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CONFLIK THEORY
AND
THE SOCIOLOGICAL DIMENTION
OF CONFLICT IN RURAL JAVA

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(M 207)

5. A BRIEF COMMENT ON THE FOUR AUTHORS' THEORY.

Coser has stressed the integrative and stabilizing aspects of social conflict. For example, interdependent conflict groups and the criscrossing of conflict lines can "sew the social system together" by cancelling each other out and preventing disintegration along one primary line of cleavage. And in a number of societies, conflict is instttutiona1ized and ritualized in ways that seem conducive to integration. From this point of view, I might say, he develops CT not as a separate theory, but as a supplementary one within the context of the integration theory or SF. Since it starts from clarifying Simmel's propositions, it seems to me that it is more psychological. Nevertheless certain concepts of his are likely workable, especially for analyzing local conflicts. For example the concept of conflict intensity.

Wertheim on the other hand, views society differently by approaching from dialectical evolutionism. Having twice, in his life, experienced revolutions (once in Russia and the second in Indonesia), he is paying much attention to the colonial period experience. His overall theory, however, except his concept of "counterpoint", is likely to be applicable only to macro level. It is difficult for example to talk about revolution in one village.

If Coser is "integration" oriented, and Wertheim is inclined to view society as a constant flux in which conflicts and frictions are integral parts of evolution process, Kriesberg in my understanding, is going nowhere. His concern is on the process of specific conflicts as such, without intending to attach to or to contradict against other theories. It is a mere categorization of the steps of the process of conflicts. As he admitted in the last parts of his book: "This book has bean about specific conflicts, about struggles, fights, and wars. We have analyzed them in terms of stages and steps. In a way, this may seem obvious. That does not make it true, nor does it make it false. ……. The approach is too general". (Kriesberg, 1973; p.268).

Like Coser and Kriesberg, Dahrendorf seems to have no attention to colonial period experience. But unlike them, in developing his "coercion" theory, he tries to resolve the contradiction between SF and CT in his own way. In his theory, however, he reverses the Marxian chain of causation and considers economic factors as derivative from the unequal distribution of authority. But he does not demonstrate convincingly why authority is prior to the relation to the means *of* production. Secondly, Dahrendorf defines social class rather differently as being an organized or unorganized collectivities or individuals as share manifest or latent interest arising from and related to the authority structure of "imperatively coordinated association (i.e. association in which its members are subject to authority relation). But he does not show how to identify other types of conflict group besides these "social classes". To paraphrase his definition of social class, it is either a quasi group or an interest group (unorganized or organized). A group becomes an interest group if it is organized, and social conflict arise when there are two opposing interest groups. But an interest group emerges because of the differential distribution of authority. Authority relations only exist in an association which is organized. Therefore, in simple wording, the notion of social conflict in Dahrendorf's sense is, the conflict between two organized groups within a larger organized group. And therefore, his model is less applicable for rural areas especially in developing countries, than for industrial societies.

[The late President Sukarno defined "Marhaen", instead of "proletariat", as consisting of all of those who were improverished by colonialism. Marhaen class thus includes the large mass of not only factory workers but also farmers, farm-laborers, artisans, traders, fishermen, despite their ownership of the means of production, -- as long as they are those who were impoverished by colonialism. Rather vague, indeed. But it is simply because it is difficult in rural Indonesia to identify social class in

Marxian sense]

III. SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF RURAL CONFLICT ON JAVA AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP 10 CERTAIN THEORETICAL PRECEPTS.

In the preceding chapter I have discussed conflict theories by merely exposing selected authors' positions in a superficial, brief, and simple way. The purpose of such an exposition is simply to get a more or less overall idea about the notion of social conflict. In the following discussion, I am not going to apply all aspects of the theories exposed, nor to follow one author consistently, but rather to some aspects of social conflict on Java by using the relevant concepts and combined with my own view. But before I discuss these problems, first I would like to discribe, in brief, the overall context of the Javanese world view.

1. The Javanese world view.

To define explicitly the Javanese world view in one statement is very difficult. In the course of long history, indeed, changes have occurred, but in order to get a real understanding for current phenomena, it is necessary to have an insight of the enduring and frequently manifest residue of traditional Javanese culture.

