

Conference Paper

Local Decentralization in North Sumatera: Civil Society at Crossroad and Social Transformation is Questioned

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Abstract

Indonesia society with its multilayered heterogeneities based on multiplicity of racial and ethnic group, different religion, conflicting classes and political ideologist that intersect at various level in the context of an 'unfinished' nationhood and statehood, does not make a clear-cut empirical case study of a 'positive' civil society (Seda 2004:30). Power and fiscal decentralization in North Sumatera on one side does not followed by powerful controlling by agencies structures such as civil society and community organization (ormas) as well as academia on the other side. For some extent, religious organization (ormas keagamaan) even contributes to religious tension since each of these organizations try to persuade and influence the local elites to get more financial gain from Bansos (local budget or APBD). In this regard, the local elites implement diametrical majority-minority power relation among religious community organization. A few of independent university organizations such as HMI, GMNI, and PMII which try to raise the voice of the voiceless almost hopeless since they were battled by paramilitary organization backed up by local business and local elites.

Keywords: Decentralization, Religious Community Organization, Civil Society, Primordialism, Majority-Minority.

Our hardware is democracy, but our software is still patrimonialism. This phrase was said by an anthropologist from developing country in international meeting of anthropologist association in America. In the same vein, Edward Banfield, states that the seed of democracy in the west does not always compatible with the basis of value system part in the east. That's why, some scholars depict some constraints in implementing democracy in Asia and Africa. In this paper, i merely focus the role civil society as a fifth pillar of democracy in decentralization era in North Sumatera. Civil society also known as third sector (for detailed discussion on LSM or NGO in

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Indonesia, see Kostarius Sinaga: *NGO's in Indonesia: 1994*). It aims to provide a better public services and nonprofit organization.

According to Natalia Coga, civil society and state relation can be classified in two perspectives as follows (1) a political-consensus view and (2) political-conflictual view. A political-consensual view is represented in the idea that civil society can play a relevant role in providing social cohesion and rational consensus building within the private realm. In this context of consensus building, civil society is encouraged to establish partnerships with the state and market in order to play roles in residual fields, particularly in terms of providing public services in non-exclusive state areas.

The political-conflictual view, on the other hand, conceives civil society as a realm of challenge and contestation, composed by multiple and heterogenic positions. Civil society, by this approach, should constitute the space where prevailing values can be questioned and opposed and is therefore conceived as essentially political. The advocacy role, the capacity to gain a hearing for divergent voices and the sharing of decision-making power are commonly emphasized in the relationship of this version of civil society with the state (Kago, 2012:51).

But before elaborate further regarding civil society and state relation, civil society as a West's concept should consider carefully when used as a concept as well as an episteme of politic. Fransisca Seda reminds that it is important to bear in mind the plurality of what constitutes 'Indonesian civil society' and 'Indonesian Muslim.' Indonesia society with its multilayered heterogeneity based on multiplicity of racial and ethnic group, different religion, conflicting classes and political ideologist that intersect at various level in the context of an 'unfinished' nationhood and statehood, does not make a clear-cut empirical case study of a 'positive' civil society.

Conflicting political ideologist can be seen when Nurcholish Madjid, a well-known moderate Islam try to instill local content as "Masyarakat madani" (literally, *masyarakat* means society, while *madani* is civil). Madjid often refers to the "Madinah charter" as the first pluralist constitution that regulated the peaceful co-existence between Muslims and non-Muslims. However, many other scholars conceive of the term as a reference to the society of Madinah, when the Prophet Muhammad was essentially the head of the state.

In other words, the term "masyarakat madani" can be understood differently by different people. In the hands of one scholar it can be equivalent to a synonym for a contemporary understanding of "civil society," while in the hands of another scholar it can be used to refer to a kind of Islamic state. The point of contention here is not merely terminological; there is also a political agenda behind the words. For the traditionalists,

by referring to the Madinah charter and society, the modernists hide their agenda of Islamization, while for the modernists, leaving the term untranslated, the traditionalists have become victims of the Western hegemony of meaning.

