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HOW VIOLENCE ERUPTED: FRONT PEMBELA ISLAM ACTIVITY IN YOGYAKARTA

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ABSTRACT

Islamic Defender Front/Front Pembela Islam (FPI) is one of the most prominent civil organizations in Indonesia. They also perceived as one of the most radical and violent Islamic organizations in Indonesia especially when dealing with the religious/blasphemy issues towards Islam. On the contrary, the cause of violence in FPI is not always depends on religious issues. They also have another reason in resorting to violence even with their fellow Islamic organizations. This case is often found in their relations with Islamic Jihad Front/Front Jihad Islam (FJI) in the Special Region of Yogyakarta province.

This research will try to explain the patterns of violence in FPI's activities in Yogyakarta, both towards the religious issues or others. The violence of FPI will be explained by the social movement perspective especially with the vigilantism and framing concepts. Framing will explain about the source of legitimation towards the violence. Meanwhile, the vigilantism will explain about the pattern and behavior in the act of violence. One conclusion that can be drawn is FPI act of violence in Yogyakarta is not always related with the religious issues, but also began with their hostility with Front Jihad Islam/FJI. This kind of violence is based on the rivalry between FPI's leader (Bambang Tedy) and FJI's leader (Jarot). On the other hand, FPI also have a religious-motivated violence although the scale of this features usually smaller than the hostility with FJI.

Keywords: *Front Pembela Islam, Front Jihad Islam, violence, vigilantism, framing, social movement.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Front Pembela Islam (Islamic Defender Front/FPI) is one of the most popular Islamic organizations in contemporary Indonesian politics. Their action and idea about Islam is able to attract a wide public exposure although most of them perceived as negative. FPI able to mobilize a great number of their members as we have seen in Aksi 411 and Aksi 212 when they protested against the blasphemy-accused-statement from former Governor of Jakarta Basuki Tjahaja Purnama.

FPI is also famous for their act of violence. Before involving in mass protest towards Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, FPI is known for their violence-imbued sweeping methods in the so-called "maksiat"(vice) places such as bar, discotheque, and

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prostitution centre. One thing that relates those two acts is FPI always using the religious motives as a justification to their action. They always act as a “moral and Islamic values guardian” which is also becoming the main factor behind their popularity. The popularity of FPI can be seen from their organizations. They have a lot of branch in various parts of Indonesia, including Yogyakarta—which believed to be the most peaceful city in Indonesia. However, it must be highlighted that every branch of FPI has their own independency towards their action. The branch organization can act with its own initiative without any obligation to consult or coordinate with the central leader in Jakarta.² The structure of FPI is relatively loose for the branch organization can have its own issues concern, methods, recruitment type, etc. Nevertheless, this loosely related organizational bond provides a space to each of this branch’s leader to define their own motives and methods in their area.

The role of branch leader in framing and defining the motives of FPI proves that FPI is not always act according to religious motives. The FPI branch leader is often uses their organization to act according to their interests. Nevertheless, the action of FPI cannot always being related to the religious motives. We must closely look at the behavior and dynamics of the organization to find the motives of FPI action, especially in their branch organization.

This research tried to study the motives behind the violence behavior of FPI Yogyakarta. This branch organization has a relatively independent position towards central FPI leadership in Jakarta. On the other hand, the role of their leader, Bambang Tedy, is very central in controlling the action of FPI Yogyakarta. Religious motives, thus, were not the main trigger behind the violence of FPI Yogyakarta. The violence act of FPI Yogyakarta, in fact, happened when they had clashes with their rival organization, the Front Jihad Islam (Islamic Jihad Front/FJI). This research wants to highlight that the religious idea is not always related to the violence action of radical Islamic organizations. Violence is based on several factors that closely related, such as the political and economic interest, or social structure.

Religious-based violence is one of the main challenges for ASEAN community. ASEAN is home of many religious community and identity. However, ASEAN up until today is still facing the threat of religious and identity-based violence. This research tried to contribute in the field study of violence especially the relation between identity and

² See Al Zastrow Ngatawi, *Gerakan Islam Simbolik : Politik Kepentingan FPI*, (Yogyakarta : LKiS, 2006), pp. 92



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violence. The main argument of this research is violence is not always rooted from religious motivation, but also from the socio-political factors that shaped the society where the organization existed. However, the role of leader is very important in framing the issues and channeling the motivation of violence.

2. RESEARCH QUESTION

The research question for this article is "What is the main factor behind FPI Yogyakarta's act of violence?"

3. METHODOLOGY

This article is a development of author's thesis in Peace and Conflict Studies Program Gadjah Mada University titled "Comparison Of Violence In The Strategy Of Movement Of Front Pembela Islam And Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia In The Special Region Of Yogyakarta". This research use qualitative method. The data used in this research including premier data and secondary data. The premier data obtained from a series of interviews between 2013 until 2014 and the direct observation toward the FPI Yogyakarta members which also acted as respondents. The secondary data obtained from books, newspaper articles, and online news article.

