



Identity Politics and National Integration: A Case Study of the Sunni-Shia Conflict in Sampang, 2012

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Abstract

This research attempts to examine the identity politics that occurred in the Sunni-Shia conflicts in Sampang, Madura. This conflict was based on religious identity that is used as a force in exerting pressure on different groups. On the other hand, national integration is needed as a form of acknowledging and accommodating differences through policies. Integration must be a two-way adaptation process involving changes in values, norms and behaviors. This study aims to determine whether the Sunni-Shia conflict in Sampang which is motivated by identity politics has now reached the direction of national integration or not. David Miller's theory of identity politics and Chantal Lacroix's national integration was used in this study. The methodology used is qualitative specifically with a case study approach. The findings showed that the Sunni-Shia conflict in Sampang has been seen on integration of Tajul Muluk's attitude and his followers' decision to leave their faith and return to the doctrines of the majority community, Sunni. This makes the absence of a two-way adaptation process appear as one group abandoned their beliefs and followed the wishes of the majority. The role of the state in fighting for freedom of religion and belief in Indonesia was very weak even though the constitution in Indonesia guarantees freedom of religion. Therefore, the application of state efforts should continually be controlled.

Keywords: Sunni-Shia, identity politics, national integration, Sampang, Indonesia

Introduction

Currently, the policy regarding “diversity” management has become an interesting or even debatable topic to be discussed. One of the issues is political recognition. It is due to the demand of

individual awareness to continuously elaborate their particular identities. Issues along with primordial identity such as nation, ethnicity and religion.[1]

Now the phase of nationalism revolves around the issues of domestic agitation. In other words,

the nation-state has become a source of nationalism however it is now experiencing demands from the lower classes of society. The collapse of an authoritarian rule not only reduces the level of political stability, increases crime, but also opens up various components of society to demand justice. These demands are carried out in groups. Moreover, group demands used the instrument of violence to spread threats against other groups that are believed to have crossed ideologies or interests. Therefore, the pace of democratization has stalled and it is in danger of being frozen (frozen democracy).[2]

The collapse of the New Order regime created major changes not only in the life of the nation but also in the life of being within the Indonesian state. One of the fundamental changes can be seen from the change of political structure from authoritarian to democratic.[3] Besides, the applied democratic system also brought significant implications for all citizens. Therefore, minority groups who were shackled by their constitutional rights during the New Order regime appeared to claim their equal treatment like the majority did. One of the rights demanded by them is the right to be free in choosing religion and belief.

The position of a multicultural and heterogenic nation often leads the nation to phenomenal conflict and violence among the society. It

is crucial that people experience diversity within Indonesia due to the diverse variable often involved into some misunderstandings, conflict and violence. While, Religion became one of the causes of conflict. Religion is also a social element that has a high level of sensitivity. Its movements are based on the name of identity that have been going on for a long time. The demands of these groups vary, but center around the right to receive equal treatment, to obtain representation, and the right to state acknowledgement of its existence. [4]

Research Problem

The involvement of religious factors in conflict, or inter-religious conflict, has lead to many questions and concerns at the same time since religion is actually intended to create love. However, it is also involved in the conflict. In the state's construction, in SARA (racists/discrimination on *Suku* or ethnic/tribe, *Ras* or race, *Agama* or religion and *Antar golongan* or groups), religion is positioned negatively as the only factor causing conflict that can create social disintegration problems. It can be seen from what happened in Sampang, Madura. This became a menace to the society as assimilation and segregation between each group was balanced unsustainability.

In recent years, Indonesia has often faced sets of problems which led the majority group to comit violence since

they feel it theologically correct. The difference in beliefs of *Sunnis* and *Shia* can be taken as the example of it. They both are considered as a heresy form rather than a diversity of belief. The constitution agreement or legalization were not used in this case as a critical reflection in facing the diversity.

The ideological contradictions between *Sunni* and *Shia* at political nuances have led to several violent conflicts. Indeed it is because of the earlier history of its birth where it is happened based on the struggle for power (political factors). The relationship between history and the condition of the two major currents have become a trigger for conflict nowadays. The existence of *Shia* groups in Indonesia has not been welcomed by some *Sunni* groups. Moreover, *Shia* is presumed to have been perverted from Islam, and hence contribute to disintegration.

