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Redefine Our Nationalism? Critical Reflection on Indonesian Nationalism as a "Joint Project": Case Study of Post-1998 Racial Communal Conflict

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Abstract The discourse on Indonesian Nationalism will never end. As the basis of the state, nationalism needs to continue to be reflected to remain relevant to current developments. The phenomenon of narrowing the meaning of Indonesian Nationalism and stagnation in the mainstream narrative which leads to the fossilisation of meaning is also an important and urgent topic to study. The big question is whether Indonesian Nationalism is still on rails and corridors that are relevant to the current condition of the nation. This article will specifically dissect in a deconstructive manner the paradigm of Indonesian Nationalism as a "joint project" as a form of response to stagnation and narrow mainstream narratives about nationalism. This paper also analyzes it in a historical framework, specifically taking a case study of racial communal conflict after the 1998 Reformation using the analytical knife of Benedict Anderson's Imagined Communities. There are three sub-discussions which will explain the background conditions and challenges of Indonesian Nationalism, the deconstruction of the paradigm of Indonesian Nationalism and how nationalism should be addressed as a "joint project" of a nation.

Keywords: Nationalism, Communal Conflict, 1998 Reform, Joint Project

Abstrak Diskursus tentang Nasionalisme Indonesia tidak akan pernah berakhir. Sebagai landasan bernegara, nasionalisme agaknya perlu terus direfleksikan agar senantiasa relevan dengan perkembangan zaman. Fenomena penyempitan makna dari Nasionalisme Indonesia dan stagnasi dalam narasi mainstream yang mengarah kepada pemfosilan makna juga menjadi topik yang penting serta mendesak untuk dikaji. Pertanyaan besarnya apakah Nasionalisme Indonesia masih pada rel dan koridor yang relevan dengan kondisi bangsa dewasa ini?. Artikel ini akan secara spesifik membedah secara dekonstruktif perihal paradigma Nasionalisme Indonesia sebagai sebuah "proyek bersama" sebagai bentuk jawaban dari stagnasi dan narasi mainstream tentang nasionalisme yang sempit. Tulisan ini juga menganalisis dalam kerangka historis tepatnya mengambil studi kasus konflik komunal rasial pasca Reformasi 1998 dengan pisau analisa Imagined Communities karya Benedict Anderson. Terdapat tiga sub pembahasan yang akan menjelaskan tentang latarbelakang kondisi dan tantangan Nasionalisme Indonesia, dekonstruksi paradigma Nasionalisme Indonesia hingga bagaimana seharusnya nasionalisme disikapi sebagai "proyek bersama" sebuah bangsa.

Kata kunci: Nasionalisme, Konflik Komunal, Reformasi 1998, Proyek Bersama



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INTRODUCTION

Some time ago, on 03 February 2024, violence occurred again with racial motives committed against a local resident in Papua (especially in Puncak Regency, Central Papua) by "unscrupulous" state officials. The video which circulated massively on "X" social media shows how inhumane the actions carried out were. This certainly adds to the long record of racial issues as one of the issues that is still rife in Indonesia (even after Indonesia's independence as a country reached its 78th year) (katingka, 25 Maret).

Racial problems such as those that occurred in Central Papua still occur frequently. This is certainly very sad, considering that the national commitment was echoed 78 years ago (in the context of the Proclamation of Independence). Or it could even be longer if based on the previous event of the formation of Indonesian nationality (the formation of national awareness and organizations for the first time; for example, Sarekat Islam or Budi Utomo which has existed since the beginning of the 19th century).

The big question then comes to the fore; Is Indonesian nationalism just a myth and fairy tale handed down from the past as a means of legitimizing the ruling majority against many minority groups? Or is it just a "reliance" on the hopelessness of formulating something that can unite all existing resources and differences? And this is made worse by systematic efforts to "fossilize" the meaning of Indonesian nationalism in the absence of critical reflection on the mainstream narrative of nationalism itself so that various phenomena that conflict with the meaning of nationalism actually occur more frequently; one of them is racial communal conflict. Is it then urgent to reinterpret "Indonesian Nationalism" to answer some of the questions above?

METHOD

This research aims to analyze the gap that exists regarding "Indonesian Nationalism" in substance and also in the context of application in national and state life, especially in the post-Reformation period of 1998. There are many criticisms of the mainstream narrative of nationalism which is increasingly being fostered by various facts that the conflict is based on Communal and racial violence continues to occur even after Indonesia (as a country) has experienced various changes in national leadership and simultaneous democratization processes (including the 1998 Reformation). In this seemingly paradoxical phenomenon, it is certainly interesting to re-read and define Indonesian Nationalism as a "joint project", as a critical reflection and way out of the mainstream and exclusive dogma of nationalism (especially in the context of the diversity of the Indonesian nation).

