



Ethnic Contestation in Regional Extension: Local Elite in Pringsewu Regency, Lampung Province, Indonesia

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Abstract

This paper examines the power dynamics between central and regional institutions since the Reform was introduced and the era of regional extension began. Specifically, it analyzes the so-called ethnic contestation in Pringsewu Regency located within the province of Lampung, Indonesia. It is found that since Reform, the efforts to build regional autonomy have spread significantly. However, this phenomenon of regional extension¹ has witnessed the interplay of the interests of political elites and the exploitation of ethnic issues, which in some cases has resulted in inter-group conflicts. This paper traces the ways in which ethnically-linked issues are being constructed, manipulated and spread within this game of power. It also examines issues of ethnic identity and boundaries. Connecting to the larger conceptual underpinnings of theory of resistance from Scott (1985), Tsing (1998) and Abu-lughod (1990), this contestation is also arguably a manifestation of social resistance. Using the qualitative approach, the data is obtained through in-depth interviews and participant observation; hence, insights and inner meanings can be used to explicate events within this phenomenon.

Keyword: Ethnic Contestation, Resistance, Regional Extension, Ethnicity, Local Elites

Introduction

Since the “orde baru” regime collapsed during Suharto era, major demonstrations and riots occurred almost in all regions in Indonesia due to economic crisis. Major changes in the relationship between the central with region governments happened due to the emergence of regional autonomy.

Legalization of the law number 22 in the year 1999, regarding regional government, has changed Indonesia’s government system from centralization towards decentralization by transferring power from

¹ Regional extension is to de-regionalize to become two or more new autonomy regions, which can be provinces, regencies, or cities. This autonomy objectives is to bring prosper and welfare toward its community accelerating the development and providing service to the public.

central government into regional government, in the form of autonomy. The reason for this change was to manage government affairs, (although, still under the Indonesia republic framework) and handled the dissatisfactions of the citizens--the aspirations and desires of the society were not being fulfilled by the central government and gap between central and regionals in terms of developments and authority widening.

Regional extension aimed to create prosperity for the communities living in the areas, accelerate the development and provide service to the public. However, regional extensions that happened in the Indonesia regions were due to the ethnicity factor.

Ethnicity is a separation or a distinction among individuals and groups of people from others. Ethnicity differences in the form of nature, character, habits, customs, etc, distinguish one ethnic group from other ethnic groups.

Regional extension in Indonesia in general, has produced variety issues and discourses about ethnicity, for example, reinforcement of ethnic identity, boundaries among ethnics, and the emergence of local elites who have interests and opportunities to control the local regions based on their identities. Local elites are people who have opportunities due to their 'good name' and the fact that they are well-known in their communities. They have sufficient financial support (either from various sponsors or own capital), and political support from parties.

In the contestation to win power in politics, local elites need to work on sensitive issues and win the emotions of existing communities in the region. Ethnic issues are very important, because it include identity and self-esteem.

Therefore, this study examines and analyzes the ethnic contestations (in the regional extensions) produced by local elites as an actor. As a result of regional extensions (by disintegration of the region into several small regions), a new form of regional power was created. The local elites try to gain control by using ethnic issues as tools. The local elites have to compete in order to gain power in new regional extensions; this creates situations showing struggle (latent resistance), treaty (accommodation), and negotiation by elites.

Theory

The theory in this study, refers to the theory of resistance (Abulughod, 1990; Tsing, 1998; Scott, 2000) resistance is a form of everyday conflict that is often not seen as a 'conflict' because it was not really visible; resistance manifested in certain symbols and meanings. Scott (2000) conducted a study of the struggle between the poor peasants and rich peasants in Malaysia. "Resistance comes from the 'against' the verb (to refuse), it means trying our best to deny or to reply to the strength or impression rather than" (Scott, 1985 as cited in Scott, 2000, 381-382).

Abulughod (1990) conducted study on Beoduin society in Africa, focusing on gender differences in Beoduin society. Abulughod explained the concept of resistance that occurred in Beoduin women replicated in various arenas². Abulughod had developed concept of resistance in much broader perspective in area called as the 'arena'. Resistance, based on Abulughod's point of view, is a latent resistance by parties who are not in a governing position. Abulughod, in his study of Bedouin community

² Arena is a place and form of ongoing resistance by Bedouin women.

in Africa, explained how Bedouin women challenge against 'traditional concept' where they are always being positioned as powerlessness.

