

# Vigilante Violence in Post-Authoritarian States: The Case of Indonesia and Russia

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The wave of democratic reforms and the resulting fragmentation of the centralised New Order state post-1998 have led to the emergence of new forms of non-state violence and revealed a ‘dark side’ of civil society. Violence has, like other aspects of Indonesian society, been both ‘decentralised’ and privatised.<sup>1</sup> Increased social and political freedoms have not, as was hoped, been accompanied by a strengthening of civil institutions and rule of law. Decentralisation reforms initiated since 1999 have given greater economic and political autonomy at the provincial and sub-district levels of government; however these reforms have also led to an increase in conflicts between groups trading in violence as political and civil organisations fight over ‘turf’, economic resources and constituencies previously the exclusive domain of the New Order. A variety of non-state actors now pursue a diverse array of objectives on the basis of coercive strategies and methods, which have previously been the exclusive domain of sovereign state power.

In this paper I will look at the intersection between two manifestations of this non state violence, organised vigilantism and ‘violent entrepreneurship’, in the context of the socio-political environment of post-New Order Indonesia. After examining case studies of several vigilante type groups in Jakarta, I will then go on to make a comparison with the impact of non-state violence in another post-authoritarian state, post-Soviet Russia, before ending with an analysis of the implications posed to the states monopoly of violence and the ongoing process of state-building. It is my contention that rather than resulting in the strengthening of formal institutions of power and civic society, the process of *reformasi* in Indonesia has resulted in a far more fragmented intertwining of informal constellations of power, and that it is informative to understand vigilantism and violent entrepreneurship in this light. Going

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that in this paper ‘violence’ is used specifically to refer to the instrumental use of physical force.



beyond issues of crime control, I argue that the processes involved in organised vigilantism and violent entrepreneurship are part of the same continuum as that of ‘state making’, albeit on a less successful and smaller scale, and are the first wave leading to a gradual privatisation of the states policing role.<sup>2</sup>

Before we begin, a working definition of both vigilantism and violent entrepreneurship is required. A succinct and comprehensive definition of vigilantism has been provided by the British criminologist Les Johnston, who describes it as:

“A social movement giving rise to premeditated acts of force – or threatened force – by autonomous citizens. It arises as a reaction to the transgression of institutionalised norms by individuals or groups. Such acts are focused upon crime control and/or social control and aim to offer assurances of security both to participants and to other members of a given established order”.<sup>3</sup>

Vigilantism claims legitimacy in its use of force as a moral response by ordinary citizens to perceived breakdowns in the social order. Like organised crime, organised vigilantism is a global phenomenon, yet it is highly localised and is generated by the conditions of various socio-economic formations.<sup>4</sup> However it is often most widespread in states referred to as being post-authoritarian in nature, where the links between the state, law enforcement structures and popular notions of justice are weak. As non-state actors employing what is traditionally considered to be a sovereign state power, vigilantes reflect both ambivalence and discontent with state authority and draw attention to its limitations and weaknesses.

While on the surface vigilante groups in Indonesia may make claims to be a citizen initiated response to crime, which finds some legal foundation within the Indonesian 1945 constitution and the stated responsibility of citizens to “defend the nation”, further investigation often reveals a close if not inseparable connection with activities associated with the criminal world of *preman*, most commonly extortion and racketeering. The ‘vigilantism’ aspect is in many cases confined to the rationale for the use of violence and coercion, masking broader social, economic and political agendas. In order to help clarify this conceptual and empirical ambiguity, I will also employ the concept of violent entrepreneurship. The term was first

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<sup>2</sup> A point more thoroughly articulated in Charles Tilly, ‘War Making and State Making as Organized Crime’, in Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol (eds.) *Bringing the State Back In*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985

<sup>3</sup> Les Johnston, ‘What is Vigilantism?’ *British Journal of Criminology*, Vol. 36 No. 2, Spring 1996.

<sup>4</sup> Alfried Schulte-Bockholt, ‘A Neo-Marxist Explanation of Organized Crime’, *Critical Criminology*, No. 10, 2001.



coined by Anton Blok in his work on the Sicilian mafia and more recently used by Vadim Volkov in his research on criminal groups in post-Soviet Russia.<sup>5</sup> For the purposes of this paper, violent entrepreneurship can be defined as “sets of organizational and action strategies that enable the conversion of organized violence/intimidation into money or other market resources”.<sup>6</sup> As I will show, contemporary vigilante groups in Indonesia combine a discourse of citizen initiated crime control and community rights claims with coercive strategies that are orientated towards the generation of social, economic and political advantage.