Furthermore, this research uses historical research methods. Research activities are adapted to the steps contained in the historical method according to Kuntowijoyo (Kuntowijoyo, 2005) which include topic selection, heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and writing

(historiography). The topic and heuristic selection stage are intended as a step to search for problems and collect relevant writing sources in the form of books, magazines, and journal articles. To obtain this material, researchers used several literature including the book entitled "Small Town War: Communal Violence and Democratization in Indonesia" by Gerry van Klinken (van Klinken, 2007) which explains the setting/case study of communal violence after the 1998 Reformation; and "Imagined Community: Imagined Communities" by Benedict Anderson (Anderson, 2020) which is used as an analytical tool in understanding the construct of Indonesian Nationalism. Apart from that, other literature sources are also used in the form of scientific journals and online media articles as additional references that are contextualized with the current situation. This research also limits the source search to only library collection materials without requiring field research (Zed, 2008).

After getting these sources, the next stage is criticism. For your information, criticism is a step to determine the truth of the source. Obtaining truly accurate data is not easy because you have to go through two important stages. First, through external criticism which functions to test the authenticity of the source by being guided by three basic questions: whether the source is the desired source, whether the source is original or derivative and whether the source is intact or has been changed. Second, through internal criticism, which is intended to test the credibility of the source.

The next stage is interpretation, carried out by conducting analysis and synthesis. Lastly, historiography/writing is an effort to describe the results of systematic and logical analysis. Through the stages that have been stated, it is hoped that the overall results of the research that will be carried out will meet the objectives and be presented in accordance with expectations.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Causes of Various "Unsettled/Gonjang-Ganjing" Phenomena in the Multi-Racial Reality of Indonesian Society After the 1998 Reformation: A Test of Indonesian Nationalism

The year 1998 became a monumental temporal context in the history of Indonesia's national journey. In fact, the transition to leadership and at the same time national government does not correlate smoothly with conditions existing at the "grass roots" (Rahman, 2022). In this context, the discussion is focused more deeply on the existence of horizontal disintegration in the reality of post-Reformation Indonesian society.

As a country consisting of various tribes, races, religions, and groups, it is inevitable that the dynamics that emerge are also complex. Uniquely, the various problems of disintegration and horizontal conflict that occurred in Indonesia after the fall of the New Order regime and its replacement by the Reformation in 1998 were very much based on racial communal feuds between communities, rather than vertical structural conflicts between the state and society.

However, what the process is and what are the causes behind the various "unrest" are interesting to analyze in more depth.

The racial communal conflict that occurred in post-Reformation Indonesia is certainly not an isolated event. There is a complex relationship between various factors behind it. Through process analysis in the "contentious politics" approach, there are at least five key processes in the context of racial communal conflict in Indonesia; The first is Identity formation (how a shared identity develops), scale shift/escalation (how a small conflict can become bigger and involve more actors), polarization (how the political space between conflicting parties expands when the parties move away from each other towards the point-extreme point), mobilization (how people who usually act indifferent can be mobilized) and actor constitution (how a previously disorganized or apolitical group turns into a single political actor) (McAdam dkk., 2003).

The two main things that later gave rise to various racial communal conflicts after the fall of the Soeharto government were the phenomena of democratization and decentralization which were not accompanied by efforts to work holistically on these two agendas. This is made worse by the condition of the country which is still weak and unstable after the government transition. So this later became a trigger for various racial communal problems which for some time after the 1998 Reformation erupted in several regions in Indonesia. In this article, we will discuss more specifically various racial communal conflicts in areas outside Java. Taking this spatial context was carried out on the grounds that the final aim of the article was to analyze whether the various conflicts that occurred were related to the construction of the Indonesian National narrative which did not accommodate various communities outside Java, or in short, that so far standardization and indicators Indonesian nationalism is still dominated by the majority narrative (Javacentric).

The communal racial conflict that occurred outside Java after the 1998 Reformation was certainly political in nature, but the relationship was indirect. The rioters (actors) involved were not middle-class democracy activists or urban workers, but members of local communities who declared themselves driven by their racial, ethnic, and religious identities (van Klinken, 2007). It could be said that this communal conflict is not actually the result of people's complaints, but rather is the result of mobilization by strong local patrons who compete each other (McAdam dkk., 2003).