The *Sunni-Shia* conflict that occurred in Sampang 2012 did not only have a physical and psychological impact on *Shia* groups who were the objects of attack by anarchist mobs. But also, became the focus of judgmental of perverted thought spread in the national public discussions. The various impacts that have occurred as a result of this conflict are not only loss of housing and ownership, but also loss of identity and citizenship rights in embracing religion and carrying out worship. From the problems that have been mentioned,

this research will look at whether the *Sunni-Shia* conflict in Sampang, which was motivated by identity politics, has now reached the direction of national integration.

Theoretical Basis

Identity Politics

David Miller in his book *Citizenship and National Identity* (2000) showed clearly how important it is to understand the issue of identity in politics that has grown in the last decade. Regarding the role of identity in politics, Miller writes as follows:

One of the most striking images of current politics is the demands of various cultural groups for political recognition and affirmation of their distinct identities.[5]

Demands for change and the struggle for recognition of differences are becoming more widely recognized and being “legitimate” creates a political struggle. Miller uses the terms “politics of recognition” and “politics of identity” (Identity Politics) to define the same phenomenon. That is, a politics which aims is to demand and open oneself to validate the presence and to give equal recognition to groups with different identities. Thus, the minority group gets the same recognition and treatment as the majority group.

Identity based groups felt that they have been excluded from the political arena or formal institutions. Besides, they felt neglected in policies made by

decision-makers at both the national and local levels. They have been treated unfairly by the prevailing system-even of a democratic system. Although both *Sunni* and *Shia*, are group markers, they still have two different tasks. Difficulties create a socio-cultural burden and citizenship of enduring a formal legal burden (many people are not recognized or do not receive citizenship status even though they were born in the country).

For Miller, it is not a universal truth that groups with different identities must get political recognition as bearers of that identity. However, a member can have multiple identities, be a member of a group, and be a citizen. Besides, concerning the politics of confession, three stages can be carried out: (1) understanding; (2) evaluation or assessment; (3) practical support. It is not difficult to understand a different identity or the demands of a group with a different identity. However, evaluating it, letting alone providing support, are two other things because this will talk about the level of positive-negative values and related to basic values in the local community.

National Integration

Chantal Lacroix have viewed the policies that exist in England and Germany towards immigrants. The policy over there is based on the assumption that integration is a one-way process. It is where immigrants are expected to be able to integrate with

existing community cultures without reciprocity. Lacroix himself argued that integration should be a two-way adaptation process that involves changing values, norms, and behavior for both newcomers and members of the existing society.[6]

From Lacroix's point of view, it can be implemented that Integration allows for two-sided changes, not only one-sided. To achieve national integration, it not only requires newcomers to adapt and merge into the dominant identity, but also the existing society must respect newcomers or the identity of newcomers so that there will be a reciprocal relationship. The differences that exist must be accommodated by the local government through the policies issued.

Meanwhile, according to Nazaruddin Sjamsuddin, integration is a process that is not only related to the factors that affect the integration process, but also the factors that determine the process. Sjamsuddin defined political integration as an integration process that contains political weight. In other words, this process is political. To implement political integration, elite and mass elements should eliminate the existing differences in the influential and the influenced group. In other words, political integration involves two problems (1) how to make people submit to and obey legal demands, (2) how to increase the normative

consensus governing people's political behavior.[7]

Discussion

Sunni-Shia conflict in Sampang

One of Islamic theology streams that has become the center of attention is the birth of the *Shia*. It often gets claim to be heretical because they are considered to have deviated from the Islamic doctrines of *Ahlussunah Wal-jamaah* (Sunni Islam). History also recorded that there were two major sects in Islam often involved in conflict and violence between one another, *Sunni* and *Shia*. Their doctrines of Islamic theology have never been able to be harmonized. In other words, they always been involved in conflicts as we can see in Middle Eastern countries, exactly in Iraq and Lebanon.[8]

Although *Shia* theology in Indonesia is not very popular, as a doctrine or sect of *Shia* it is very interesting to analyze thoroughly. This is because *Shia* is a minority group in Islam who receive discriminatory treatment from the majority group in Indonesia. According to A. Hasyimy in his book, he said that *Shia* and *Sunni* had been fighting for influence and power since the beginning of their history.

