

ETHNIC STEREOTYPING AND INTRA-RELIGIOUS CONFLICT: THE EXPERIENCE OF MUSLIMS IN SAMBAS OF THE INDONESIAN WEST BORNEO

Syamsul Kurniawan

UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Email: syamsulkurniawan001@gmail.com

Sangkot Sirait

UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Email: sangkot.sirait@uin-suka.ac.id

Azis Muslim

UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Email: muslimtenan@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explore the impact of ethnic differences and ethnic stereotyping on the atmosphere of peace, written based on the conflict event between Muslims of different ethnicities (ethnic Malay of Sambas and ethnic Madurese) in Sambas in 1999. This paper, based on my research from 2018, is qualitative research with data obtained from observation, interviews, and documentation. Regarding the method, this research used a qualitative method that leads to a case study model as an investigative method. Meanwhile, for data analysis, the interactive data analysis method using the theory of self-categorization was employed. Based on the findings of the study, ethnic differences and stereotypes had a significant impact on the escalation of conflict between Muslims in Sambas in 1999. These ethnic differences and stereotypes essentially emerged as a consequence of the way a person or group of people of a particular ethnicity categorizes a person or group of people of another ethnicity.

Keywords: Ethnic Stereotyping; Inter-ethnic Conflict; Atmosphere of Peace

INTRODUCTION

The term conflict describes a situation in which two or more people feel incompatible or do not get along with each other (Mead, 1934). There are various types of conflict, one of which is differences between ethnic groups (Wolff, 2006), which may occur naturally as a result of different attitudes, beliefs, values, and/or needs in social life (Liliweri, 2009). Therefore, inter-ethnic conflict should be seen as something natural. So, the problem is not the

presence or absence of conflict, but how the conflict unfolds and then how to handle it: does it lead to 'violence', or 'peace'? What happened in Sambas of the Indonesian, West Kalimantan in 1999 was a valuable inter-ethnic conflict learning experience for the people of West Kalimantan and still, after twenty years, the leftover tension has not disappeared. Although not as bad as twenty years ago, the consequences of conflict are still felt to this day.

Currently, the atmosphere of peace in Sambas has not yet reached positive peace (Galtung, 1969; 2010), because the Malays in Sambas still have a negative attitude towards the ethnic Madurese. This situation not only prevents the ethnic Madurese who have been expelled from Sambas for twenty years from settling back in the region, but it also creates fear around even visiting the graves of their relatives. In fact, during the last twenty years, various efforts have been made to reconcile these two ethnic groups (Fahham, 2010; Mochtar, 2007), however, it seems they have not succeeded in overcoming post-conflict realities and difficulties.

Although for a while, open conflict did not occur between the two ethnic groups, that does not mean that the relations between them have completely improved. At the minimum, there is an impression that until now, Sambas is an unsafe area for ethnic Madurese. In contrast to Singkawang, which was once part of the administrative area of Sambas Regency, now after being separated from Sambas, it has become a very tolerant city not only in terms of ethnicity, but also between religions (Muhtifah et al., 2021). Why is the impact of this inter-ethnic conflict in Sambas so lasting that it is still felt after twenty years? Undeniably, the inter-ethnic conflict in Sambas, according to Galtung, falls into the middle-level category (Galtung, 2004), a massive communal conflict. It is considered so because it involved not only the masses from the two ethnic groups, but also resulted in the loss of life and destruction of property from both sides, as well as severe damage to public facilities, etc. (Cahyono et al., 2008).

Even though both ethnic Malay and Madurese are Muslims, they murdered each other in the 1999 Sambas conflict, when there was no longer any mutual trust between them. This was exacerbated by the stereotype that the presence of the other group is an 'obstacle'. The point here is that differences and stereotypes in the inter-ethnic context can trigger conflict, even though both groups embrace the same religion. It makes the inter-ethnic conflict in Sambas much more complex than the one that occurred in Ambon, which Tomas Lindgren associates with intra-religious conflicts (Lindgren, 2018). This is what this work aims to describe.