### ***Reformasi and the Decentralisation of Violence***

While vigilante groups have existed in various forms in Indonesia for sometime, since the end of the New Order there has been a move towards greater levels of organisation as well as independence from state and elite patronage. During the New Order groups commonly identified as paramilitary, such as Pemuda Pancasila and Pemuda Pancamarga were backed by the state, and can accurately be described as state proxies, carrying out ‘regime maintenance chores’, such as the intimidation of activists. The authoritarian character of the New Order meant that groups attempting to operate without state approval were quickly eliminated. Instead, via the *beking* system, criminals and racketeers were allowed to operate with virtual legal impunity on the condition that a proportion of their profits made its way through the state bureaucracy, and that they were available to be mobilised when the state felt its hegemony to be under threat.<sup>7</sup> The result was that criminality and state practice were practically inseparable.

The collapse of New Order patronage saw the breakdown of the *beking* system, and consequently the tenuous ‘legitimacy’ of state proxies and *preman* gangs. However there were many new opportunities available for those ‘with nothing to sell but their own muscles’. The removal of Suharto in 1998 meant not the complete disintegration of patrimonial networks and authoritarian structures, but rather the loss of their central focal hub, so that they loosened into decentralized and competing power centres. Attempts by the post-Suharto leadership to employ civilian auxiliaries to bolster the security apparatus, such as the ‘People’s Security’

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<sup>5</sup> Anton Blok, *The mafia of a Sicilian village, 1860-1960 : a study of violent peasant entrepreneurs* New York : Harper and Row, 1975 and Vadim Volkov, *Violent Entrepreneurs: The Use of Force in the Making of Russian Capitalism*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2002

<sup>6</sup> Volkov, 2002

<sup>7</sup> A detailed analysis of the *beking* system can be found in Tim Lindsey, ‘The Criminal State: *Premanisme* and the New Order’, in Grayson Lloyd and Shannon Smith (eds.), *Indonesia Today: Challenges of History*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2001.



(Kamra: *Keamanan Rakyat*) and *Pamswakarsa* 'self-help' security force, had unanticipated repercussions. Made up of a rag-tag mix of unemployed youth, preman, martial artists and militant Islamist groups, the Pamswakarsa was formed in 1999 to counter widespread opposition to Habibie's presidency.<sup>8</sup> It was the biggest mobilisation of civilian forces by the state since the 1960's and reflected the state's recognition that it could no longer legitimate centralised violent suppression of peaceful dissent. As a political strategy the Pamswakarsa exercise was a failure, however it had a more lasting impact in a number of respects. In its aftermath a new mentality emerged amongst civil society, 'if the state can do it why cant we? Civic nationalism collapsed, replaced by what one commentator describe as the 'I am Indonesia syndrome'; localised interests superseding any sense of collective welfare, similar to what Koonings and Kruijt's have referred to as 'uncivil society'.<sup>9</sup> The result was a rapid increase in the number of paramilitary and vigilante groups. Taking advantage of political liberalisation and the freedom to organise, many of the new political parties formed large *satgas* paramilitary wings, and a host of social and religious groups set up security auxiliaries in order to defend their interests and pursue a variety of agendas.

The situation was further exacerbated by the ineffectiveness of the state in maintaining public order. Suspicion and mistrust of the police was at an all time high, and this led to the establishment in many communities of vigilante groups ostensibly aimed at combating the symptoms of social and economic collapse, such as *premanisme* and 'vice'. Initially welcomed in official quarters, vigilante groups were considered to be supplementing the overstretched police by providing policing and security at the community level.<sup>10</sup> However in many instances, it was *preman* themselves that either established or infiltrated these groups in order to establish a new legitimacy. The post-New Order state has attempted to resolve the argument against the previous centralised patronage network via the introduction of decentralisation reforms in 1999. In theory, this devolving of power would help foster local leadership and autonomy. To an extent this has been the case, however it has also given a new quasi-legality to long-standing patron-client relations, and allowed local interests to consolidate control over resources and markets without institutional checks or rule of law. In this space, vigilantes and violent entrepreneurs have emerged as a new nexus of criminal

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<sup>8</sup> *Tempo*, 'Berjihad Mendukung Sidang', 30 November 1999.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Munir, Jakarta, 2003. Kruijt, D. and K. Koonings (1999) 'Introduction: Violence and Fear in Latin America'. In K. Koonings and D. Kruijt (eds) *Societies of Fear. The Legacy of Civil War, Violence, and Terror in Latin America*, London: Zed Books, pp. 1-30