A. Hasyimy also argued that early history of the conflict between *Sunnis* and *Shia* was originally politically based. However, gradually, it became a conflict based on faith background,

tradition, philosophy, and Sufism, even though occasionally its political face showed itself.[9] The same thing was conveyed by Mushadi that the emergence of *Shia* groups originated from differences in political interests. This doctrinal justification only emerged later when followers felt the need to gain religious legitimacy.[10]

In Indonesia, the causes of *Sunni* and *Shia* conflict occurred in Sampang. It began from family problems that extend to community / communal issues. This problem then spread to issues of ideology and identity of religious groups. Different views, perceptions and attitudes are the key issues for both of them to fight for the interests of their respective versions of true Islamic identity and belief.[11] The disputes that occurred initially were just family conflicts but developed into conflicts of understanding. The link between family disputes and differences in understanding has led to a multi-complex conflict in Sampang.[12]

The arrival of *Shia* Islamic doctrines itself in Omben sub-district, Sampang began with KH. Makmun around the 1980s. He received guests, namely his friends who had just arrived from Iran. Carrying a picture of Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the Iranian revolution in 1979. This friend's story made KH. Makmun interested in studying *Shia* deeper. By the coming of the YAPI Islamic Boarding School in Bangil, KH. Makmun got a lot of

knowledge about *Shia* doctrines. He then sent his three children, Iklil Al-Milal, Tajul Muluk, and Roisul Hukama to the YAPI Islamic boarding school in Bangil, as the center of *Shia* doctrines in East Java, to learn more about *Shia*.

The beginning of conflict was when Tajul Muluk returned from his studying. The religious preaching brought by Tajul Muluk from the YAPI and Arab Islamic boarding schools made a difference with the *Sunni* concept. Coupled with the interpersonal conflicts that occurred with Tajul and Roisul Hukama plus personal reasons, the feud -between these siblings- was also triggered by the competition of the influence of power on their respective congregations.[13]

Tajul was more aggressive in carrying out his *Shia* preaching, while Roisul felt defeated by his brother's preaching. This made Roisul return to *Sunni* and confront his brother. Roisul then approached the *Sunni*'s Clerics in his area who had disliked Tajul's preaching, which they regarded as heretical.

Apart from the matters of mazhab belief, *Shia* followers also perform several different rituals of worship and traditions. Such as not straightening down the arms when praying. In implementing the Ramadan fasting, the beliefs regarding breaking the fast was also different. Additionally, the Prophet's birth celebration (Maulid) is different with the tradition of *Sunni*

groups. Unlike the *Sunni* who always Celebrate the Prophet Birth in their own homes, *Shia* groups celebrate it together in their mosques.

Physical violence began in 2011 when Tajul Muluk was going to hold the Prophet's Maulid. The surrounding community began to react to prevent it. The people equipped with various sharp weapons were ready attack them instead. Tajul Muluk argued that his preaching was only aimed to his followers. As well as, the religious activities carried by them were only to strengthen the internal *Shia* group among themselves.[14]

At the end of 2011, the Islamic boarding school of Syiah Karang Gayam residents was burned by a mob on behalf of the *Sunni* group. This incident is the second case after the first in April 2011. The Sampang clerics and government officials arranged a closed meeting with Tajul Muluk. It had several results those are : 1) stop all activities and return to Islam / *Sunni* ideology; 2) leave (evicted) the Sampang area without compensation for existing land/assets; and 3) if the two options are not fulfilled, the *Shia* Sampang congregation must die.[15]

Until 2012 conflict and violence continued to occur against *Shia* in Karang Gayam Sampang. In mid-2012, a group of mobs who identified themselves as *Sunnis* conducted the attacks, vandalized and burned houses of *Shia* followers. In this attack, 37

houses of *Shia* followers were burned down and several *Shia* people died. These violent acts and clashes involved approximately 500 people. As a result of this uncondusive condition, at least, 83 families consisting of 349 members of the *Shia* group were expelled from their villages and until now they live in the Puspo Agro Simple Flats (Rusunawa) in Sidoarjo.[16] The Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) of East Java Province issued a fatwa number Kep-01/SKF-MUI/JTM/I/ 2012 concerning the Heresy of *Shia* doctrines. Also, Tajul Muluk was sentenced to four years in prison after being convicted of committing religious blasphemy.