According to Benedict Anderson, based on his study on Javanese "wayang" philosophy, (wayang = shadow-play which performs the modified Indian epics Mahabharata and Ramayana), an attribute of the traditional Javanese world view is its sense of tension between opposites. This world view has been epithomized by Claire Holt, as edited by Anderson, as that of "a stable world based on conflict". From this comes the idea of "tolerance", or the ability to accomodate and tolerate conflicting moralities which has become almost a necessity in the Javanese context (Anderson, B, R, O'G., 1965; p. 1-6). Some foreign observers were fond of referring to the Javanese "syncretism" and the Javanese "sense of relativism", but since the outbreak of the Revolution, it has become common and popular to speak of the "tolerance" of

the Javanese as their characteristic. Tolerance for the sake of harmony. And "yet, the sense of underlying instability is no less important than the sense of permanence. If a wheel spins eternally on a fix axis, is it changing or uncharged??". (Anderson, B.R.O'G., ibid). I agree with Anderson that besides the feeling of harmony. The Javanese traditional view is that the teeming multiplicity is ordered by clearly marked dichotomies. So there is, for example, the fundamenta1 cleavage between Left and Right, between Good and Evil, between "Kurawa" and "Pendawa" (conflicting groups in the wayang world), which reflects the dualities of the universe: male and female, day and night, young and age, etc. All necessary and complementary to one another. But I do not agree with one of Anderson's statement that in Javanese civilization, "there is no clear line of separating the idea of the good and the beautiful … Accordingly, what is beautiful is good" (Anderson, Ibid; p.24). It is on the implication of the fact that the same Javanese word "sae" is used for both good and beautiful that Anderson based his reason. Perhaps he does not know that it is used only in a particular case and occasion. There are still some different words used for each of them. It is surprising that Anderson whose work is based on "wayang" which has so a rich vocabulary, had missed this understanding.

In a sense, perhaps, the traditional Javanese view is "structural functionalism". For the Javanese, as I agree with Anderson, the cosmos is not only teeming with life and living energy, but is also elaborately ranked and ordered. This hierarchical feeling is also expressed in the fundamental and unique structure of the Javanese language which employ two radically different basic vocabularies – "krama" and "ngoko" --- According to whether the person addressed is higher or lower than the speaker on the social ladder. Further more, though Java has never had a caste system, the idea of caste also exists with the greater emphasis upon function than on birth. The term "satria" and "brahmana" are still popular among the old generation of today. But they are used as morality symbols rather than as referring to blood. Even today, we can still hear people saying: “we have to behave as a "satria",

despite they are farmers. The idea of unequal hierarchical order involves the notion that each rank or level has its own peculiar functions within the social structure. Each order is dependent on all the other. If one falls to function, all the other suffer its consequences. Thus, in the Javanese traditional view, the King communicates with the supernatural powers and secures their benevolence; the "brahmana" performs the rituals of the state and ransmits the culture of the community to the next generation; the "satria" have the duty of administering the government and protecting the state and the people from any attack and difficulties; the trader maintains economic prosperity; and the artisans construct the material apparatus of the civilization. Hence, the idea of morality follows. That is, since all functions are interrelated, social approval for individuals within each order depends on how adequately they fulfil their order's function. Thus, a "satria" who behaves perfectly in the artisan "manner" is a "bad satria", regardless of the good work that he may in fact do. So for example, a rice buyer who behaves as, or lives in the life-style of a trader, is a better member of the society than a village chief who behaves in a trader's way.

Closely related to the ideal of tolerance in Javanese society is the value placed on the avoidance of open conflict. As noted by Daniel Lev, "With a deep sense of relativism, or, as Anderson has argued, tolerance, the Javanese are inclined to exceeding care in their personal relations, to caution, diplomacy, reserve, and respect for social status. Every effort is made to avoid personal conflict and, when it occours, to cover it over by refined techniques of social intercourse pending the least damaging and humiliating solution" (Lev, in Claire Holt ed., 1972; p.283). When disputes occur, in the village fcr example, attempts are generaly made to handle them at personal level, through referral to a frend or village elder, or to the Lurah (village chief), who acts as a conciliator. Ideally, the conciliator is attempting to "de-ideologize" the conflict by emphasizing shared interests, with the hope that those who are in conflict win came up with a compromise.

One important thing that most foreign observers fail to

comprehend, perhaps unconsciously, is what I may call the "indirectness" character of the Javanese. In simple wording, it may be described as follows: If a Javanese says "Yes", it means "perhaps": if he says "perhaps", he means "no": and if he says "no", he is not a Javanese! This is based on a value in which. for particular cases, "directness" is considered improper. "Tunjuk hidung", or pointing to the nose, a metaphoric term for directness, in a conflict situation, is considered as crude behavior. When personal conflict occurs, one will not accuse directly toward the opponent, instead he will find a scapegoat to whom he will attack with such a language or action that is understandable only to those to whom the attack is really referred. And it is the same so in group conflict. There are many cases, one of which I will show later in this paper, which can be understood only by this explanation.