This article combined the sociological approach and social movement concept to explain the rise of violence behavior. Violence in FPI Yogyakarta's action cannot be separated from the social background of its members. FPI Yogyakarta's members mostly come from lower social class in their neighborhood. Thus, the violence in FPI Yogyakarta can be analyzed with the concept of "*Framing*".

The concept of *framing* comes from the field of social movement theory. It explains the background of group mobilization and its relation with the discourse of issues. David Snow defined *framing* as:

*"...when social movement actors **creates discourses** that can resonates among the mobilization audiences. This process involved a **translation of grievances** from the mobilization audiences which based on a **master frame** that resulted from **specific perceived values**"³*

The process of *framing* then includes the role of leader or main actor to mobilize the grievances of group member using the strategy of communicating their message into

³ David Snow et.al in *Frame, Alignment Process, Micromobilization and Movement Participation* (1986) from Noorhaidi Hasan, "Laskar Jihad: Islam, Militansi, dan Pencarian Identitas di Indonesia Pasca-Orde Baru" (Jakarta: Pustaka LP3ES Indonesia, 2008), pp.132.





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them. The leader, thus, must have an ability to choose the symbols and issues in which the group members can relate them with it. This kind of “sense of belonging” thus can encourage the group members to act according to the group motivation or the leader interests.

4. ELABORATION

4.1. History of FPI Yogyakarta

The discussion about history of FPI Yogyakarta is very important to analyze their act of violence. From the data collection process, author found that the only major violence act of FPI Yogyakarta happened when they had clashes with Front Jihad Islam (FJI). Both FPI and FJI hate each other because the FJI originally was former FPI members. The split between FPI and FJI marked a bitter conflict between them, as author will explain it later. Compared with their fellow in other areas, FPI Yogyakarta had never performed sweeping or attacking “tempat maksiat”. They also had never attacked that so called “deviant actor” such as Shi’ite follower or Ahmadiyah follower like FPI in other areas. The main trigger of FPI Yogyakarta’s violence is their rivalry with FJI.

FPI Yogyakarta was established in 2007-2008 by Bambang Tedy, a local political figure in Yogyakarta. He was a local strongman and have relatively negative track record as a small thug and petty criminal (“preman pasar”). In addition, he has no religious background to lead a religious-based organization as FPI.

On the other hand, Bambang Tedy has a great amount of resources to build FPI Yogyakarta. First, he is known to be one of the richest men in his neighborhood. His wealth is the main reason behind his success in building FPI Yogyakarta. He used his privat house as FPI headquarters and also financing this organization with his personal money. His wealth is also used to help his neighbor, which later recruited into FPI and become his loyal follower.

Second, Bambang Tedy has a good connection with Yogyakarta’s focal political figures. Bambang Tedy is husband of Sebrat Haryati which also a village chief in Balecatur—small village in western part of Yogyakarta in which the FPI headquarter located. He is also has a great connection with Haji Syukri Fadholi—former vice mayor of Yogyakarta and prominent figure from Partai Persatuan Pembangunan /PPP (one of the most influential political party in Yogyakarta). The close relation between Bambang Tedy and Haji Syukri Fadholi started when Bambang joined Gerakan Pemuda Ka’bah—



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youth organization of PPP and one of the largest paramilitary organization in Yogyakarta—in which Haji Syukri Fadholi was the founder. This GPK connection will later be the foundation of FPI Yogyakarta recruitment, because most of the leader in FPI Yogyakarta comes from this organization.

The foundation of FPI Yogyakarta later causes one main problems about who is the most legitimate person to lead the FPI Yogyakarta. Bambang Tedy claimed that he is the most suited man, since he personally went to meet Rizieq Shihab—founder and leader of FPI central headquarter—to asked his permission to founded FPI branch in Yogyakarta. He also claimed that he spent his personal money to get the “license” from Rizieq Shihab and finished the administration process to legalized FPI foundation.⁴ This claim was challenged by Durahman--Bambang Tedy’s former commander in FPI and fellow GPK member. Durahman felt that Bambang Tedy doesn’t have enough capabilities to lead a religious-based group as FPI. He accused that Bambang Tedy cannot even read the Al-Qur’an or performing *sholat*. Durahman also claimed that he is the most suitable person to get that position.

Conflict between Bambang Tedy factions versus Durahman factions caught the attention from FPI central leadership in Jakarta. They even sent their negotiator to mediate the reconciliation process (“*islah*”) between them but it failed because both of these factions were not willing to unite again. As a result, the Durahman factions decide to out and formed their own organization called FJI. The split between FPI and FJI is not ending their conflict. They are still competing to be the most influential Islamic organization in Yogyakarta with the largest member in this city. One of the FPI member even admitted that FJI is always provoking and intimidating them. When FPI members are held a convoy in Yogyakarta’s street, FJI often intercepted their entourage, mocking them, and even throwing rocks and trying to punch them.⁵ The hostility between FPI and FJI later proved to be the main factor behind FPI’s act of violence

4.2 FPI Perception of Violence

The number of violence that linked with FPI Yogyakarta peaked between 2011 until 2013. Between this timeline, the biggest violence act occurred when FPI clashed with FJI in front of Yogyakarta District Court on 17 April 2012. This clash happened when Bambang Tedy was undergoing a trial after been convicted with fraud accusation by

⁴ Interview with Komaruddin, member of Dewan Syuro FPI Yogyakarta, 9 September 2014.