Meanwhile, multiple works reveal how the inter-ethnic conflict in Sambas

emerged twenty years ago because of kinship issues, primordial grudges, and the emergence of intolerant attitudes, as well as other factors related to economic problems, social mobility, and politics (Alqadrie, 1999; 2015; Djuweng, 1997; Klinken, 2007; Patebang and Sutrisno, 2000; Saad, 2003; Schulze, 2017; Sudagung, 2001; Bahari, 2008). In this article, I do not deny these factors, but instead reinforce them while adding another factor that has been barely addressed in all previous works: stereotyping. This paper, written based on my research findings since 2018, is classified as qualitative research, with the data obtained from observation, interviews, and documentation. Regarding the method, this research used a qualitative method that leads to a case study model as an investigative method (Cresswell, 2009; Neuman, 2006).

For qualitative research models relevant to the topic and information about a particular case, this type of research uses a non-probability or non-random sample whose number is not specified before conducting the study (Neuman, 2006). As Cresswell points out, the idea behind qualitative research is the selection of participants (informants) or documents/visuals with a specific purpose that helps a researcher understand the research problem and question. Following the non-random sample model, the selection of informants in this study used a purposive type. The informants were determined based on abundant, in-depth information they have related to the problem of this study, and also as long as the informants meet the criteria (Cresswell, 2009). In this regard, most of the informants in this study were Sambas ethnic Malay in addition to several members of ethnic Madurese who were former Sambas refugees. To analyze the conflict between Muslims of different ethnicities in Sambas in 1999, this study uses the interactive data analysis method proposed by Miles and Huberman (Miles et al., 2014). While the theory used to analyze the data is self-categorization theory.

CHRONOLOGY OF CONFLICTS BETWEEN MUSLIMS OF DIFFERENT ETHNICITY IN SAMBAS

The conflict between Muslims of different ethnicities in Sambas in 1999 began with the news of the beating of an individual of ethnic Madurese suspected of being a thief in the house belonging to a Sambas Malay. The news of this beating developed into a beating of ethnic Madurese by the Sambas Malays. After that, rumors spread of attacks by a group of people from the ethnic Madurese as a form of revenge for the beating. Particularly as it occurred during the month of Ramadan.

In fact, the Village Head initiated a peaceful settlement of this issue, several times, with the hope that the dispute between residents could be resolved

adequately. However, this effort was unsuccessful, which resulted in an attack by a group of ethnic Madurese against the Sambas ethnic Malay in Parit Setia (19 January 1999), which then spread to other areas in Sambas and its surroundings, including Tebas (23 January 1999), Prapakan (17 March 1999), 1999), Sei Garam (7 April 1999), Singkawang Hospital (9 April 1999), Sei Ruk (15 April 1999), and Karimunting (18 April 1999) (Asmara, 2002; Al-Qadrie, 2003).

The attacks, which initially only resulted in the death of three people of Sambas ethnic Malays (Saad, 2003, pp. 90–94), later turned into a large-scale ethnic conflict. Reportedly, victims fell from both sides in large numbers, and houses and property were also burned down during the incident. To minimize more casualties, due to the rage among Sambas ethnic Malay being out of control at that time, most of the ethnic Madurese who previously lived in Sambas had to be evacuated.

Police reports noted that as of April 1999, 177 people died from both sides. In addition to the dead, 71 were seriously injured, 40 sustained minor injuries, 12,185 houses were burned, 315 were damaged, 45 were vehicles burned, and 21,626 residents were evacuated. In contrast, the report from the Governor of West Kalimantan in 1999 stated that the number of people evicted reached 33,634 (Kapolda Kalimantan Barat, 1999).

ETHNIC DIFFERENCES TRIGGER THE CONFLICT

Based on estimates, Sambas and other areas in West Kalimantan, in general, are known to be prone to inter-ethnic conflict. (Al-Qadrie, 2016). The reason is that Sambas' population has a diverse ethnic composition. This is partly because the former kingdom of Sambas was of important value, not only because of its natural resources, but also its historic strategic location as an international trade route. The Sambas Kingdom was located between the junction of Sambas Kecil, Subah, and Teberau rivers (Rahman, 2001). In this way, its potential attracted people from various other regions to migrate to this area. Moreover, Sambas has been dubbed the “Veranda of Mecca ” and some call it the “Veranda of Egypt ” because of its scholars. So, in addition to the motive of earning a living, people also come to this area to study religion (Mahrus, 2009; Musa, 2003).