<sup>10</sup> International Crisis Group, 'The Perils of Private Security in Indonesia: Guards and Militias on Bali and Lombok', Asia Report N°67, 7 November 2003



interest and political power. Without any guarantee of state patronage, groups employing coercive methods must establish alternative claims to legitimacy. In some cases this is done via the invocation of primordial sentiments; protecting the integrity of an imagined ethnic or religious community. Another has been ‘entrepreneurial’, employing the logic of the supply and demand. The group asserts that it is supplying a service (protection) that is demanded by the market, patrons being replaced by clients. What all share is a willingness to appropriate the public's distrust of the state and its ability to enforce law and order and uphold citizens rights.

These new vigilantes, as the following case studies will show, combine the pragmatic self-interest and reliance on coercive strategies of the preman with a justificatory moral ideology and socio-political agenda. Advantage is taken of the legal and empirical grey zone that exists between ‘crime prevention’ and protection racketeering. On the one hand legitimacy is claimed as a citizen initiated response to a failure by the state to provide basic services. On the other hand, vigilantism is also predatory, making use of weaknesses in state power and appropriating the principle of popular sovereignty in order to create a parallel order to that of the state. The development of large organizational structures, often national in scope, also necessitates regular income. This creates the momentum whereby vigilante groups often move closer in practice towards racketeering, for “the racketeer is both protector and exploiter”.<sup>11</sup> The promise of security and order comes at a price. Having removed localised threats to security, i.e. rivals to the groups’ territorial monopoly, payment from local businesses and the population for its ongoing self-appointed security role is either given voluntarily or obtained through coercion.

### **New Vigilantes: The Defenders of Islam Front**

One of a number of vigilante style groups employing the symbols of Islam to emerge as part of the Pamswakarsa exercise was the *Front Pembela Islam* (FPI: defenders of Islam Front). Led by Habib Rizieq, an Islamic preacher of Betawi-Yemeni descent, FPI asserts that while leading to more political freedom, ‘reformasi’ has been corrupted by numerous ‘excesses’, most notably what they perceive to be a breakdown in the moral fabric of society evidenced by the prevalence of alcohol, narcotics gambling and pornography, which is referred to under the general term of *kemaksiatan* (‘vice’), all of which constitute a threat to the Muslim

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<sup>11</sup> P.M Stirk in Schulte-Bockholt, 2001.



majority.<sup>12</sup> Due to corruption and complicity with organised crime, state law enforcement agencies are considered to be either incapable or unwilling to enforce existing laws, making it the obligation of ordinary citizens to do so.<sup>13</sup>

FPI's agenda however moves beyond simple law enforcement, articulating a definition of both 'deviance' and 'crime' that conflicts with that of the state. FPI's mission is emblemised in the Quranic edict of *amar makruf nahi mungkar*, to lead people towards good and away from evil.<sup>14</sup> Ultimately, it is believed this can only be achieved through the implementation of shariah law in Indonesia that would outlaw alcohol consumption, gambling etc. Rather than adopting a political approach to achieving this aim, as has been the case with others, such as the Justice Welfare Party (PKS: *Partai Keadilan Sejahtera*) the FPI has focused exclusively upon an aggressive street level policing of public morality. Interviews with rank and file members, most of whom are male aged 17-28, suggest that it is this focus upon "action, not pointless talk" that attracts them to the FPI.<sup>15</sup>

In the aftermath of the end of the New Order, the FPI was initially courted by elite figures such as the governor of Jakarta Sutiyoso and former police Chief Noegroho Djajoesman. After blockading the office of the Jakarta regional government in 1999 the FPI successfully negotiated revisions to laws regarding opening hours for cafes, bars and restraints during the fasting month of Ramadhan. This was considered a great strategic success. The FPI gained concessions from the government, and were effectively given a mandate to act in its absence. Bars and cafes considered to be in violation of the rules were trashed and patrons beaten. Throughout 1999 up until 2002 the FPI conducted dozens of raids on nightspots, brothels, gambling dens, billiard halls, and other places deemed sinful. Initially the raids were confined to the fasting month but soon extended beyond it. It became apparent FPI had a larger agenda to purge vice from the capital full stop.

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<sup>12</sup> Interview with Habib Rizieq, Jakarta 2005.