Abulughod called activities made by Bedouin women as “romance of resistance”. Romanticizing Bedouin performed by women in the form of songs, poems, jokes, and gossips; such resistances are often not exposed and indirect.

Tsing's (1998) study went deeper. He stated that resistance is not only regarding resistance alone, but, also included accommodation or obedient. In his study, it was shown that resistance is always accompanied by accommodation. Tsing saw resistance as latent resistance from marginalized communities to government or state. Tsing conducting an in-depth study of how people from Dayak Meratus tribe imagined how the State looked like. Government's developments have also contributed to wards marginalizing the tribe Dayak Meratus. Tsing explained in detail about how they struggle against government. Local elites of Dayak Meratus acted as brokers between tribe folks and government (as state symbols); local elites are tribe chiefs, elders, village chiefs.

Methodology

The method that been used in this research is qualitative with ethnographic approach (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Spradley, 1997), The use of ethnographic approach is to investigate resistance (contestation, accommodation, negotiation, friction, etc.) this due to conflict can be difficult to be measured with statistical figures, such concepts can only be viewed with in-depth definition, to find the “definition” needs intensive involvement of research object, thus it takes a very substantial research, as Geertz describe of “thick description”(Geertz,1973). Qualitative methods with an ethnographic approach aims to understand from key informants perspectives not researcher perspective, as an expression of the classic ethnography is to understand other people's understanding and informant understanding (native's point of view) (Malinowski, 1922; Geertz, 1973). In order to seek and obtain data about the resistance in this study, resistance only can be understood by doing an ethnographic approach to search and collect data. Through observation involved (observation participants) and in-depth interview meant to live together with people or society that will be study. By living together with this society, the author will able to perceive the attitudes, outlook on life, knowledge, behavior and resistance, likes or dislikes, and feelings regarding the regional extensions and ethnic contestation.

This research is located in Pringsewu regency, lampung province, Indonesia. Data collection in this research made us of participant observation, in-depth interviews and documentation. Data analyses were performed with the categorization, classification, and verify the data, after that author will present the data that were analysis at level theories, from this author can decided this study able to build a new theory or support existing theories or criticize existing theories.

Regional Extension: An Interpretation of Regional Autonomy or Power Sharing?

The relationship between central and regional governments is still being discussed among scholars, citizens, government officers and various groups in Indonesia. According to Muhtar, Bambang, and Oktafiani (2007), the concept of regional organized can actually be done through three ways, (1) regional extensions, (2) mergers and (3) re-grouping of sub-sub regions within the relevant area; among these three ways, regional extensions is the most popular subject of study.

During “new order” Indonesia regional organized was applied in a form of centralized, which means that the area represented by the provinces governed and controlled by the central government.

According to Santoso (2007), regions are not given freedom because in those days regions only care about their own regions. Furthermore, “New Order” government worried local identity emerged and became threat toward Suharto regime. Central government did not see local identity as social capital and local wisdom which could accommodate nationalism. Centralized government with the characteristics of a top-down development has made the structure of regions in Indonesia from the smallest until the largest of all regulated by central. The structure of government in Indonesia, nation consist of several provinces, while in provinces, they subdivided into areas called regency, then the underlying regency and the smallest villages.

Issues of Ethnicity in Lampung; Contestation Arena by Local Elites

Lampung Province on the southern corner of Sumatra Island also experienced regional extensions. Formerly, Lampung province was part from the South Sumatra, since March 18, 1964 Lampung province emerged by Government Regulation No. 3 year 1964. Before the era of regional autonomy, the regency numbers in Lampung Province as many as eight regencies and one city, but after the autonomy regions it became twelve regencies and two Cities. One of them is Pringsewu regency which was inaugurated on October 29, 2008 based on Law No. 48 year 2008 regarding the establishment Pringsewu regency. Previously, Pringsewuregency was part of Tanggamusregency as parent regency. The population of Pringsewuregency majority is Javanese, while Lampung as indigenous ethnic minorities together into Semendo, Minang, Chinese, Balinese, etc.