The villagers' houses that had been burnt in their villages made *Shia* groups become refugees without the certainty of repatriation, either by the East Java Regional Government or the Central Government of the Republic of Indonesia. Living in Rusunawa which is only filled with a bed without a couch, and also a living room without a seat/ chair, they live in makeshift conditions. They only received compensation from the government of Rp. 750,000 per month.

The Sampang Madura incident has led various parties to participate in resolving the dispute between the two conflicting camps. The Brimob apparatus (special operations), the Police, the Regional, Provincial and Central Governments were also involved. Non-governmental

organizations are involved in advocating for *Shia* groups. The ulama/cleric forum, administrators of PCNU Sampang, MUI Sampang, and also Islamic religious institutions in Sampang were involved to discuss this conflict. According to the management of the NU Sampang branch, the Sampang clerics /ulama together with religious elements have met with hostile *Sunni* and *Shia* groups. However, this forum did not find a solution or a peaceful path, instead, it made things worse. This is because the result, the Regent and MUI Sampang asked the *Shia* group to repent and return to embracing *Sunnis*, and then they can return to their area. This is difficult for the Shi'a group to accept.

The conflict that occurred did not only have a physical, psychological, and economic impact on the *Shia* people who were the objects of attack by the anarchist mob. But also, an impact on the spread or expansion of national public discussions about *Sunni* and *Shia* who were considered to be opposites in faith. The various impacts that have occurred due to this conflict are not only loss of homes and ownership, but also loss of identity and citizenship rights in embracing religion and carrying out their worship in society.

Reflecting of Shia Sampang Advocacy

Several years after the incident occurred, at least several organizations of *Shia* advocacy members have taken various measurements to urge the

government to take steps and ensure that the return of Rusunawa-headed residents is done in a dignified manner and fulfills human rights principles. In 2017, the Minister of Religion made a disappointing statement regarding the *Sunni-Shia* conflict in Sampang. In his statement, the government has not found a solution for the *Shia* Sampang refugees who are currently residing in the Sidoarjo Rusunawa. The Minister of Religion completely handed over the matter to the regional government. According to him,

“The problem of *Shia* refugees should be handled more by the provincial government and local governments. They can continue to coordinate since the resolution of the religious group’s problems also depends on the community groups involved. Additionally, the conflict resolution requires the unity of all interested parties.”[17]

In its development, there is a tendency for hands-off efforts made by the central government, in this case, the Minister of Religion is fully handed over to the regional government. The fact is the provincial government has only provided a living quota and there has been no effort to carry out post-conflict reconciliation until today.

This is not following the mandate of Law No. 07/2012 on Social Conflict Handling, which expressly states in Article 36 paragraph (1) that the Government and Regional Governments are obliged to carry out post-conflict recovery efforts in a planned, integrated, sustainable and measurable manner; and

paragraph (2) Post-conflict recovery efforts as referred to in paragraph (1) include: a. reconciliation; b. rehabilitation; and c. reconstruction.

Therefore, various organizations of *Shia* member’s advocacy claimed at least five joint declarations entitled “*Deklarasi Bersama,*”

1. Take strategic steps in the shortest possible time to return refugees to their hometowns;
2. Restoring the rights of refugees who were forcibly removed during the eviction;
3. Providing security guarantees to post-returned refugees;
4. Recovering post-conflict social conditions in Sampang Regency and other community groups who have suffered the same fate;
5. Ensure that there will be no more expulsion of minority groups or certain communities within the Indonesian state.