<sup>13</sup> Organisationally the FPI operates via a semi-autonomous branch system, with a central advisory council that reports directly to Habib Rizieq. Individual branches are free to act unilaterally in accord with FPI's basic principles, submitting quarterly reports on their activities to Jakarta. The group claims to follow a strict procedure in the identification and eventual targeting of *tempat maksiat* This involve intelligence gathering, approaching the identified target and requesting them to stop their activities, formally contacting and informing the police, and in the event that after three attempts the police fail to respond, the group will take direct action. Interview with Ustadz Sobri Lubis, FPI official, Ciputat, 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Misbahul Alam, former secretary general of FPI, Ciputat, 2003.

<sup>15</sup> Interviews were conducted in 2005 with several dozen regular FPI members from the Tanah Abang, Ciputat and Bekasi branches of the organization. FPI's current membership is claimed to be 1 million.



The response from the police to the raids was initially non-committal. Some individual members were arrested, and public statements released that FPI should abide by the law; however no comprehensive action was taken. It wasn't until after the Bali bombing in October 2002 that government patience for the FPI ran out. Four days after the bombing Rizieq was arrested on charges of inciting hatred against the government and inciting public unrest, to which he was sentenced to seven months imprisonment.<sup>16</sup> With international pressure on Indonesia to be seen to be tackling terrorism, groups using the symbols of militant Islam were now a political liability. The ability of the FPI to quickly mobilise large demonstrations against the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq also worried the Indonesian government. For FPI followers however, Rizieq was a martyr, the victim of US intervention in Indonesian internal affairs, and membership numbers continued to grow.<sup>17</sup>

After Rizieq's was released from prison in November 2003, the group temporarily halted its raids, in order to "reconsolidate its membership". By its own admission, FPI's rapid growth had resulted in 'bad apples' slipping into the organizations ranks, including unrepentant preman as well as what were claimed to be state operatives intent on subverting the group.<sup>18</sup> Accusations that FPI were little more than preman in religious garb were also taken seriously by the group, who saw them as undermining the moral platform they claimed to stand upon. FPI's response has been to tighten membership criteria and increase the level of religious instruction and physical training. By 2004 it had resumed its Ramadhan raids on cafes. FPI's recent government assisted deployment to tsunami-ravaged Aceh suggests that they may also have re-established a working relationship.<sup>19</sup>

### **Community Rights and Racketeering: The Betawi Brotherhood Forum**

The *Forum Betawi Rempug* (FBR: Betawi Brotherhood Forum) was established in 2001, ostensibly as a vehicle for improving the social and economic conditions of poor and working class ethnic Betawi in Jakarta. Based in the Cakung district of East Jakarta and led by Fadli Muhir, an Islamic preacher and former member of the Supreme Advisory Council, FBR's

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<sup>16</sup> It is worth noting that even in sentencing the state was conciliatory. The state prosecutor reduced the maximum sentence by six years on the grounds that Rizieq had "merely intended to improve the morality of Indonesia society". *Laksamana.net*, '7 Months Jail Sought for FPI Leader', 30 July 2003.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with FPI members, Tanah Abang, 2005.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Misbahul Alam, 2003.

<sup>19</sup> The group gained praise for its dedication to tsunami relief efforts, however Rizieq's warnings of 'Christianisation' via foreign aid workers, as well as FPI's plan to help enforce shariah law in the province have caused some concern that it will further exacerbate existing tensions.



stated objective is to “make Betawi *jawara* in their own neighbourhood”.<sup>20</sup> FBR’s membership is primarily drawn from the disenfranchised and those living on the margins; unemployed youth, preman, *ojek* drivers, and others working in the informal economy.

FBR articulate a rationale for the use of force based in a discourse of indigenous cultural and economic rights. This translates into using violence and intimidation to secure control over the informal economy in neighbourhoods deemed to be primarily ‘Betawi’ in composition, alongside pressuring businesses to employ its members and make regular financial contributions to the group. In FBR discourse, due to uncontrolled migration into the nation’s capital, together with economic and political disenfranchisement, the indigenous Betawi have become marginalised in their own land.<sup>21</sup> While regional autonomy laws have resulted in improving the socio-economic standing of indigenous communities in other parts of the country, FBR insists that this has not been the case for the Betawi. Non-Betawi migrants are blamed for high unemployment rates, crime, as well as a host of other social ills such as prostitution and gambling. Bars and cafes in Cakung run by non-Betawi have been attacked by FBR on the grounds of eliminating ‘immorality’. Violent clashes with ethnic Madura gangs controlling sectors of the informal economy such as parking have erupted and portrayed as the indigenous community reclaiming a source of income that is rightfully theirs.<sup>22</sup> Perceiving the social, moral and economic cohesion of the ethnic community as under threat, FBR considers its use of violence as a legitimate act of self-defence.