The migration of people from other areas to Sambas has made Sambas an area with a diverse ethnic composition. This situation, in turn, resembles a melting pot that Haitami Salim described as “a forum for fostering cultural diversity from various communities”. These conditions gave rise to positives

and negatives. The positives, among others, are that society tends to be heterogeneous. Conversely, there are negative impacts such as the possibility of conflict (Salim, 2012).

The event of inter-ethnic conflict in Sambas, generally cannot be separated from the ethnic differences in the region, especially the conflict between locals and migrants. These differences are made by unfair and unbalanced socio-economic structures and competition (De Jonge and Nooteboom, 2006; Giring, 2004; Klinken, 2007; Marzali, 2003), which, if traced back, have occurred since the 1770s (Kristianus, 2017). Thus, the inter-ethnic conflict in Sambas that occurred in 1999, between the Sambas ethnic Malay is considered to represent a clash between the indigenous population and the migrant Madurese. Previously, ethnic Madurese had also been involved in several conflicts with ethnic Dayak, who like the Malay also regard themselves as locals in Sambas (Cahyono et al., 2008).

Judging by the relationship between religion and ethnic identity, it is difficult to accept the fact how there could be a conflict between Sambas ethnic Malay and the Madurese, who are both Muslim. Islam is synonymous with the Malay and the Madurese (Asmiati, 2017; Hermansyah, 2015; Yusriadi, 2017). Even though the conflict involved ethnic Malays (who are Muslims) assisted by the Dayak (who are Christians) against the Madurese (who are Muslim), it does not mean that the Sambas conflict had a religious motive (Salim, 2012). The reason the Dayaks helped the Malays in the inter-ethnic conflict in Sambas was mainly that the two were bound by an oath (Hermansyah, 2018). Meanwhile, Madura's ethnic ties are strong (Hefni, 2009).

Thus, the ethnic connection in Sambas is much stronger than the religious and has quite a strong ground. Indigenous ethnic groups (the Dayak and the Malay), as well as the migrant ethnic group (the Madurese) tend to hold strongly to their respective ethnic identities, and they display them openly. The Dayak, the Malay, and the Madurese ethnic groups consist of ethnic subgroups. For example, the ethnic Dayak sub-groups include Kenayatin, Kendayan, Bekatek, Menyuke, Kayan, Taman, Kenyah, Ot Danum, etc. The Malay ethnic group includes, for example, Pontianak Malay, Sambas Malay, Sintang Malay, Sanggau Malay, Kapuas Hulu Malay, and more. The Madura ethnic group includes Madura from Sampang, Bangkalan, Sumenep, etc. Outside of these sub-ethnic groups, they each identify themselves or are identified as one ethnic group, namely Dayak, Malay, and Madurese. In most cases, ethnic Dayak who have converted to Islam claim to be Malay. This is not the case with ethnic Madurese, who are Muslims. Even though the Madurese have long been married to the Malay, they remain strong with their Madurese

identity and are reluctant to be identified as Malay (Prasojo, 2011).

Consequently, referring to Syarif Ibrahim Al-Qadri, it is the emergence of ethnic solidarity, among the Dayak, Malay, and Madurese – where each group forms and strengthens a strong, unified ethnic consciousness (Al-Qadrie, 2015). Due to the strong and unified ethnic solidarity, each ethnic group considers ethnic groups outside theirs, as the other. This trend occurred in Sambas when the inter-ethnic conflict occurred in 1999. This tendency, according to Amartya Sen, contributes to an intolerant attitude of a person or group of people towards the “other” (Sen, 2007).