With the establishment of Pringsewu regency as a new autonomy region, of course have a new government which means there will be new positions that need to be filled by elites. After the establishment Pringsewu regency contestation among local elites are more visible as in the example is the forming up logo as a symbol of regional regency, which is always changing because of the government should accommodates the desire of local elites from various ethnicity, and it became problems in society such as Javanese community wishes to re-use the name of the “village” to replace “pekon” name (which came from Lampung language) as the name of a “desa” Javanese language. Also civil servants (who are mostly Javanese) in Tanggamus regencyas a regency parent decided to move into Pringsewu regency in order to obtain vital positions and receive power sharing in government. Advertisement with local elites pictures that are using traditional outfits followed by slogan that heavily influenced by ethnicity in order to attract and gain support from society during local elections are mushrooming; these are parts of the contestation of inter-ethnic power struggle that occurred in Pringsewu regency.

Social change in Lampung society today, where ethnic Javanese areas have progressed and developed, became urban areas rather than Lampung ethnic communities, one example that came from Javanese village which has developed into new regency is Pringsewu regency.

Regional extensions is meant to accelerate the development and prosperity of society, but issues of ethnicity and identity boundaries as often used by local elites for the sake of power. From the discussions and studies on the regional extension in Indonesia, one of the important keys that are ignored by the policy makers of regional extension is an issue of ethnicity. The ethnicity issues has become one of the reasons of the establishment of the regional extension; also the emergence of various problems that cause inter-ethnic rivalry. Ethnic competitions can be viewed as a contestation that becomes arena by local elites to gain power.

The problems of ethnicity include: (1) ethnic issues that can be used by ethnic leaders in regional extension (2) ethnic problems that can lead and influence ethnic majority located in the region (3) Issues of ethnicity could encourage the formation of new regional extensions. Slowly the central government's authority eroded by regional autonomy. Therefore, many sides vying to become and to position

themselves as local elites, who compete for power in the new area, which cannot be got in old area. In order to obtain the power of various interests, various strategies and ways were embarked by the local elite also strategies and in ways to deny other local elites.

The relationships among the local elites showed contestation, where the resistance, accommodation, negotiation, and friction happened. Final destination of local elites is the power. With the regional extensions it has opened an opportunity to gain new power that being contested by local. Ethnic rivalry has become the arena by local elites to gain power. Contestation shorter local elites can be seen on the Figure 1 follows:

