

Paper for 4th International Symposium of the Journal Antropologi
“Indonesia in the Changing Global Context: Building cooperation and
partnership?”

**Obstructing and Stimulating Factors in
Religious Group's Harmony
(from Domination, Alienation, towards Accommodation,
Assimilation and Amalgamation)**

By

Bungaran Antonius Simanjuntak &
Netty Hutabarat
State University of Medan (UNIMED)

University of Indonesia, Depok
July, 12 – 15, 2005

**OBSTRUCTING AND STIMULATING FACTORS IN RELIGIOUS GROUP'S
HARMONY: DOMINATION, ALIENATION, ACCOMODATION, ASSIMILATION
AND AMALGAMATION (A Sociological Perspective)**

By: Bungaran Antonius Simanjuntak and Netty F. Hutabarat**

There has never been any official statement by the government since the the attack over the Headquarters of PDI (Indonesian Democratic Party) on 26 July 1996 in Jakarta broke out and followed by the social curfew and burning of churches in Surabaya, Ujung Pandang, Situbondo (10 October 1996), Tasik Malaya (26 December 1996), Rengasdengklok (30 January 1997), and later by mass demonstrations on Jalan Ketapang, the kidnapping and murder of Moslem teachers known as the incident of Banyuwangi (1 January 1998), While there was no full investigation on the tragic events by security forces, at the same time an interreligious conflict occurred in Ambon (19 January 1999) and followed by an interethnic conflict in Sambas, West Borneo (14 March 1999). Before long, Indonesia witnessed a bomb explosion at the church of Indonesian Christian Protestant Medan on Sunday morning 28 May 2000 when the congregation was shaving the service injuring 23 people. Also, there was an attempt to destroy the churches of HKBP (Batak Protestant Church) Sudirman and Catholic Christ the King on Jalan Nusantara Medan on the same day.¹

Earlier there had been severe conflicts between local people and the security forces (Army and Police Force) in the Provinces of Aceh and East Timor taking many lives. East Timor eventually was independent after a referendum was in favor of the

** Bungaran Antonius Simanjuntak is currently a Professor of Sociology and Cultural Anthropology. Netty Hutabarat is a Lecturer at English Department of Faculty of Languages and Arts, State University of Medan.
1. It has been almost four and a half years (Lebaran Day 1999 until now May 2005)



pro-independence group. *Interfet* forces intervened as "it was stated in the news" that many people were killed by the " pro-integration militia". Meanwhile, Aceh was in turmoil¹ although the legitimate government led by President K.H. Abdulrahman Wahid was democratically established. Recently, on 1 May 2000, under the pretext of saving two policemen kidnapped by the students, the police attacked² the University of HKBP Nommensen Medan causing the death of two students and many more injured.

This is a series of bloody events which were provoked by some issues such as religion, ethnicity, ideology and economic conditions.

A. OBSTRUCTION

Domination

Domination is a kind of strategy applied by a certain group of people to gain benefit from sources of interest.³ Domination produces a condition that creates jealousy among the pluralistic society where the social power balance is different. Domination as a strategy will lead to the domination as a condition that carries conflicts if the balance of interests is not under control.

The influence of ideology, religious teaching, cultural notions, economic interests, ethnic interests which are dominant and coerced will tend to encourage people to apply the strategy of domination in their life phenomena. There may be strong goals of interest which motivate people to take over and control the sources of interest. There is a long-term expectation contained in the interests, and so these

¹ In November 1999, some two million Acehnese people conducted General Assembly of Referendum Supporters (Consultative Assembly) (read SIB 8 Nov. 1999). Then, in the year 2000 there have been several delayed meetings of the Acehnese People's Congress and there is no definite date for the recurrence. In the meantime, Human Understanding Memorandum was signed by the GAM (Aceh Independence Movement) and the Rep. of Indonesia in Geneva, Switzerland

² Like a "Rambo" style.

³ Such as power institution, status, Job, position, region, company, natural resources, art and cultural resources, informal sources of income (like at the bus terminal, in the ship / on the bus, shopping areas), politics, etc.



sources should be grabbed so that others will not use them to destroy their own interests.

Very often the short-term interests motivate people to gain the areas of interest. The danger may not be so big for other groups of people, however, when the interests are for long-term goals, the attack may sound like "it is a must". When this "obligation" is polished with sanctification of cultural, religious or politico-ideological values, the potential for conflict will be more severe and in the end it will cause social conflict both in the realm of religion, politics, economics, and explosive and dangerous ethnicity. Very often the lack of mutual understanding on the foundation of group structure and function causes unintelligible fanaticism.

The conclusion is that domination is an attempt to take over all structural positions for one's own group without leaving anything left for the other groups. It is the takeover of all resources without any consideration of others. It is the takeover of all opportunities to implant and spread views to other groups in order to influence them. Domination becomes a dominant condition which ostracize other people who have different opinions or views.