Muhammad Iqbal Ahnaf stated that the conflict that occurred in Sampang was very complex because of many interests and actors involved while the current context is based only one issue, namely the issue of religion. Ahnaf described the map of actors in the conflict, namely (a) the social forces who opposed *Shia* teachings, (b) the security apparatus, (c) politicians and government bureaucracy and (d) of course Tajul Muluk himself and the civil society forces that defended him.[18]

After eight years of struggling in

displacement, on 22 September 2020, BBC News Indonesia[19] reported that hundreds of *Shia* residents from Sampang, Madura declared their commitment to renounce their faith and return to Ahlussunnah Wal Jamaah doctrines or *Sunni*. Tajul Muluk and the majority of his followers decided to abandon their faith and return to *Sunni* doctrines, which were embraced by the majority of Indonesian Muslims. Muluk said he and his followers wanted to return to the path they thought was the best way for them.

Most of the Madura's ulama/clerics asked these *Shia* followers to abandon their doctrines if they wanted to return to Madura lively and had to make baiat or pledge to become *Sunni* Muslims. Muluk and his followers have also agreed to do this, it is only a matter of waiting for the indeterminate time of the pledge because they are still waiting for an agreement from the Regent and related parties in Sampang. There are around 300 from 349 adults pledging themselves to the faith. That number is less than before, which was almost 500 people (the number who first fled from Sampang to Rusunawa Sidoarjo).

According to Tajul Muluk, this decision was best for him and his followers. The reason why it took up to eight years to revert to *Sunnism* is that according to Tajul the process of seeking and receiving is not instantaneous. Additionally, this desire is an initiative in itself, there is no

pressure from anyone. He also admitted that he found his followers disappointed because some of them had sacrificed their lives. Moreover, their property was physically injured and imprisoned. Tajul wanted to convey his hope to return to his hometown in Madura. Besides, they also wanted the Governor of East Java Regulation number 55/2012 related to "Heretical Sects" to be repealed. For them, this regulation violates freedom of religion and allows people to pursue justice into their own hands.

The *Shia* community organization (*Ormas*) in Indonesia, Ahlul Bait Indonesia (ABI) see Tajul Muluk decision was a natural thing because it is a form of religious freedom. He hopes that the decision is not made under pressure. In line with the *Shia* mass organizations, the response of the Chairman of MUI for Sampang Regency, Bukhori Maksum, responded to the decision of Muluk and his followers well. However, Bukhori could not confirm the possibility that Tajul Muluk and his followers would return to Madura since they should wait the decision of local government, ulama/clerics, MUI, and community leaders throughout Madura meeting about this matter.

Conclusion

The *Sunni-Shia* conflict in Sampang showed that the conflict is based on a certain identity, namely religion. Religion in other cases is also

often used as the main tool to obtain identity of politics and exert pressure on different groups. The differences of religious beliefs create new problems and lead to conflicts and violence that seem to get legitimacy from religion.

The involvement of religious factors in conflict raises many questions and concerns at the same time because religion whose mission is to create peace is involved in the conflict. In-state construction, SARA as the religion case is negatively positioned since it seen as the only factor of causing conflict that automatically create social disintegration problems such as what happened in Sampang, Madura. This is a threat in itself to the sustainability of identity politics in Indonesian society when it is not balanced with assimilation and shows segregation between each social group. The state should be the most responsible institution for the emergence of social conflicts because it has the authority to manage diversity both ideologically and politically. Thus, conflict through differences in religion can be minimized.

However, the fulfillment of these basic rights is still far from the norm. It must be admitted that the issue of identity politics in the last few decades has become a serious problem for the Indonesian nation even though the Indonesian nation was born from a pluralistic identity. Furthermore, maintaining the diversity tree must be

continuously echoed as a manifestation of the heterogeneity and diversity of the nation. In recent years, our country has often faced the problem of differences in beliefs that lead to acts of violence by the majority groups who feel theologically correct. The difference in belief as seen in the case of *Sunni* and *Shia* is still considered as a form of heresy rather than a diversity of schools. The constitution agreement is not used as a critical reflection in addressing the existing differences.