FBR first gained public attention after its members viciously attacked a peaceful protest by the Urban Poor Consortium, who was demonstrating against the Jakarta administrations eviction and arrest of *Pedi* cab drivers, buskers and street vendors.<sup>23</sup> This led to media speculation that FBR was backed by Sutiyoso. However rather than being on Sutiyoso’s ‘payroll’, the attack was more an attempt to attract the governor’s attention and seek his patronage. The plethora of groups employing violence means that maintaining a public profile is essential, and some actions are best understood in this sense, as exercises in self-promotion.<sup>24</sup> While Sutiyoso made some flirtations with FBR in the run-up to his 2001 re-election as governor, the potential political backlash outweighed the benefits to be gained

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<sup>20</sup> Internal manuscript, Forum Betawi Rempug, date unknown.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Fadloli Muhr. Chairman of FBR, Jakarta 2003.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> A chronology of the FBR attack can be found at the UPC website at <http://urbanpoor.or.id/28.03.0.0.1.0.phtml>.

<sup>24</sup> FBR, like other similar groups, is regularly privately contracted to settle land disputes etc.





from access to the group, and once re-elected he distanced himself from them. For the FBR to achieve its 'ideal' of recognition as the 'traditional security' in Jakarta, similar to that of the *pecalang* in Bali, requires government support.<sup>25</sup> The lack of success in wooing Jakarta's administration has prompted a more direct political strategy. Fadlioli intends to run as an independent candidate in the 2007 elections, seeking to become Jakarta's first 'indigenous' governor.<sup>26</sup>

### ***The Gardu System***

Organizationally the FBR finds its strength at the neighbourhood level via a system referred to as *gardu*. *Gardu* are small security posts that are similar to the *poskamling* established during the New Order as a form of self-policing at the *kampung* level. Aside from conducting neighbourhood patrols, FBR *gardu* also organise various 'cultural' services, such as performances of Betawi arts, traditional weddings, and circumcisions etc, which provide an opportunity for drawing in new members. Since the end of the New Order there has been the phenomenon of *posko*, 'command posts', that have been utilised by political parties and other social organisations to establish a neighbourhood presence and act as a strategic site from which to mobilise support.<sup>27</sup> In many neighbourhoods, these *posko* outnumber those of the police. By FBR's own admission, the system is in a sense a self-fulfilling prophecy. Crime rates often appear to decrease in *gardu* areas because its perpetrators now wear FBR uniforms, for intimidation and racketeering is only considered illegitimate and hence 'criminal' when it is done by those who do not have a 'right' to do so. Conflict of course arises when local communities reject and resist FBR's rights claims, and this has increasingly been the case in the last six months as the group has attempted to expand its *gardu* network into new territory.<sup>28</sup>

The *gardu* system is also a way of franchising the reputation of the FBR. By joining the FBR local Betawi preman can set up a *gardu* and benefit from affiliation with a large organization. Without powerful networks or connections, local level preman can only survive through

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with FBR officials, Jakarta, 2005. For more on *pecalang*, see International Crisis Group, 2003 and I Ngrah Suryaman. "Ajeg Bali" dan Lahirnya "Jago-jago" *Kebudayaan*, *Kompas*, 7 January 2004, <http://www.kompas.com/kompas-cetak/0401/07/Bentara/781054.htm>.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with FBR officials, Jakarta 2005.

<sup>27</sup> *Sinar Harapan*, 'Posko Parpol dan Ormas Mulai Warnai Jakarta', 18 September 2003 (<http://www.sinarharapan.co.id/berita/0309/18/jab02.html>)

<sup>28</sup> See for example, *Liputan6.com*, 'Gardu FBR di Bekasi Diamuk Warga', 31 May 2005, <http://www.liputan6.com/fullnews/102542.html>



establishing a name for themselves. This is a dangerous and risky business. There is the constant threat of attacks from rivals, retribution from a local population tired of being ‘protected’, as well as the police who periodically do well publicised *razia* raids on individual preman or smaller gangs to give the impression of tackling ‘crime’. As in the case of the FPI, the police’s powers are limited to arresting individual members in relation to specific criminal violations, not possessing a legal foundation upon which to disband or curtail the organization as a whole. It has only been in recent months, after violent territorial disputes between the FBR and the Banten Family Development Committee (BPPKB: *Badan Pembinaan Potensi Keluarga Banten*), over the establishment of new *gardu* that the police have threatened to dismantle the command posts of both FBR and other similar groups.<sup>29</sup> The irony of course is that both groups claim that the purpose of the disputed post is to help tackle local crime and maintain security. This guarantee of ‘security’ however can only be established when one gains a territorial monopoly. The intersection between vigilantism and the *dunia preman* seen in the FBR heads in the direction of classic racketeering, but with an ideological dimension. Coercion is justified by claims to socio-economic rights for an exclusive community.

