tidore, and Bacan have taken an active role in relieving the tensions between the two warring communities. Sultan of Ternate even took the controversial step to reshape the indigenous forces. This force is called yellow force because they wore yellow uniforms. This special force

known as the Sultan of Ternate yellow force. At first, yellow soldiers helping police and army to defuse conflicts in the region. But over time, they are slowly begun to take over the function of the security forces to the point where they are the only security force in the city.

The situation becomes worse that many people take advantage of the conflict and get more power to do everything they want and the common people always became the victim. If some people get more power, there always the negative impacts because they used their power in the wrong way. People were afraid to go out in that time because of they afraid that people will attack each other all of the sudden.

Conflict in North Maluku occurred again on the 26th of December 1999 to March 2000. In that period, conflict in North Maluku was the impact of what has happened in Central Maluku. The violent attacks carried out simultaneously by a group of Christian against Muslim villages in Gahoku, Toguliwa, Gurua, Kampung Baru, Gamsungi, Lauri, and Popilo in Sub Tobelo and Galela Mamuya village in the district. Based on existing data, in these riot victims who died carrying approximately 800 people, of which 200 of them died burnt alive in the mosque in the village Baiturrachman Popilo. The conflict also occurred on 19 June 2000 in the village of Duma Galela District. In dispute is not balanced at least 215 people died and around 500 people went missing along with the sinking of the ship that brought the community of Nusa Bahari village of Duma to evacuate (Yuniarti, dkk, 2004:2).

The issue of social inequality, the seizure of natural resources as well as political and bureaucratic elite conflict are some factors which factors which wrapped in the "religious conflict" that had been believed by most people both in the context of national and local context. In the local context, there were at least two crucial factors underlying the conflict in this region. Firstly, the rivalry of elites to take control the management of natural resources and positions of the bureaucracy and politics. Secondly, the strengthening of ethnocentrism as a tool to compete for economic resources and political. The issue about who belongs to this island and who are the immigrants was the main factor but they cover it as "religious conflict". People in that time still thought differently that they afraid their culture and real identity was disappeared because of the new comer.

With the law No. 22/1999 which reduces the domination of the national government in local government, it made the local government groups tend to focus on gain hegemony in the government. Competition between groups of bureaucrats and non-Ternate (Tidore, Makian) became more pointed to their expansion area. Some bureaucrats Tidore cooperation with Makian aimed to offset the dominance of Ternate in the government group.

For the issue of the immigrant, Christian majority think that this is one of the government's plan to increase the population of Muslim that's why they plan to migrant the low-income family in Java to migrant to North Maluku for the balance of the territory population and mostly because most Java-

nese people are Muslim that's why the religion issue also comes to the mind regarding this conflict. Christian majority think that for making all the people in Java island migration to North Maluku the island will be overpopulated and just increase the unemployment rate. Religious maybe also the reason but it was not the main reason for the conflict. If we understood that income and political things also the main crucial factor.

The religion factor is the main trigger, it is also not completely right but also not completely wrong, massacre of Muslims by the Christians in Togoliua and other areas make the most of society difficult not to say that this is a religious conflict Religion issue is very sensitive at that time and even until now Indonesia is still having a lot of conflict regarding religion. As a country that believes 6 religions exist and hold a freedom to hold a religion, it is very difficult to avoid a misunderstanding regarding their faith. To say that one religion is better than another is also difficult to overcome this dilemma.

In some perspectives, they will have said that political influence is a main trigger for the conflict. Ethnic, race and class influence people at that time. Internal conflict and politics become the greatest fear of the conflict. North Maluku is consisting of four kingdoms such as Ternate, Tidore, Jailolo, and Bacan but the kingdom who are famous and active are Ternate and Tidore, that is why they said that to gain a lot of power there were competitions regarding this issue. The existence and the fourth sultanate's competition (Ternate, Tidore, Jailolo, and Bacan) simultaneously with the arrival of the four countries or western nations who intend to stick his

power in the Moluccas and surrounding earth. Fourth nations are Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, and English. Historically, since the fifteenth century, and the feud between the fourth sultanate relationship and the four nations of the west was an interesting story. Exchange partners and change the enemy were not a rare case. This moment has aroused confusion the four nations of the west associated with them. Then end up being a very powerful tool to undermine the fourth empire authority earlier.