Furthermore, there is a factor or assumption that violence seems very normal in Indonesian culture. In a social psychology approach, the phenomenon of violence in Indonesia can be said to be xenophobia (excessive fear of foreigners or people outside the group, who are considered different or unknown) which appears as a logical consequence of social cohesion (the ability of a society or group to maintaining strong unity and togetherness in order to achieve common goals) between communities in Indonesia (Colombijn, 2001). In short, a very strong

social identity accompanied by a tendency to see people outside that identity as if they were no longer human. The combination of the two is the root of all kinds of violence in Indonesia. If this is the case, the heterogeneity of the Indonesian community further justifies this.

The greater freedom of the press and journalism after reformation also directly influences the formation of communal violence and conflict. Moreover, this reality is also coupled with the symptoms of modernity which have given birth to new communication technologies such as the internet and social media (Bräuchler, 2003). These various advances also help produce meanings which, in conditions where society is not yet ready, can complicate the dynamics of conflict (Eriyanto, 2003).

Indonesia's condition, which is still weak in terms of legitimacy after the transition of government (1998 Reformation), has once again become a gap that has given rise to racial communal conflicts and national disintegration. Ethnic movements do not emerge by themselves and then weaken the nation-state, but rather a weakly legitimized nation-state has given rise to ethnic-racial movements that offer new forms of political community (Brown, 2002). Brown further stated that the weakening of nationalism and the resulting strengthening of communal identity was the result of the development of three things; the increasingly rapid flow of democratic ideas, the existence of patrimonial politics (father's inheritance/genetic politics), and the loss of trust in the promises of justice made by the state elite.

Deconstructing the Indonesian Nationalism Paradigm: Myth and Exclusion?

Today's nationalism seems to be "finished" in the sense that it is limited to the idea of nationality based on conditions of shared fate in the past (as Otto Bauer and Ernest Renan said). It seems as if there are symptoms of a simplification of the meaning of nationalism among most of the Indonesian society. This is certainly dangerous, especially if the simplification of meaning is only based on opinions believed by the majority. Of course, many problems will arise if there is no further discourse about how to read nationalism "today" according to the relevant context and spirit of the times (*zeitgeist*) (Hariyono, 2011).

Indonesian nationalism is like air, where everyone can live in it. That's roughly what Sukarno said long before Indonesia became independent. This does sound cliché. This means that if the meanings of nationalism are full of figures of speech and hyperbole, if they are not balanced by continuing to be translated according to the applicable context of the times, they will only lead to a culture of fossilized meanings without practical skills. In the end, nationalism will only be considered an obsolete item, a myth or fairy tale that comes from the past which was deliberately created as a basis for despair over the diversity of conditions of the Indonesian nation (Kanisius, 2014).

The dominance of mainstream narratives about nationalism should be balanced with alternative narratives that are fresher, more real, easier to understand and embody. Especially in

an era that is so different like today. If during the national movement, nationalism was used as a synthesis to unite all revolutionary forces (*samenbundelling van alle revolutionaire krachten*) to expel the invaders as a common enemy of the Indonesian nation, it is very natural and understandable that the use of heroic diction and hyperbole is very effective in fueling the fire of the spirit of struggle (Soekarno, 2018). However, today's conditions are very different, which must then be translated into the common enemy of the Indonesian nation. We are faced with issues of character crisis, group arrogance, mental inferiority, tolerance between groups, identity politics and the meaning of democracy that has gone too far to become liberal. This means that nationalism must exist not as an exclusive and fairy-tale item, but it must again be reinterpreted as a force to raise awareness and the power of the people to resolve the current problems above. If necessary and necessary, deconstruction of the paradigm of the meaning of nationalism must also be carried out to redefine nationalism in the context of the spirit of the times. The application, in terms of national insight, is that discourse about nationalism must be built, not just presenting nationalism as a ready-made and finished item (without any room to deconstruct old views about it) (Azzahra & Santoso, 2023).

Critical Reflection on Indonesian Nationalism: A "Joint Project" Out of the Stagnation of the National Narrative

Continuing the discussion in the previous sub-chapter, there is still a lot of homework to re-produce alternative and contextual narratives about nationalism so as not to stop at the same mainstream narratives. Even if necessary, efforts must be made to form a space for discourse and deconstruction of the nationalist paradigm. This needs to be done so that there is no fossilization of nationalism instead of stagnation of the narrative about nationalism. Of course, this will be very detrimental and threaten the integrity, sovereignty, and progress of the Indonesian nation (Aisy dkk., 2021).