Therefore, it is not exaggerating Ekiert and Foa have criticized its 'one-dimensional view of civil society' and have suggested that 'existing studies have focused excessively on voluntary membership and survey data in assessing the strength of civil society at the expense of other equally if not more important factors' (Ekiert & Foa 2011:4). Contemporary civil societies are the result of 'diverse processes of transformation' that have been shaped by a range of factors including 'the quality of democracy in different countries, the resources and strength of independent civic initiatives, the role of the state in financing and supporting emerging civil society sectors, the quality of institutional infrastructure, and the involvement of external actors' (Ekiert & Foa 2011: 18).

For some extent, it is confused to use civil society as tool of analysis in conducting civil society-state relation research particularly in decentralization era. Decentralization as a "state model" (a side form such as federalism and grand national coalitions) is hoped to be a nation-territory for dominant ethnic both at provincials as well as regencies lives. The big bang decentralization is hoped to be an answer for the local grievances over New Order centralistic regime. Instead of centralization, domination of Javanese culture on governance (Java-centric) throughout of Indonesia archipelago also molten through decentralization paradigm.

Unfortunately, the more autonom of local governance power, it does not follow by more independent control at decentralization era. Independent control agencies such as civil society, local media, and academia almost are absent. In another word, when trias politic at local governance does not function well in term of check and balance, the control from civil society also is weak if not absent. We can assume, more remote local government from central government, more less supervision take place. Lack of supervision at remote regency level is prone to create rampant corruption and political dynasty.

1. Research Method

Paradigm in the social sciences attempt to help us understand social phenomena. Paradigm present assumptions about the reality of the world, how should science be done, and the problem of research that should be investigated, solutions, and criteria for 'proof.' Paradigm includes theory, method, and followers (Firestone, Gioia, Pitre,

Kuhn, 1987: 56). Key informants in this study were local journalists, key figures of non-governmental organizations or NGOs, high ranking echelon of local government and former regents in three selected sites research who interviewee with an open interview guide. As in the qualitative paradigm, the researcher is an instrument of collecting data by using in-depth interviews and observation.

2. Research Finding

State and civil society relation during decentralization era in North Sumatra is more consensus rather than conflictual. Ironically, this consensus tends to build 'unholy conspiracy' among executive, legislative, judicative, civil society and media. It can be assumed, the more remote a local government, the less credible civil society and independent to supervise local governments. Ultimately, local civil society never control the local government but involved in conspiracy with local elites, police, and judiciary institution. Former regent told, if there is sharp criticism in local media, you should not believe it immediately. This could have been a conspiracy between NGOs, the media, the police and the prosecutor in raising and mobilizing the media on certain issues. Media released that the police or prosecutors will summon local officials for alleged corruption based on reports from NGOs. But actually all of these institutions conspire together in the hope of extorting local officials. The information might be ordered by the police or the prosecutor from certain NGO and send it to those that the local officials will fear and offer money and hope that the news not to be published anymore. More ironically, these NGOs often sheathed by youth organization (*ormas kepemudaan*) which in many extend act like thugs. So, if there are other groups who criticize, it is not uncommon to these organizations to spread intimidation and even violence. A student activist in Medan said that his organization (KAMMI) must face the youth organizations (*ormas kepemudaan*) which act like thugs when they voiced their idealism. Thuggery even occur in internal campus, when students or activist eager to conduct rally of demonstration to fight for justice for the people. The respondents said the rector prefers and to fund student organizations affiliated with youth organizations rather than the student organization from Cipayung group. Why? Because the organization can be mobilized at any time if there's a protest from among the other students. In short it can be concluded, the unholy alliance of NGOs and local government is supported by an organization that is synonymous with thugs. Another informant said, sometimes the local government requested the security help from these youth organizations when demonstrations taken place, causing horizontal conflicts in society. Even,