Alienation

It is dangerous when domination will later appear as the result of alienated situation. Generally, alienation occurs when people feel alienated in their own neighborhood, culture, religion, ethnicity or nation, and even in their own selves.

There are some factors that produce a situation of social alienation. When people are constantly banned to express their views in their community because their group is a minority, or poor and stupid, they tend to feel alienated and ostracized. Or when there is an ideological view or teaching stating that the other group is not allowed to voice their aspiration and wishes, and is not acceptable to be in the



leadership, there will be discontent. If this situation continues constantly and there is no change at any time. this group will feel there is no hope for the future even though they live with their community. They feel powerless, so there is an assumption that they are put aside and ignored by the power holders.

When the assumption of "being ignored" accumulates and crystalizes, the group members tend to be sensitive and easily provoked to do illogical actions. Social conflict to reject unfair treatment will be directed towards those who are considered "the alienation makers". As a result, there is an atrocity of mass rally which takes many victims in large scale.¹ It would be different if the alienation occurred to an individual. The impact will be that he will act to punish himself because of his disappointment. Usually, if his logic functions, he will stay away from other people or become exclusive. However, if his positive logic does not function as a control, this alienated person will commit a suicide tragically.

Anomie

Usually if the society has been contaminated with alienation situation in various social groups, then among them there will be a situation of *anomie*, that is, a situation without norms or laws. It means that there is no authority of rules and laws. Members of the society will act at will without respecting laws. The laws are based on the "survival of the fittest". In short, there is a situation of *homo homini lupus* - people kill each other. Usually, the powerful control the weak.² It is a threat if this situation develops in the direction in which groups of people are formed as *formative* groups that reach their goals through violence and atrocities like one of the Machiavellian

¹ Like the victims in Aceh, East Timor, Ambon, Irian Jaya, Sambas and Banyuwangi

² We can see the evidence in the incident in Ambon one and a half years ago. The weak will migrate to leave their villages such as the case of Bugis and Buton in South Celebes. The powerful will control over the villages of the defeated.



concepts.

The *anomic* condition is the bad impact as the result of *alienation* towards the community. Anomie is not just caused by the unfair treatment in religion, but also by alienation in economic and political conditions. Therefore, the anomic situation at present widespread in many parts of Indonesia cannot be eliminated through political statements alone but should be dealt with directly by approach and action. The anomie caused by economic situation, for instance, can be solved if there is strict and definite action upon the criminals of economy, banking, and industry. At the same time, there should be corrective actions on the income and living standard of the workers and the jobless to be done quickly and consistently. I predict that if the government does not increase the income of the laborers, the exploitation will be more severe. If the unemployed cannot have jobs and regular income, crime will be rampant in the society. If the crime increases, the people will defend themselves. As there is no trust in the security forces, the law of the "*survival of the fittest*" will be applied. This is the beginning of national disaster of *anomie*. Therefore, the theory of Machiavelli is accepted to be true.

In such a condition, it is difficult to predict the possibility of building harmony based on religious values. There will eventually be a segmented classification based on religion or ethnicity which is more trustworthy as a weapon to defend oneself in the present anomie.¹

B. BUILDING HARMONY

Role of the Elite

To discuss harmony, it is important to consider issues of domination, alienation

¹ About *alienation* and *anomie*, you further can read the book of Sociology, for example, popular and interesting books such as *Sociological Theories* by Lewin A. Coserand Bernard Rosenberg, 1982, McMillan, New York



and anomie. In addition, to realize the harmony among religious groups, it is necessary to observe closely three levels of elite in every religion. The first elite is the highest level of religious elite. The second is the middle level and the third is the lowest level of the religious elite. Also, it is important to observe the existence of three levels of elite based on the structural organization or bureaucracy namely the elite of national, regional and local levels. Both levels of elite can be *overlapping*. For instance, regional elite can be in the position of highest elite although their presence is in the local level. Or middle elite can be in the local level and so on.

Although harmony in the upper elite can be produced, there is no guarantee that such an idea of harmony is accepted by the middle and low elite. Most probably, the concept of harmony has not been internalized by the middle and low elite. Not to mention the attitude of the middle and low elite which rejects the idea of the upper elite. It is possible that the upper elite has been successful in building the harmony but among the middle and low elite especially among the congregation, they have not. Meanwhile, those who have direct contact with the mass are from the low elite, sometimes from the middle elite. There is tendency in which the low and middle elite have more influence over the mass than do the upper elite.