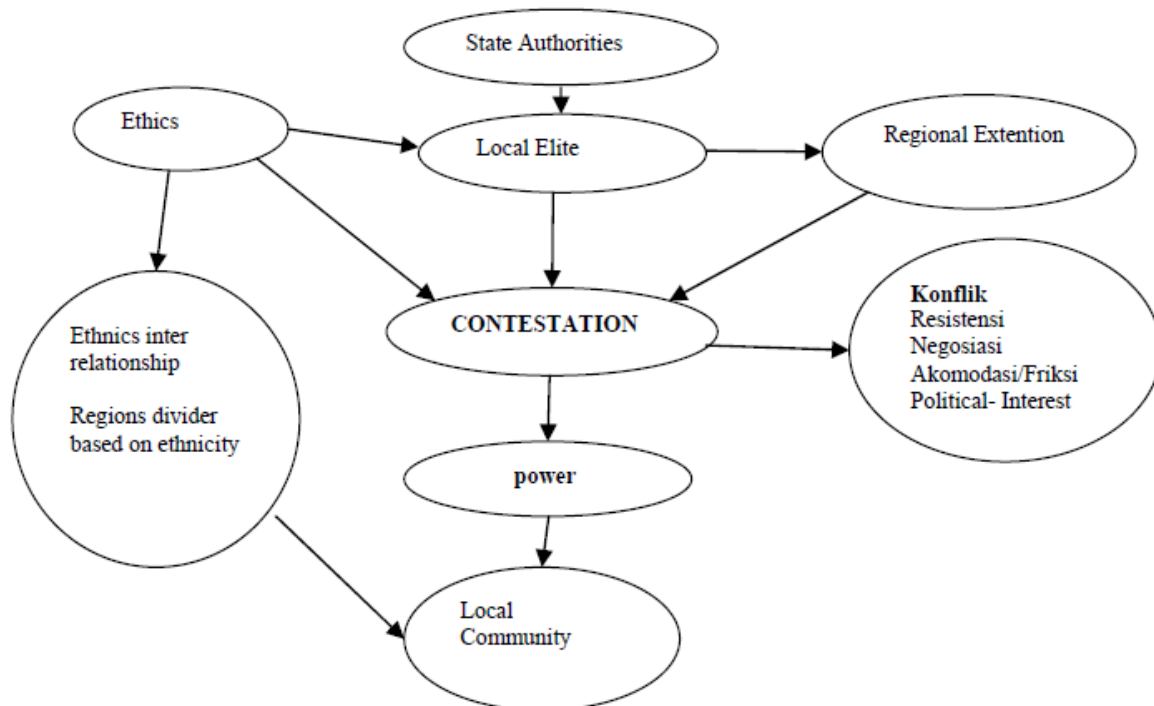


Fig. 1 Contestation of local elites in the regional extensions

Resistance, Negotiation and Accommodation: Strategies Elites Local for Power

In the era of regional autonomous which led to regional extension, many new local elites sprung; local elites are community leaders, chairmen and indigenous people who have good name and are well known in the community. They have sufficient financial, obtain political support from political parties, are direct descendant, or have relationship with previous local elites. Local elites are very influential in the local community.

During regional autonomy, the regency is an autonomous region. Most of the issues are solved independently. Local elites have strategic position for power and politics in the region. The legitimacy of central government power is transferred towards the autonomous region. Therefore, many parties vying to become local elites, compete for power in the area. Among the local elites there will be rivalry within the framework of power struggle. Various strategies are used by local elites to impose upon other local elites.

The relationships between the local elite are known to be in contestation--the contestation of conflict which consists of resistance, negotiation, and accommodation.

Conflict that happened is manifest and latent. However, most conflicts are latent, in which the conflict that is not visible on the surface. Conflicts that are not visible on the surface are meant here as the resistance, negotiation, and accommodation. Resistance, conducted in secret and unseen as well as indirect, for instance, issues, gossip, sing, stereotype, or through the media. Negotiation is the process of bargaining, where bargain is very important in politics, because this will influence the outcome toward what they desire. Accommodation is a form of self-adjustment, or forms of compliance of local elites against their political opponents or the elites who are at a higher level than them, for example, local elites will accommodate other local elites in terms of win-win solution scenario, or instances where the local elite acted as intermediaries between citizens and government; local elites on the one side must accommodate the interests of their society in order to gain support, and on the other side should accommodate the central government in order to legalize their power. As intermediaries, local elites must have a strategies and tactics to be able to accommodate both. Local elites must be able to favor higher tier and embrace low class community.

Regional extension not only opens new opportunities for the emerged of local elites, but also provide opportunities for new positions in the bureaucracy in the region. Local elites who have won got power to determine who will occupy positions in the bureaucracy. Support toward one candidate of the local elites is very important for the non-partisan elites who want to occupy positions in the bureaucracy, because of the support that given by them can proved them strategic position at bureaucracy.

Therefore, the bureaucrats who want to occupy the strategic position in bureaucracy, which means that the elites must able to decide whose supports can help them for win the game. Because members of elite groups that lost the elections commonly referred to as "not one of these... (name of winning elite)...."

Conclusion

Organizing regions in Indonesia since the reform era is famously known as regional extensions, which have spawned many local elites which then use variety of issues of ethnicity for the sake of gaining power. This phenomenon is said to be a local elite's contestation, by performing resistance, accommodation, and negotiations (Abu-Lughod, 1990; Tsing 1998; and Scott, 2000). As Scott used the concept of resistance as a tool to analyze in a view of the clashed between classes, so in this paper, author understand the concept of resistance as something that is very relevant to talk about the relationship between local elites, who also have to give benefits for the community in order to get support while at the same time also need to responsiveness higher tier elites in order to get legitimacy.

Although data of this study focuses on a different level with Scott has examined, social class at 'Sedaka' in Malaysia, but at the level of concepts and theories, the "resistance" does not only apply to the agricultural community, but also among by local elites; where their positions were between the state and community. Resistance seems to become unharmed conflict, which did not produce a lot of risk. Regional elites that emerged are located between two sides, between "submission/obedience" in the "central" side and 'compliance' on the other side which its objectives for power.

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