NEGATIVE INTER-ETHNIC STEREOTYPES ESCALATE THE CONFLICT

Ethnic Malay are an ethnic group that is open and accepting of migrants. They also want to live in harmony and peace, including with ethnic Madurese (before the ethnic conflict occurred in Sambas in 1999). Until then, a culturally pervasive stereotype identified them as people who do not like to take risks, are considered shy, hide their feelings, and are cowardly. Before the inter-ethnic conflict in Sambas occurred, the term “kerupuk” (crispy chips) was used to refer to the Malay (with a scornful tone) among the Madurese, because of their cowardice and unwillingness to take risks.

While ethnic Madurese hold the principle of “lebih baik putih tulang daripada putih mata” (death is better than disgrace) (Wiyata, 2002), Sambas’ ethnic group has a similar phrase: “lebih baik mati berkalang tanah, daripada hidup berputih mata” which means the same as the principle of the Madurese. So, no matter how well the Malay hide their anger, when it is too much and their honor is at stake, they can also be reckless. Many ethnic Malay from Sambas informants reported they could not bear the treatment from ethnic Madurese towards them, which in turn increased their anger at the migrant ethnic group. Munawar M. Saad noted some criminal events that occurred from the 1950s to 1999, which were perpetrated by ethnic Madurese against the Sambas ethnic Malay, such as extortion, robbery, persecution, and even murder (Saad, 2003).

These cases are among the things that formed the Sambas Malay’s stereotype about the Madurese. The feeling of resentment of the Sambas Malays as an indigenous ethnic group continued to fester, worsened by the negative stereotypes about ethnic Madurese. This build up of animosity could exacerbate slight disagreement between them into a communal conflict, such as what happened in 1999. From the perspective of the Sambas Malay, ethnic Madurese are known to be selfish, threatening locals, carrying sharp weapons when traveling, defending the guilty, being vengeful, and in the name of “God’s

land” they take other people’s land, etc.

This stereotype held by the Sambas ethnic Malay about ethnic Madurese is not much different from that held by other ethnic groups, as stated by De Jonge cited by Edi Petebang and Eri Sutrisno, that the Madurese in the eyes of other ethnicities are disrespectful, angry, revengeful, often resort to fighting, and are familiar with violence. If the Madurese felt embarrassed, they immediately drew their sickles, ready to tear the victim to death. Pulling a knife is their way to defend their honor as Madurese (Patebang and Sutrisno, 2000). This reckless character of the Madurese, to some ethnic groups, is portrayed as a negative thing, like the Malays, who are usually passive and considerate.

The stereotype that developed with the negative image of each, was likely influenced by the fact that most of them had relatively low formal education at the time. Their education, like the generations of the 1980s and earlier, was mostly finished at the elementary and junior high school levels (with a few exceptions from college graduates). The low level of education may be the reason why this ethnic group tends to have a negative image of other ethnic groups outside of them. This stereotype contributed to the escalation of inter-ethnic conflict in Sambas in 1999.

Based on the theory of self-categorization, the process of forming a stereotype is determined by the presence of categorization in the individual, in which the categorization contains the concept of fit which is an important consideration for an individual in forming a stereotype. The concept of fit is considered as the core of the theory of self-categorization where in this theory it is revealed that individuals have several categorizations which then become prominent or are considered significant because of the crystallization of several prototypes caused by these categorizations fit with a social context (Littlejohn and Foss, 2009).

The concept of fit is classified into two categories: comparative fit and normative fit. Comparative fit concerns the issue of the comparative relationship between stimuli as the distributor of the meta-contrast principle, meaning that the categories formed must be in accordance with the differences in comparison between groups. Meanwhile, normative fit relates to a person’s background knowledge and theory to be adapted to the existing data. So, the role of data is an important thing in the formation of content, where the content reflects the actual comparison and contextual aspects of the reality of stimuli. However, the role of the perceiver is also very significant, considering that the categorization and search for similarities and differences are determined by the person’s needs, motives, and goals. When one compares differences between groups, it makes sense in terms of the relationship between knowledge and theory used

in stereotyping, so that comparative and normative fit runs in interactions to determine the content of the stereotype (McGarty et al., 2004).