In the cases of both the FPI and the FBR we see that vigilante activity is part of larger social and political agendas. Both criticise the state for failing to enforce the law and uphold community rights, however both have also displayed a readiness to form alliances with the political elite when it is in their mutual interest. The seeming irony that groups concerned with maintaining law and order should actively recruit *preman* and known criminals is the training, discipline and structure involved in becoming a group member is a means of ‘reforming’ preman, providing them with an opportunity to become “useful members of society”.<sup>30</sup> A similar argument was used during the New Order to rationalise the existence of groups such as Pemuda Pancasila. On the contrary it is their readiness and propensity towards using violence of the preman that makes them an invaluable form of social capital.

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<sup>29</sup> *Gatra*, ‘Polda Metro Jaya akan Tertibkan Pos-pos Ormas’, 7 April 2005, and *The Jakarta Post*, ‘Police to punish violent gangs’, 23 May 2005.

<sup>30</sup> Interview, FBR official, Jakarta 2003. Some FBR and FPI members recounted that they had ‘born again’ type experiences after becoming involved in the group, and felt that their youthful *semangat* was now being directed towards a greater cause.



## **From Vigilantism to Violent Entrepreneurship: The Family of Tanah**

### **Abang Association**

An example of a group adopting a more ‘entrepreneurial’ approach to security and successfully gaining sustained government support is that of the *Ikatan Keluarga Besar Tanah Abang*. The IKBT emerged in 1997, the product of a coalition between ethnic Betawi, Bugis and Madura gangs in the Tanah Abang district. As one of the biggest textile markets in Southeast Asia, Tanah Abang has long been a centre of gangs who make a living from protection rackets and extortion of local traders. Throughout the 1990’s Tanah Abang was controlled by a gang led by Hercules, an East Timorese youth with close links to the military. With the backing of Prabowo Subianto, Hercules’s gang was able to exercise unrivalled control, extracting protection dues, as well as being involved in the black market economy. By the late-90 however challengers had emerged to Hercules’s hegemony. Violent clashes between Hercules gang and rival groups increased. Realizing that government backing was necessary to overthrow him, in 1997 rival Betawi, Bugis and Madura gangs formed the IKBT, proclaiming it as a community based response to the ‘preman problem’ in Tanah Abang. The IKBT lobbied that it could restore security to Tanah Abang and put an end to the gang war that had begun to impact significantly upon trade. Eventually gaining the support of the local mayor as well as some prominent Tanah Abang businesses figures the IKBT made a swift but brutal takeover bid, exiling Hercules and his followers from the area and raising their headquarters to the ground. The IKBT now began operating as the ‘legitimate preman’ of Tanah Abang, imposing daily 500rph levies on transport workers and street vendors in the area in return for the guarantee of protection from other preman. Despite insisting that the levy was voluntary, IKBT’s new regime was met with some resistance and on several occasions bus drivers went on strike in protest.

In 2001, responding to increasing complaints from the public, Sutiyoso launched a high profile ‘war on preman’ campaign.<sup>31</sup> The IKBT was consulted by Sutiyoso prior to the campaign, and publicly named by him as a successful example of how preman could be reformed and turned into productive members of the community. The IKBT recommended that the police provide training programs for unemployed youth to circumvent the danger of

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<sup>31</sup>Around 73 areas of preman activity were identified throughout the city, and a budget of 12 billion rupiah was allocated for the operation.



them falling into 'premanisme', and then employ them as security for shops and businesses in Tanah Abang.<sup>32</sup> Sutiyoso took to the idea. To carry out the anti-preman campaign approximately 1900 civilian police assistants (Banpol: *Bantuan Polisi*) were employed in addition to the 800 regular police already assigned. The painful irony was however that the Banpol were largely recruited from the ranks of the very preman that the program was supposedly aimed at eliminating.<sup>33</sup> Not surprisingly then, when amongst great media fanfare Sutiyoso took to the streets of Tanah Abang, there were no preman insight, except for those now wearing Banpol uniforms.