The ethnic issue as another big problem occurs at that time and only add the conflicts. Kao ethnic and Makian ethnic have a long story conflict, there were strong allegations that this conflict also caused by social jealousy. The social reality shows that Makian society is a tribe and the famous challenging work has been able to lead them to power sources of power and economy and, they lead the political circumstance in the area. In the farming sector, also Makian ethnic make a fast progress while in the Kao region is growing rapidly, plus the recruitment of the dominated workforce dominated by this ethnic cannot be proven then ultimately lead to social jealousy (Hasyim, 2010). In the end, the impact to boundary issue of the territory, the conflict carried out the expulsion of this community to the area then happened.

Race, class and ethnic are matter because they continue to structure society in ways that value some lives more than others. Currently, some groups have more opportunities and resources while other groups struggle. This is also a reason why conflict starts so easily. The power of bureaucratic hierar-

chy (whether at the local level of an organization or at the level of the nation-state) is maintained through the mobilization of the remaining regulative authority which is deployed to manipulated opportunity structures by shifting resources and centrally determined pricing. This induces uncertainty and instability into the environment of those released from the kinds of direct bureaucratic domination. The new autonomy is real but its beneficiaries find themselves in shifting opportunity structures within which they must operate and over which they do not have direct control (du Gay, 2007)

The main source of conflict in North Maluku (1999-2004) was two sides in the competition to take power in North Maluku between the camp of Sultan Ternate and South stronghold. The southern group comprised of ethnic migrants and islands included in the South of the Ternate Island. Actors of South group such as Syamsir Andili, Thaib Aramyn and North Maluku such as Bahar Andili. While the camps 'Sultan' consists of the Sultan of Ternate Mudaffar Shah, tribal council's settlers, residents of the northern part of Ternate, the Christian community in North Halmahera (Diharjo, 2008).

The violence in North Maluku cannot be separated with religion perspective also. Most villages are organized per religion, with Muslims and Christians living in separate neighborhoods. Furthermore, although marriages across ethnic lines are acceptable in North Maluku, marriage across religious boundaries is more problematic.

## CONCLUSION

Conflict in Ternate bring a lot of adverse impact to the society, many people couldn't get over with this conflict, many people died, broken infrastructure and ethnic people still had a problem with their social identity. Political reason was mostly the main reason behind this conflict. How local elite create a group to make the conflict become worse than before. They created the white group (Ternate Kingdom) and yellow group (Tidore Kingdom) to take offer the position of the governor of North Maluku.

Political influence caused a lot of issues in North Maluku after the separation and the creating of a new province in Indonesia, to make a new capital city and the new power kingdom make the balance of the control by the Ternate Kingdom in North Maluku. When you are living in the country as the biggest ethnic group in the world it's no surprise that the issue of class, race, and politic become the main factor of the violence in the region.

The stereotypes towards people in the East of Indonesia are they full of violence and always involved in the conflict. If we see the news it is always about the brawl by the students, mass demonstration and many people died. They are so easy to fight if they are not satisfied with the policy by the government and the students will use violence to show that they do not agree with the policy by the government. From the past until know violence will not be separated with the daily life of the people itself. We cannot have said that it is because the past conflict that makes people here is always fighting with each other but

we also cannot ignore that the history influences the culture of one ethnic and their behavior overall.

Even right now Ternate as the most active kingdom in North Maluku after the death of Sultan Mudaffar Sjah, he is a king of Ternate and a member of the local representative council of Ternate. After he died on 19 Feb 2015 many internal conflicts occurred because of the issue who would be lead Ternate after he died, even they said that the selection process is must be transparency so the people in Ternate know about this issue.

However, although the causes of the conflict are primarily local, it is also helpful to see the conflict in Malifut as connected to both the residual political and administrative structure of the New Order and changes in that structure. The devolution of local revenues to the district level through Law 25/1999 greatly increased the financial benefits of controlling the governments and bureaucracies at the district level. This development sharpened political competition for control of the district level of government in many areas of Indonesia. As an individuals and groups did in other areas of Indonesia, many Makian attempted to exploit more fully this opportunity. Many in the Makian elite attempted to establish Malifut as a subdistrict quickly before the division of new districts occurred in the new province of North Maluku (Wilson, 2005).

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