In all interviews held with the informants from both Malay Sambas and Sambas Madurese refugees, there is a categorization process that involves comparative fit and normative fit. Therefore, there are themes and labels that fall into both categories. The themes and labels in the comparative fit category are needs that have different labels in them: goals that have the demeaning and joking labels, and motives that have the labels of use, honor, and benefit. As for normative fit, there are background themes that have personality labels: knowledge which has interaction labels, and social contexts which have educational social environment labels (McGarty et al., 2004).

When it comes to how ethnic stereotypes can be formed, there are at least three possibilities: 1. Stereotypes can be formed as a reflection of a person's direct observation of the behavior of a group 2. Stereotypes can be a reflection of one's expectations and the extent of one's insight about how a group behaves 3. The formation of stereotypes may also be a combination of one's observation and one's expectations and knowledge of a group (McGarty et al., 2004, p. 68).

These stereotypes are formed from observation, expectation, and knowledge about a group. Someone receives social information in the form of categories, where the category is obtained through an adjustment process (process fit) which includes comparative fit and normative fit. The content of the category is then described with a prototype. If the prototype defines itself (for example, an in-group prototype, and out-group prototype) then someone tends to internalize the prototype so that the prototype acts as the basis for self-perception, social judgment, attitudes, beliefs, and behavior (Littlejohn and Foss, 2009).

In the case of the conflict between Muslim ethnic groups in Sambas in 1999, the experience of interaction with ethnic Madurese was then generalized by the Sambas ethnic Malay as the basis for their self-perception, social assessment, attitude, belief, and behavior towards ethnic Madurese, and vice versa. However, in this context, they not only find group differences and stereotype content based on their own experiences, but also learn differences from outside themselves, and from various social sources. In the previous discussion, it has been described how there have been a number of criminal cases by ethnic Madurese against the Sambas Malay, such as theft, persecution, assault, and even murder as some of them have been reported by Munawar M. Saad. In addition, this stereotype becomes a kind of collective knowledge in several other ethnic groups who are non-Malay or non-Madurese (Patebang and Sutrisno, 2000, pp. 167–169).

In the formation of stereotypes, there are at least four theories that can be put forward: first is “bottom-up”. This level is also called information-rich, which assumes that people produce stereotypes that are derived from information and facts about a group. The differences between groups are very clear because of the large amount of information available so that it becomes the basis for the formation of stereotypes, without making or using arbitrary assumptions about group differences. When these stereotypes afflict members of their group, self-enhancement occurs (where a person tends to prefer their social identity to be portrayed positively or negatively) and judgment emerges as a form of evaluation. This is in line with the principle of social identity in which when someone sees something that is the same or equal, the group will tend to see their own group positively in the arena of difference. On a bottom-up basis, information and data are obtained by someone through a process of learning or experiencing, where people are known by some information which, in creating such information, is used as the basis of the stereotypes, which of course are also based on group interests. This is in line with the principles of comparative-fit and meta-contrast which are then described in the self-categorization theory, that the better and clearer the group differences, the more they will be used as the basis for the formation of stereotypes.

The second theory is “a bit of bottom-up”. Stereotypes formed through “a bit of bottom-up” do not require much information for a stereotype. Information that is little and not clear, can be the basis for the formation of stereotypes. It should be noted that in this context, the content of the stereotype tends to be informed by what a person knows, such as from his or her own group, and is likely to be evaluatively differentiated from attributes in other comparisons outside the group.

The third theory is “a bit of top-down”. Where there is sufficient information to establish or suspect a person or group. That is, even if there is little information and knowledge, a person can generate stereotypes from these pieces of information to distinguish others (such as where he comes from or his family background).

The fourth theory is “neither up nor down”. In this context, stereotypes are produced without clear and tangible data or information about what distinguishes a person or an ethnic group from the other (Spears, 2004).

The description based on the information obtained from the informants shows how the concept of fit is highly considered within them. This can be seen from the extent to which comparative fit is needed for ethnic groups as a differentiating measure. The Sambas Malay informants interviewed in this context felt different from someone who is of ethnic Madurese, in which

according to them their ethnic group is not as violent as the Madurese. They felt calm in their speech and were reluctant to fight. These differences encourage the presence of a kind of stereotype against ethnic Madurese, such as being violent, irritable, aggressive, and more. Meanwhile, ethnic Madurese perceive some Malays to be very timid and reluctant to take risks.