2. The Social-Cultural Division.

It is common understanding today that basic to contemporary Javanese society *are* distinct cultural orientations, which are generally considered to be devisable into three main groupings: the "priyayi", "santri", and "abangan" (Foreign observers generally rely heavily on the work of Geertz, "The Religion of Java", 1960).

Of course they are terms the Javanese themselves apply and thus representing the bases of actual grouping. Hence, as Geertz argued, they are not constructed types. But if dealt with as truly distinct entities, they must be viewed as analytical construct of an ideal nature.

"Priyayi" refers to those people associated with the hereditary aristocracy, with roots in the old Hindu-Javanese courts, whom the dutch used in the colonial civil service and who now form the basis of the Javanese bureucracy. Generally characterized as possesing a sense of refined etiquette and an intuitive mysticism, the priyayi are considered to place a religious emphasis on the Hindu elements in the javanese syncretism and to occupy a position of status as Java's social elite (see Geertz, 1960;

p.227-352).

The "santri" orientation, which is based on the Islamic suctradition in Javanese society, was traditionally associated with coastal trading peoples, but now a pervasive element in Java. Those adhering to it may be characterized by their enphasis on the Islamic aspects of Javanese syncretism and a tendency to reject pre-Istamic elements as impure (see Geertz, 1960; p. 121-224).

The "Abangan" orientation is characterized by a complex of spirit be'-efs and ritual "slametan" feasts and represents a stress on the animistic elements in the rather loose system of Javanese syncretism. These adhering to it are mostly peasants (see Geertz, 1960; p. 11-118).

Such are the descriptions of the three groups as described by Geertz. If we da not have a deeper insight, however, it wil1 be misleading. As I mentioned above, in a sense, Geertz' distinction between these three groups is a mere construct. My opinion is based on Geertz' emphasis that abangan orientation is basically animism. But, as I understand it, the term 'abangan' only emerged when Islam came to Java. It refers to those who accepted Islam with reserve, as contrasted to, or distinct from, santri who adopted Islam strictly purely. The emphasis, therefore, is that abangan is a religious orientation in conjunction with the acceptance of Islam. Here the distinction is in terms of religion in a strict sense. In this sense, the distinction between priyayi and the other two groups is not relevant. Priyayi, having the main identity of, basically, noble blood, is thus a social layer which constitutes a distinct "class" as opposed to "non-priyayi". It may be true that the peasants are mostly animistic, and priyayi Hinduistic. But in terms of religion, many priyayis consider themselves as abangan, or as santri either. Hence there two axes. Santri versus abangan, or, priyayi versus non-priyayi. In the Javanese perception, there is no such thing as priyayi versus abangan. Nor priyayi versus santri. It is true, *of* course, that during and after the Dutch colonial period, the term priyayi also refers

to civil servants *of* the goverment regardless of birth. But this is precisely only confirming the concept that the priyayi constitute the ruling class. This, in turn, does not imply that the abangan is the governed class. Therefore, Geertz' concept is a mere construct. Even if it is so, when we try to apply his concept of "priyayi vs. abangan", for example, then we will find difficulties. Suppose we consider a village as a closed unit. Then the Lurah, or the "governer" of the village, is a priyayi since he is the ruler, the elite. But at the same time, in terms of religion, he may be an abangan, or a santri. And he is always a farmer since he has to operate his "bengkok" sand or the land provided by the village for him as salary during his incumbency of Lurah position. Therefore, it is difficult to say to which group then he belongs.

However, as long as it is provided by such understanding as mentioned above, Geerti' analytical construct is useful.

3. The Sources and Bases of Conflict in Rural Areas.

Whether it is considered as three or two main groupings, two axes or multiple ones of opposition, it is those religious-cultural cleavage that formed the modern one. After Indonesian independence, with the attempt at setting up a par1ementary state, political organizations were introduced and expanded to the village populace. It is during this politicization process that the transformation of "quasi-group" into "interest-group" were carried out. Thus, a self-conscious, ideologically based, and originally national (supra-village) politic in the from of political parties came to be imposed on previously more diffuse local cultural orientation. Of course, this gives rise to a new *organizational* framework where village issues came to be structured within, and fought out along, opposing lines among political parties. And yet, the old cultural cleavage was made more articulated by the fact that the nature of village leadership positions tended to mirror these cultural/political groupings, *By* way of background, the Indonesian goverment administration