The move towards a degree of territorial control and relative stability, such as with the IKBT, makes the claim to be providing protection more credible, for someone who produces both the danger, and at a price, the shield against it is a racketeer, whilst someone who provides protection against a danger over which they appear to have little control appears as a legitimate protector. Occasional clashes between groups in either disputed or 'crossover' territory, as well as firm action against individual or unaffiliated preman can be seen as proof to their respective constituents the reality of the threat to which they claim to protect against. According to IKBT's chairman Bang Ucu, there is no element of coercion in relation to payment from local businesses; "what we have is a mutually beneficial relationship".<sup>34</sup> For local business the IKBT is in a sense the lesser of two evils. Dealing with a single group is safer and more economical than dealing with a variety of 'wild' preman gangs. What we see then with the IKBT case is an example of criminal racketeers making a transition to a semi-legitimate protection agency with a government sanctioned monopoly over a given territory.<sup>35</sup> Unable to eliminate gang violence in Tanah Abang, the state has opted for a negotiated alliance with a dominant group, essentially outsourcing its policing role.

## **Privatisation of the State: Comparing Post-Soviet Russia**

The situation in Indonesia is in many ways not unique. Globally, there has been a move towards the increasing privatization of security, of which organised vigilantism is one manifestation. As Anna Leander has comprehensively argued, globalisation has displaced politics and diffused authority, resulting in the diminishing of the state's monopoly over

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<sup>32</sup> *Kompas*, 'IKBT Tangani Program Percontohan Pembinaan Preman', 11 May 2001.

<sup>33</sup> *Gamma*, 17 April 2001

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Bang Ucu, Chairman of the IKBT, Jakarta, 2005.

<sup>35</sup> Despite its alliance the IKBT remains fiscally independent, its protection levies remaining within the organization



violence and its legitimate use.<sup>36</sup> A comparative look at vigilante movements worldwide, such as post-apartheid South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, Brazil, as well as numerous other central American and post-Soviet 'transition' states provide comparative evidence of the tendency for what were initially 'anti-crime' orientated movements emerging from post-authoritarian social upheaval, evolving into alternative sources of 'protection' with whom the weakened state is forced to negotiate.<sup>37</sup> Most commonly this is in the form of a privatization of the states security and policing role and/or integration into existing power structures.

One of the most striking examples of this is post-Soviet Russia. Vadim Volkov, in his study of Russian gangsters, has shown how criminal networks and thugs trafficking in violence have played a pivotal role in the making of Russian capitalism.<sup>38</sup> With the collapse of the soviet system and the opening up of markets, disenfranchised members of sports and martial arts clubs began offering and extracting protection from businesses. According to Varese, the spread of property and opening up of markets was not accompanied by clear laws and legislation, and where they did exist the state was ill-equipped to enforce them, resulting in a demand for alternative sources of protection.<sup>39</sup> This represented an opening for criminal gangs to become intermediaries in the new system. After a period of fierce rivalry between criminal gangs in the mid-1990s, stronger 'violent entrepreneurs' gradually emerged. Having established a degree of territorial control and becoming recognised guarantors of business transactions, these stronger groups "made a conscious choice of economic policy of reasonable taxation and reliable protection of property, thus creating a relatively secure environment".<sup>40</sup> The result was criminal gangs eventually becoming something akin to a government agency, and this was instrumental to the eventual legalisation of private protection.

Over time private security companies with closer links to government, often run by former KGB and military officers have commandeered these territorial monopolies. Privatised

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<sup>36</sup> Anna Leander, 'Globalisation and the Eroding State Monopoly of Legitimate Violence', working paper, Columbia International Affairs Online, <http://www.ciaonet.org/wps/lea02/index.html>, August 2001.

<sup>37</sup> See for example Rachael Monaghan, 'One Merchant, One Bullet: The Rise and Fall of PAGAD', *Low Intensity Conflict and Law Enforcement*, Volume 12, Number 1 / Spring, 2004, Martha K. Huggins, 'Urban Violence and Police Privatisation in Brazil: Blended Invisibility', *Social Justice*; 27, 2, Summer 2000, and Daniel Jordan Smith, 'The Bakassi Boys: Vigilantism, Violence and Political Imagination in Nigeria', *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol.19 No.3, August 2004.

<sup>38</sup> Volkov, 2002.

<sup>39</sup> Federico Varese, 'Is Sicily the Future of Russia? Private protection and the rise of the Russian Mafia', in Mark Galeotti (ed.), *Russian and Post-Soviet Organized Crime*, Ashgate Publishing Limited, Burlington, 2002.