The Sambas Malay who feel different from the Madurese, apart from the reasons mentioned above, are also caused by a strong pressure to maintain their identity as indigenous people of Sambas. For them, migrant ethnic groups should not underestimate their position as the indigenous ethnic group in the region. In addition, negative experiences with ethnic Madurese also greatly influenced the formation of the Sambas ethnic Malay's stereotype about the Madurese. For example, several criminal cases committed by ethnic Madurese against Sambas ethnic Malay, such as attempted theft, persecution, assault, and even murder, as revealed by Munawar M. Saad, were very possible to contribute to the formation of this stereotype. Due to the experience of conflict between Muslims of different ethnicities in Sambas in 1999, this stereotype has further escalated the conflict.

EDUCATION IN ADDRESSING INTER-ETHNIC STEREOTYPING

Being aware of the fact that inter-ethnic stereotyping may trigger conflict, and/or re-occurrence of conflict, is important to address. In the current context of Sambas, little has changed from this stereotyping, both in terms of the Sambas Malay's stereotypes about ethnic Madurese, and/or vice versa, the Madurese about the Sambas Malays.

As described above, inter-ethnic stereotyping basically arises as a result of the way a person or group of people from a particular ethnicity categorizes a person or group of people from other ethnicities. Thus, stereotyping is very likely to arise from a person's experience due to their social environment, how they grow and develop among other cultures, experience inter-ethnic communication, and are educated (Samovar et al., 2010). This also means that when someone biologically looks similar to someone else, but they grow and develop with different socio-cultural situations and conditions, they will likely become different from each other, including in terms of stereotypes about a particular group. This is because the experience of a person and/or group of people is shaped by the social situations and conditions that surround them, which John Locke refers to as *tabula rasa* that the (human) mind is a "blank paper" without rules for processing data, and data are added, and the rules that process them are formed only by the experience of the senses (Locke, 2007). Education in one's social environment in this context is likely to

provide important experiences for a person and his character, including how he perceives others, has stereotypes, etc.

Should this be the case, then education is possible to shape or change mindsets. In the wake of the Sambas conflict, it is expected that the current stereotypes held by the Sambas Malay and the Madurese that tend to be negative about each other can be appropriately addressed. Several writers, such as Davies (2004), Bush and Saltarelli (2000), Hilker (2011), and Brown (2011), mentioned the reliable functional role of education for this, while at the same time, they also warned about the possibility of education becoming a conflict catalyst, which is very detrimental if it does serve its original purpose.

CONCLUSION

Based on these research findings, ethnic differences and stereotypes had a significant impact on the escalation of conflict between ethnic Malay and ethnic Madurese in 1999. Theoretically, this ethnic differentiation and stereotyping essentially emerged as a consequence of the way a person or group of people of a particular ethnicity categorizes a person or group of people of another ethnicity. It can be argued that differentiation and stereotyping are formed based on observation, expectation, and knowledge about a group.

This is quite understandable because a person receives social information in the form of categories, where the categories are obtained through a fit process that includes comparative fit and normative fit. Where the content of the category is described by a prototype, and if the prototype defines self (for example, an in-group prototype, rather than an out-group prototype) then one is more likely to internalize that prototype so that the prototype acts as the basis for self-perception, social judgments, attitudes, beliefs, and behavior. There are at least four models of information processing that lead to a stereotype, namely with a lot of information (bottom-up), adequate information (a bit of bottom-up), little information (a bit of top-down), and poor information (neither up nor down). In addition, the emergence of ethnic stereotyping as a form of distinguishing a person or an ethnic group from the other can also be a consequence of inter-ethnic interaction and communication.

In the context of post-conflict Sambas, it is expected that the strongly held inter-ethnic stereotypes, which tend to be negative and have undermined the relations between the Sambas Malays and the Madurese, can be appropriately addressed. As discussed earlier in this work, we can rely on educational work to help reconstruct the stereotyping in a more appropriate direction.

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