This has been proven in the context of case studies of communal (racial) violence/conflict in the post-1998 Reformation period. Various horizontal conflicts occurred and involved cross-ethnic communities who were both part of the Indonesian nation (even these incidents occurred after more than 50 years of Indonesia independence). Apart from several trigger factors which have also been explained clearly in sub-chapter 1, on the other hand this shows that there are still very large gaps in the Indonesian Nationality frame. That Indonesia consists of various tribes, races, religions and groups, is a fact that should not need to be debated (Utami dkk., 2024).

The real problem is how to redefine the idea of nationalism (Redefine our nationalism). Borrowing from Ben Anderson's analysis of the phenomenon of the nation, he defines the nation as "*imagined communities*". According to Ben, a nation is an imagined community because its members can never meet and get to know each other in person. However, they have a sense of

unity and shared identity because they imagine themselves as part of the same community (Anderson, 2020; Wulandari dkk., 2021).

This means that the heterogeneity of the Indonesian nation is not a problem if we borrow Ben's analysis of nationalism. In fact, nationalism must be reflected and reinterpreted as not just a myth from the past, but a joint project in the present and the future. A joint project that must be carried out and held accountable by all components of Indonesian society as one and the same imagined community. The question is, what is the joint project for? With awareness of resolving various national problems such as character crises, group arrogance, mental inferiority, intolerance between groups, identity politics and the meaning of democracy that has gone too far to become liberal (Ekaprasetya dkk., 2021).

CONCLUSION

This article is an effort to re-open space for critical reflection on Indonesian nationalism, especially in the post-1998 reform context, which was accompanied by the occurrence of various racial and communal conflicts in several regions in Indonesia. After the fall of the New Order regime, Indonesia experienced a transition process that not only involved political change, but also faced more complex social dynamics. One prominent phenomenon is the occurrence of horizontal disintegration in a multiracial society. The emerging communal racial conflicts, especially outside Java, illustrate the tensions that arise from social instability and the state's weakness in managing diversity. This conflict is not only driven by structural political factors, but also by racial and ethnic identity factors which are exacerbated by inequality in the national narrative that has been dominant.

The main factor behind these communal conflicts is the phenomenon of democratization and decentralization which is not accompanied by adequate attention to the unification of Indonesia's ethnic and cultural diversity. When the newly formed state and government are not strong enough to provide legitimacy and control, local groups who are alienated or feel marginalized begin to raise the issue of their identity as a form of resistance. Mobilization by competing local patrons and the influence of increasingly free mass media exacerbate social polarization, which in turn fuels violence. This condition indicates that the nationalism that has been built so far is not able to cover all levels of society, especially those outside Java (which has so far been dominated by the majority narrative).

Indonesian nationalism, as explained in this article, requires deconstruction to realign with existing social realities. Nationalism, which was previously often understood as a utopian and heroic concept, has apparently not been able to provide enough space for the diversity that exists in Indonesia. Many people consider nationalism to be a myth or just a fairy tale from the past, which only unites the nation in the context of the struggle against colonialism but fails to

answer national challenges in this modern era. In this regard, this article concludes the importance of a more inclusive redefinition of nationalism, and no longer focuses on a narrow exclusive concept, but rather as a joint project to overcome complex social problems, such as character crises, identity politics, and intolerance between groups.

This reflection on nationalism as a "joint project" is very important, as an effort to continue to make us aware that Indonesia's diversity is a reality that must be accepted and managed wisely. As according to Benedict Anderson, a nation is an imagined community, where its members cannot always meet or get to know each other in person, but they have a strong sense of unity. In the Indonesian context, heterogeneity should not be seen as a barrier, but rather as the basis of dynamic nationalism. Therefore, Indonesian nationalism must be understood as a collective agreement that continues to develop, not as a static idea based only on experience.

This article underlines that the meaning of Indonesian nationalism must be continuously evaluated and updated so that it remains relevant to the challenges of the times. This process requires an open space for discourse, where various alternative views and narratives can develop without being trapped in outdated, let alone feudal, understandings. In this way, nationalism will not only be an empty narrative that has no impact but will become a force that moves the Indonesian nation to face existing national problems. In this process, every element of society/citizens, regardless of ethnicity, race, religion or class, has the same responsibility to maintain and strengthen a sense of unity and integrity based on mutual respect and understanding of diversity.

Lastly, there is no ivory that is not cracked, and this article is no different. However, hopefully this can contribute to the process of writing and redefining our history (the Indonesian nation) so that future generations will never be uprooted from existing historical roots and can face each era more wisely based on extensive insight into the past. and deep.

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