It is similar to the position of national, regional and local elite. The logical explanation is the same. It is possible that the harmony has been achieved in the level of national religious leaders. This is due to the fact that they realize how important it is to have the national harmony among various religious groups, and they realize its importance for the unity of the nation potrtically and regionally. Unfortunately, what is felt by the religious leaders at the national level may not necessarily be experienced by the regional and local religious elite. In this case, it is assumed that there is a factor of direct influence of the regional and local elite which is powerful over the middle and low elite. Sometimes, the interest of local level is more important than that



of national level. In particular when it is concerned with the principles such as the essence of religion and esteem of the elite. This is even worse when the values of the ethnic culture are not supportive or well utilized as the channel for socialization of the concepts of harmony introduced in the higher level.

Social Accomodation

There are five elements in the theory of accomodation namely *displacement* (delaying the conflict), *institutionalization*, *superordination* (deviating the conflict), *compromise* (with conditions) and *toleration*. Accomodation is *antagonistic cooperation*, that is, a kind of opposite cooperation.

Accomodation is a way out taken to solve a conflict. What is lacking in this theory is that actually there is an attempt to deviate the conflict by creating another conflict, then" a scapegoat" is chosen and victimized. Usually, the minority or weak groups will be the target.¹

However, if the conflicting groups have the equal power², then they will choose the accomodalive *compromise*. To achieve the compromise, they need confirmation of the differences. For that purpose, they need mediation, arbitration, and conciliation. Similarly, toleration is used to create peace by allowing for differences of opinions, it means that they will make an agreement to the differences. This concept is often politicized under the banner of *democracy* that is to accept differences of opinions.

¹ It takes further research to confirm whether the burning of churches in several cities in Java and South Celebes in 1996, the assault of the Headquarters of PDT on 26 July 1996, the assault of Trisakti University 12 May 1990, incidents in Sambas and Ambon in 1999 were alt the case of the accomodation of *displacement*, *superordination* to distract the attention off the national disintegration which was assumed to happen.



Cultural Assimilation

Harmony can be achieved if cultural assimilation is seriously introduced among the pluralistic ethnic groups in Indonesia, Cultural diffusion is an effective channel to build harmony. It takes a long time to achieve the purpose- It should be realized that to prevent the conflicts in the future, there should be unified people of Indonesia. Therefore, the program of *Indonesianization* should be launched. One of the values to be promoted in the *Indonesianization* is the pride of being Indonesians. Like Americans, they are also pluralistic as in Indonesia, but the assimilation process called *Americanization* for hundreds of years has created the pride to be Americans although the people have different skin color such as black, white or colored.

Amalgamation and Miscegenation

Suspicion will be reduced when the differences among racial or ethnic groups are minimized especially if the process of Indonesianization culturally continues well. The process of Indonesianization will be under way if, from now on, the biological assimilation can be started or continued without coercion. Biological interbreeding is one of the channels for harmony among different ethnicity and religions, although there will be cultural, psycho-religious, and administrative problems of carrying it out. The biological interbreeding will be supported if interracial marriage or miscegenation is developed and facilitated, it will be easier to achieve if all stereotypes and socio-racial prejudice are eliminated through open and continual communication as well as through formal and non-formal education and religious teaching.

Suggestions and Conclusion

To establish harmony among religious groups, it is necessary to realize that



the position of religious elite is significant. Consequently, continuous dialogs among religious leaders should be held, not only in the upper or national level, but also in the middle or regional level as well as in the low or local level. There should be guidelines established continuously for the discussion among the elite. Then, the low elite will demonstrate the concepts of harmony conceived in the national, regional and local dialogs to their own masses.

What is to be observed is the fact that there is an elite that intentionally opposes the harmony because they keep the strategy of domination and create domination situation. If there is an elite key-person, the solution must be found. Or the elite that searches for harmony should prepare a method or way in anticipating such a situation. For instance, they can explain, threaten or even eliminate the activities of the person who opposes the harmony. Another elite can even persuasively explain to the mass why such an elimination of activities of the key person was done so that they will not be emotionally agitated or be extremely fanatic.

Inter-religious harmony will be established when harmonization, balance, solidarity, and sociologically national pride are achieved. To reach that goal, harmonization, balance, solidarity, should also be established in all social phenomena of life in all lines. This includes the equal employment¹ equal opportunity for everyone to hold positions.

It appears that the harmony can be created if the similarities in all religions are promoted. Meanwhile, the differences in all religions should not be emphasized or even dramatized. It is important to think of the *Indonesianization* through the assimilation of culture, inter-racial or inter-ethnic marriage (*amalgamation, miscegenation*).

¹ Never apply the differences of religion, ethnicity, region to everyone as the requirement to get a job, appoint an official, offer scholarship, especially ask for religious conversion to be accepted



Building a harmony is a continual commitment by all leaders and religious followers. To establish harmony and mutual trust means to straighten out the path to the harmony. To realize the people's prosperity means to facilitate the development of harmony among the followers. Therefore, it is necessary to promote *tolerance* among the pluralistic followers, ethnic groups in Indonesia.

as a civil servant.