⁵ Interview with Wagiman, member of Laskar FPI (FPI’s Paramilitary wing), 12 Desember 2014.



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Erna F Riyanti (local businesswoman in Yogyakarta).⁶ When Bambang Tedy stood for his first trial, FPI Yogyakarta also gathered in front of the court building and tried to intimidate the court. At the same time, FJI, who supported Erna, arrived in the court building and soon insulted the FPI convoy. Finally, these two groups were caught in a clash.

Clash of 17 April 2012 proved that the rivalry between FPI and FJI is the main factors that triggered the violence of FPI. The violence, thus, is not related with religious issues, but merely a political and personal problem between the leaders. FPI came to the District Court to support their leader and FJI also came to support the one who bring Bambang Tedy to the court. The religious cause is absent in this case.

FPI Yogyakarta's members have a unique perception about violence. They believe that violence is incompatible with Javanese tradition in which they have been raised with. They thought that as a Javanese people, they must put dialogue and harmony first.⁷ On the other hand, when asked about why they had not attacking other groups such as Ahmadiyah and Shi'ite follower in Yogyakarta, they told author that those group is already protected by Sultan of Yogyakarta.⁸ It is their duty to follow the order from their beloved and respected King of Yogyakarta.

On the contrary, the Javanese view of dialogue and harmony suddenly disappear when dealing with FJI. FPI members admitted that most of them hate FJI members and leaders. They felt that FJI always intimidating them first. Nevertheless, when asked about the 17 April 2012 clash, they argued that they were just trying to defend themselves and protecting their leader.⁹ FPI and Bambang Tedy, for them, is not just organization and their leader, but also their symbol. Thus, every attack towards FPI and Bambang Tedy means also attacking themselves.

The FPI member's loyalty towards Bambang Tedy is also a very important factor in FPI violence. Most of them admitted that they "owe something" to Bambang Tedy. Bambang Tedy often loan them money when they needed it. Bambang Tedy always ready when they need his help. And the most important is: they felt that Bambang Tedy

⁶ See <http://www.viva.co.id/berita/nasional/291945-massa-fpi-front-jihad-bentrok-di-pn-yogya>, and <http://regional.kompas.com/read/2012/04/17/1801221/Massa.FPI.dan.FJI.Bentrok.di.Yogyakarta>, accessed on 22 September 2017.

⁷ Interview with Wagiman, and Widodo, member of Laskar FPI (FPI's Paramilitary Wing), 17 Desember 2017

⁸ *Ibid*, op.cit.

⁹ *Ibid*, op.cit.



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can respect and humanize them.¹⁰ He does not look down upon them, as their neighbor always do to them. Thus, when they felt that Bambang Tedy needed their help, the FPI members will always ready to protect their leader.

5. CONCLUSION

The violence of FPI Yogyakarta is not a routine phenomenon especially when compared to the activities of FPI in Jakarta or West Java—two base of FPI in Indonesia. FPI Yogyakarta members still perceive themselves as a Javanese person that must protect the harmony and peaceful situation through dialogue. On the contrary, there is an exception about this value, especially when FPI must deal with their arch enemy FJI. The clash between FPI and FJI is a matter of “pride”, “solidarity”, and “defending their organization and leader”. These three words is a discourse that have been used to frame and justified their act of violence. In the case of violence against FJI, the FPI members use the means to “protecting their organization and leader” as a framing to mobilize themselves towards violence. The words of “pride”, “solidarity” and “protecting their leader” functioned as a discourse that can resonates among the member of FPI itself. In addition, the feelings of “owe something” to Bambang Tedy is part of their grievances—the absence of recognition from their neighborhood. Bambang Tedy and FPI are the only ones that willing to accept and help while other part of society rejecting them. The leader of FPI, especially Bambang Tedy, can capitalize these discourses optimally. Instead of using religious motives as a solidarity maker inside the FPI Yogyakarta, he chose the member’s main grievanes—the need to be recognized as a human being. As a result, he can ensure his member’s loyalty and obedience towards him. On the other hand, the framing of FPI Yogyakarta as a “Bambang Tedy’s boys” is also have its own flaw. First, it limited the recruitment of FPI Yogyakarta. Second, Bambang Tedy can use the FPI member for his own purpose.

In conclusion, we must be aware that the roots of violence are not merely resulted from the radical religious thinking. Violence is also derived from the social, political, and economic deprivation. This is the gap that must be filled by government and the civil society. If both of them failed, then this gap would have been filled by radical or vigilant actor as it happened in FPI Yogyakarta.

¹⁰ Both Wagiman and Widodo admitted that Bambang Tedy is not an arrogant person and always “nguwongke” (humanizing others, taken from the Javanese language “wong” = human)





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