<sup>40</sup> Volkov, 2002.



sections of the state coercive apparatus have also become more independent market actors.<sup>41</sup> Faced with myriad autonomous groups employing violence, the Russian state has effectively lost “unconditional priority in those very areas that constitute it: protection, taxation and law enforcement”.<sup>42</sup> Volkov speculates that one possible scenario is a gradual appropriation of those private protection agencies with state links, leading to a re-centralisation of state control, albeit in a more dynamic form. This process entails not just controlling ‘crime’, but a fundamental rebuilding of state institutions. The logic of the market, where long term intensive violence is simply unprofitable, has also emerged as a mediating factor, leading to the consolidation of local ‘regimes’ that have negotiated working arrangements with both the authorities and rival groups and established recognised ‘rules of the game’.<sup>43</sup>

Like Indonesia, the Russian case shows the ambiguity that emerges in post-authoritarian environments between ‘crime’ and ‘free enterprise’, legitimate security and racketeering. One significant difference between protection rackets in the two countries is that of claims to legitimacy. In the Russian example, organised protection rackets for the most part make little pretence as to being anything other than a purely profit driven enterprise, albeit one considered necessary for the operation of free market capitalism. In Indonesia, while economic gain may be to a lesser or greater extent a central motivating factor for involvement in vigilante style groups, as my examples have shown, this is largely couched in a discourse of rights claims and reform agendas.

In terms of possible directions for the future, the Russian example presents some intriguing and alarming insights. Non-state violence has been used due to what is claimed to be the failure of the state in upholding its policing and patronage role. In the absence of an adequate provision of security and law enforcement by the state those trading in violence have emerged both as the source of insecurity, and the eventual answer to it. A vicious cycle emerges that has relegated the state to the role of passive spectator. Like Russia, I think that what we are seeing in Indonesia with the emergence and consolidation of groups such as those discussed is not reducible to a reaction to ‘increased crime’ due to the deterioration of social and economic conditions, but is something far more significant. The size and ambiguous relationship of these organisations to the state and the law makes conventional terms such as ‘crime’,

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<sup>41</sup> Vadim Volkov, ‘Violent Entrepreneurship in Post-Communist Russia’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol.51, No.5, 1999,741-754.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 752.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 753.



vigilantism, premanisme etc increasingly inadequate for capture this new reality. What is occurring is perhaps best described by Volkov as “an open ended struggle between different forces for the control of violence and economic resources”, and subsequently for the capacity to project ‘legitimate’ definitions of ‘criminal’, something which is central to the process of state making.<sup>44</sup>

Part of the responsibility for this situation can be laid with the state itself. The reaction by the post-New Order state to the proliferation of vigilante style group and the problem of *premanisme* it claims to address has to date followed two trajectories. The first is a general ambivalence. The authorities are in a sense caught in a double bind. Political liberalisation has allowed groups such as the FBR and FPI to gain legal status as registered ‘social organisations’. Consequently taking comprehensive action against them would require taking a backward step to more authoritarian measures that are likely be politically unpopular and met with suspicion and opposition from the public. The second has involved incorporation, via the recruitment of preman and vigilantes into auxiliary security forces and the forming of alliances and outsourcing of policing functions to non-state groups. The danger here is that a situation emerges similar to that of the New Order, where criminality and state power intersect to the extent that the public view them as one and the same, perpetuating the cycle of popular justice and vigilantism. Increasing privatisation Perhaps Indonesian society may have to tolerate a certain degree of vigilantism and violent entrepreneurship if it aims to preserve its hard won civil and political rights.

One interesting recent development has been local trials of the *koban* community policing system used in Japan. In this system police are pro-active in establishing close relationships with the community in which they are posted. Anecdotal and media reports suggest the program has been successful, at least in terms of going some way towards restoring public trust in the police.<sup>45</sup> If the state is indeed but one of many sources of protection, then public relations exercises such as the *koban* trials will need to also be accompanied by more concrete

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<sup>44</sup> Vadim Volkov, ‘The Political Economy of Protection Rackets in the Past and Present’, *Social Research*, Vol. 67 No.3, September 2000, pp. 709-744

<sup>45</sup> *Kompas*, ‘Jepang Aman dengan Sistem *Koban*’, 28 July 2002.



reforms. In order to regain both its monopoly and legitimacy over the use of coercion, the state may need to endeavour to provide a service that is more 'user friendly', reliable, legally accountable, and comprehensive than any of its would be competitors.

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