Theoretical implications

The demands for change and the struggle to obtain recognition for the differences between the *Shia* groups in Sampang have yet to show a bright spot. Miller uses the term “politics of recognition” to define the demand of opening oneself to accept the difference in existence and to give “equal” recognition to the different identity groups, in this case, *Sunnis*.

Shia groups in Sampang, not only lose their homes and ownership but also lose their identity and citizenship rights in embracing religion and doing their worship in society. The groups formed based on this identity also feel that they have been excluded from the political arena or formal institutions and neglected in policies made by decision-makers at both the national and local levels.

After eight years of struggling in displacement, Muluk and the

majority of his followers decided to abandon their faith and return to *Sunni* doctrines, which are embraced by the majority of Indonesian Muslims. This shows the absence and weakness of the government in finding solutions to conflicts of religious freedom. The decisions made by Tajul Muluk and his followers are the right of every citizen. However, it shows a form of the weak role of the state in fighting for the freedom of religion and belief in Indonesia. The state acts as a facilitator and mediator, the protracted settlement for up to eight years without a solution shows that the state is neglectful, fearful of the majority and weak. Therefore, it seems that it has done nothing.

As a result, the *Shia* group made the most rational choices and made compromises with the circumstances by leaving their belief and following the will of the majority. In addition, there is also no certainty of a solution to return to their hometown. Nobody can survive living in the different condition in a different social environment, in a different nature, and this has created their psychological tension.

Whereas, Miler believed that it is not a universal truth that groups with different identities must get political recognition as bearers of that identity. However, a member can have multiple identities where they are became a member of a group and be a citizen. In the politics are, recognition can be obtained based on three stages:

(1) understanding; (2) evaluation or assessment; (3) practical support. It is not difficult to accept a different identity or the demands of a group with a different identity. But, evaluating and supporting it was different thing because this will discuss the level of positive-negative values related to basic perspective of the local community.

Additionally, Lacroix believed that integration is a two-way adaptation process that involves changing values, norms, and behavior of one identity or another. To achieve national integration, everyone does not only demand a single identity to adapt and merge into the dominant identity but citizens must also respect. As the result, there will be a reciprocal relationship. The differences that exist must be accommodated by the local government through policies issued.

The problem is how to avoid the emergence of a negative collective identity without causing feelings of being ignored, excluded, or dominated by different identity groups? Scientists try to answer this question by looking at the existence of togetherness element that is not ethnic, cultural, or (sub) national. This togetherness element which is owned by members of the public in a political community does not replace existing ethnic, cultural, or sub (national) identities but rather adds or complements the existing elements. The element of togetherness that we all adhered here in Indonesia is the

constitution. David Millier believed that in a shared community, a standard of assessment and way of life is needed to be accepted by all groups with different identities or cultures. The constitution is the entire regulation that governs the binding.

The most rational solution to see the *Sunni* and *Shia* conflict in Sampang is to provide recognition and accommodation for each different identity. This is to minimize the emergence of a negative collective identity which creates a feeling of being excluded. The state is present and participates in providing legal protection. *Shia* also has the right to live in peace and to free choosing their beliefs according to the truth of their hearts. In our constitution, the state needs to monitor the implementation of religious freedom. Article 28 (e), Paragraphs 1 and 2 of the 1945 Constitution state that “Everyone is free to embrace a religion and worship according to his religion,” and “Everyone has the right to freedom of

belief, to express thoughts and attitudes according to his conscience,”

In the *Sunni-Shia* conflict in Sampang, the process of national integration may have been seen from the attitude of Tajul Muluk and his followers’ decision to abandon their faith and return to the doctrines of the majority of society. However, making reconciliation by compromising on the circumstances that happened is not something to be expected. The role of the state in fighting for the freedom of religion and belief in Indonesia seem to be weak. In the end, the state should again become the most responsible institution because they have the authority to manage the diversity of identities both ideologically and politically. With this states guarantee, conflict can be minimized. As a pluralistic nation, the state should protect minority groups who live in the society and guarantee the harmonious religious life in the frame of diversity.[]

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