operates through a series of ministries which have branches at all level from Jakarta at the top down to "Kelurahan" (the smallest unit of administration, Desa). The Ministry of Home Affair is of primary importance in rural administration, and the services of most ministries must work through its offices, and most officials at the village level are subject to it, Officials allied to the Ministry of Home Affairs in Java before 1965, are generally priyayi-syncretists and oriented to the PNI (Partai Nasional Indonesia). So most of the Lurah (village chief) has generally been allied to the PNI or other non-Islamic political organization. Whereas another village functionary, the "Modin", or religious official, whose duties concern matters relating to Islamic-law has been an important figure in the focus of Islamic identity. Major Islamic party at that time was NU (Nahdatul Ulama), whereas the Christian parties (Partai Kristen Indonesia or PARKINDO, and Partai Katholik Indonesia) are of minor importance. For the 'abangan', unfortunately, the word "abang" which means red, leads to the misjudgement that all abangan are allied to the PKI (Partai Komunis Indonesia) despite the fact that most of the PNI members are also abangan in the real Javanese sense. It was a fact that some of the PKI members are devout Moslems or devout Christians.

The most important of the village officials, the Lurah, represents a central link between members of his administrative unit and forces of the central goverment. With the increasing political organisation at the rural level his position became the focus of much political activity. The nature of the political alignment of the Lurah could serve to deepen the lines of cleavage within a village area.

By early I960's, political organization at the village level came to mean political polarization based on Islamic versus non-Islamic orientation. "Religious and cultural differences used as emblems of opposed community loyalties have increasingly become socially and politically visible" (Jay, 1963; p.104).

When the real conflict came into the open in 1965, where violence was used, the result was the total distruction of the PKI and the decreasing popularity of the PNI. This fact, however, does not mean the total crush of the abangan, nor the ascendancy of the Islamic, parties for the military then came to power. Under the "'New Order" government the political parties were regrouped into only three parties: the Golkar (Golongan Karya) to which all civil servants officially must ally; the PPP (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan) which fuses all the previous Islamic parties; and the POI (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia) which is the fusion of the previously non-lslaniic parties. In this framework, it is prohibited for the political parties to estabilish their branch organization at the village level. Their activities are limited to the third lavel i.e. the "Kabupaten", or regency, level. This regulation is intended to erase the hostility feelings among the village population deriving from the sharp hostile sentiments of political cleavage in the past. For the Golkar, however, by claiming that they are not political oriented, hence it is not a political party, and since all civil servant must ally to it, expansion of its influence can be easily carried out. Most of the Lurah of today are Golkar members.

From the short description above, it could be said that the bases and sources of conflict in rural Java are the religious-cu1tura1 sentiment. Other elements, such as land, as suggested by Margo Lyon (see, Lyon, 1970: p.45), seem to be mere issues which may, of course, be used effectively for intensifying conflict. At the present time, under the New Order government, the situation appears stable. But the remaining sentiments or feelings of hostility still exist. If ruling group, i.e. the military-backed Golkar, is considered as representing the priyayi-abangan orientation, it is now opposed, secretly or openly, by the santri-oriented PPP party. Whereas the PDI, though most of its members belong to the abangan but since it is not backed by the military, and usually considered as having associated

with the 1965 September affair, may take an attitude of silent opposition. Or in the words of Wertheim, the "counterpoint" may remain dormant behind the appearance of acceptance.

The violence of the conflict in 1965 affair where the victims were estimated as being more than that of the 3-year Vietnam War, which occured mostly in rural areas, had startled most of foreign observers. The question is why, in Javanese society whose people are long considered as being gentle, friendly, "tolerant", such a violent behavior can occur?? Coser explanation as mentioned before, may be relevant. Javanese villages are "closed corporations", thus maintaining a perpetuity of rights and membership, and limiting the privileges to insiders and discou raging close participation of members in the social relations of the larger society" (Wolff, in Patter et. al. ed., 1967: p.231). Hence, relatively they may be considered as closely-knit groups. In such groups, according to Coser, there are tendencies to suppress conflict and hostility feelings. Consequently these hostility feelings tend to accumulate and intensify. In local disputes, attempts were always made to avoid open conflict, in line with the Javanese value as noted by Daniel Lev mentioned before. But the penetration of political parties into rural areas broke down the "closed" and "corporate" nature of village organization. The accumulated feelings of hostility have channeled their outlet through political polarization. Hence, once the real conflict breaks out, it becomes violent. The remnant of the 1965 tragedy are still felt until today, and the sentiments of which may potential source of future conflict.