local governments have to pay billions of rupiah to these organizations when taking over government offices used by these organizations. It is ironic that the government must pay to the paramilitary organization for its own assets. This reality makes corruption in North Sumatra is really acute. Because of the decentralization of power is not followed by strong supervision. Expected supervision from the media and NGOs as the fourth and fifth pillars of democracy is absent, even build a conspiracy with the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. Acute graft is exacerbated by two factors, namely the high cost of the elections and the widespread culture of nepotism and patrimonial culture in local governance. Direct local election, for much degree, destroys social capital in communities such as found in Samosir Regency (Kabupaten Samosir) even lead to violence and conflict at community level. One informant said as quoting a proverb that the massive of money politics make the price of the heads of animals (pigs) are more expensive than the price of a human head (voter). *Ungharganan ulu ni pinasa sian uluni manusia*. The price of head an animal (pig) is Rp 500,000, while the price of a voter head is only Rp 300,000. This statement revealed by an elected regent when visiting villages where he did not receive any significant votes even though he has given large sums of money during the campaign. Horizontal conflict can also occur when the social organization based on religious ties receive social grants from the local government. The tension was triggered because there is no clarity for giving the amount of social fund to the organization. In general, Islam-based organizations will receive more aid, while other religious organizations are relatively small depending on their lobbying abilities through their legislative members in local parliament. Likewise, if Christians are a majority in the region, the Christian-based organization will receive a large amount, while other religious organizations will receive a small amount. In contrast to the majority who are supposed to do resistance or negotiation against discriminatory practices because of the number of people and their resources are sufficient, the minority hard to do the same. Under the shadow of the hegemony of liberalism where political decisions are based just on majority voting, the minority will be ultimately defeated (Preece in Amin Mudzakir, 201: 2). Liberal democracy is difficult to work in a liberal country sharply fragmented media by the identity and interests such as Indonesia. By using this argument, we can be sure that 'minoritization' is a liberal political consequence. As famous jargon of liberal democracy, one (wo)man one vote, decisions or policies in liberal politics is basically calculated based on the highest votes (Schmit in Amin Mudzakir: 20). It can be said, liberal democracy will produce regimes that tend to be anti-minorities. This does not mean a religious conflict, but rather the conflict over scarce resources by mobilizing sentiment basic identity (ethnicity,

religion, and culture). Because, in Samosir Regency, where Christian is as majority (99%) conflicts also occur by mobilizing sentiment clan (*marga*) identity. Thus, if in Kota Medan and Kota Stabat roots of conflicts based on religious ties, then in Samosir regency the tension is clan-based affiliation.

Therefore, it's too hard to say the role of NGOs in bringing the social transformation in society in the era of decentralization now. Quite different from the central government in Jakarta where it has some independent and credible NGOs, in the more isolated areas it is very difficult to find such NGOs. Therefore, it's too hard to say the role of NGOs in bringing the social transformation in society in the era of decentralization now. Thus, NGOs as well as part of the analysis tool of social transformation questionable. It is difficult to distinguish between NGOs, paramilitary, and civilian organizations in the midst of the unholy alliance of legislative, executive and judicial. Even the student organizations known as group Cipayung or "Kelompok Cipayung" (HMI, GMNI, PMII, GMKI, PMKRI) are almost desperate with their idealism due to be blasted with the paramilitary organization. In the same vein, as described by Mary Kaldor in his famous book "New Wars" where she contrasted these to 'old' wars: old wars were political and fought over noble causes of grievances, with a broad popular support and controlled violence. The new wars, largely civil wars, were more based on private looting without popular support, where greedy bandits, often in conjunction with multinational firms, competed for who can best tax and exploit a desperate population.

3. Conclusion

The role of NGOs as a leverage of social transformation in the era of decentralization is now questionable. This is because most of these NGOs are either co-opted by the legislative, executive, judiciary and even the police and prosecution. Although the media and civil society co-opted by the head of the region, but they also have the power to investigate the corrupt practices in the local politics, although to a certain extent, in the end they will also be involved in such corruption. Therefore, the power is not only in the hands of officials and businessmen as described by Marxist and Weberian approach. The power relations are diversified and spread like a network. The issue of power is not a question of ownership, in the context of who the master who or who is powerful while others are powerless. Power spread, is everywhere (omnipresent), immanent contained in any social relations (Foucault, 1982). Corrupt behavior is a direct consequences of the direct election of regent and mayor (Pilkada) that require a lot of money and a culture of patrimonialism. Conspiracy between state

and the NGO community in North Sumatra is almost perfect. However, local democracy should not be hijacked. Reform legislation and the goodwill of the political parties in offering regional head candidate with integrity and has a good track record can bring good local governance. In other words, the strong and inspiring leader is far more important than efforts to increase the capacity of NGOs that do not necessarily have the ideology and values as usual practiced in developed countries.

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