4. Local Conflict and A Conflict Case in a Javanese Village.

In rural villages, potential conflicting groups are relatifely abundance. But, efforts to determine the units involved in the conflict are usually faced with

difficulties because the group boundaries are often vague. People who belong to one group may have some good relationship with those of another group.It is even difficult to identify social categories which may serve as "recruiting group" or "quasi-group". People shift back and forth, tend to interact with each other and have many relations to others. In Javanese-villages for example,there are "land-owners", there are "farmers","farm-laborers", "farm-operators", "tenants", "tenant-operators", "traders", and many others. But actually, there are many people who belong to more than one category. A farmer,though he is a land-owner,iiisy participate in another's harverst serving thus as harvest-laborer.

As mentioned before, according to Coser, conflict will arise, a.o. because of scarce resources. In rural Java, since the people's livelihood is basically based on agriculture,there are three important resources namely, land, water, and job opportunities, over which people ussually competing and struggling. These are the basic sources of conflict. Traditionally, these conflicts can be resolved by the Lurah who is acting as a conciliator. During the tide of village politicization in the 1960's.

Based on the bitter experience in the past, social tensions which occur in several places deriving from the consequences of the application of agricultural new technology, are now becoming serious concern of the present government. In this connection I will discuss one case of conflict situation which I personally witness.

The place is Desa Rowosari, on the north coast of Central Java, and the time was 1974. I was then doing asurvey on RiceIntensification Program. One day I was coming to a certain ricefield where the rice were just going to be harvested by a

group of people. These people, consisting of 50 men and no women, were brought by a "penebas" from outside the village and were going to harvest 1.5 ha "sawah". Instead of using the traditional knife "ani-ani", they used sickles to harvest the paddy. "Penebas" is a rice buyer in the socailed "tebasan" rice selling system, that is, where the rice were sold in wholesale lot just before the harvest and where the buyer must harvest at their own expense. At that time the 'penebas' was standing beside the village rnad and I was just beginning ta Interview him when suddenly another group of people attacked him. In the meantime, the harvesters being the penebas' gang, came to defend their master, and groups fight began. It was lasting for a few minutes before the police came and ceased the fight. Seriously hurt the penebas was then brought to the hospital.

When I interviewed one of the attackers the next day, he explained that the reason for taking physical action is because the local harvest-1aborers, of whom he is one, have lost their tolerance. Traditionally the farmers allow anyone who wants to joint the harvest so that everyone in the village may benefit, however a bit, from the wealth of the village. But now many of the farmers sell their rice by tebasan system, thus reducing the opportunity for the landless people to get a share. Because the "penebas" being a business-man, ussually limits the number of harvert-laborers to minimize his expenses. In doing this, however, formally he was still taking care of the local people by allowing some of them to joint the harvest. But gradually he reduces the number of those who are allowed to joint until finally he totally rejects them. Therefore the local people lost their temper.

When I interviewed the owner of the land whose name is Pak Kromo this farmer explained that he sold his rice to the penebas because he tried to reduce his loss, but at the same time he did not want to lose his face. In the village, allowing everyone to joint one's own harvest is considered as obligation. With the growing number of laborers, however, it becomes a more and more heavy burden. But to limit the number of harvester means to deny his

social obligation, thus reducing his status. So the only way to lighten his burden is to sell his rice to the penebas.

Now, in the above simple case, the question is why the local harvest-laborers attack the penebas instead of taking action toward the farmer?? Is it not the Farmer who is to be blamed?? When I asked this question to one of the attackers, he replied:

"Pak Kromo (the land-owner) remains our “Bapak" (Father; or, patron). He will help us whenever necessary. But, by attacking the penebas, I am sure he will understand that what we mean is against him. It is net good to attack or accuse Bapak!"

Clearly, such an explanation reflects what I have mentioned before as the "indirectness" character of the Javanese. The assumption of the laborer that the farmer will understand by himself was proved to be true when Pak Kromo told me later that he will consider not to sell his rice to penebas, in the next season.

The second question is, why they use physical violence ?? First, the hostility feelings were suppressed for so long by a sort of compromise (the fact that penebas was still allowing, for some period of time, some of the local harvesters to join his harvest, is a form of compromise). So once the conflict breaks out, the outlet is violent. Secondly, since the penebas including their men were outsiders, the group boundary is very clear, so that the members of the groups participate in the conflict with almost their total personalities.

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