



## When Ethnicity Is Stronger Than Religion: A Look Into Dayaks And Madurese Conflicts In Kalimantan, Indonesia

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**Abstract:** *Although there are some incoming ethnicities in Borneo such as Malays, Chinese, Buginese, Javanese and Madurese, only with Madurese that the indigenous Dayaks conflicted with, despite being in the same faith that is Islam. This paper discusses ethnic conflict that occurred in Sambas District, West Borneo in 1999 between the indigenous Dayaks and the immigrant Madurese. Using Schmidt and Schroder's (2001) framework of violent acts and social ramifications, this article looks into contributing factors of this conflict and how these factors interrelated. The study finds that Sambas outbreak was driven by an external factor such as central government's transmigration policy that impacted on Dayak traditional lands and forests and economic deprivation. Additionally, there was also accumulating historical clash between Dayaks and Madurese, fueling the hatred toward the transmigrating group. An important finding to note is that Dayak Muslims and Malays also shared religious belief as do Dayak Muslims and Madurese, but they did not conflict with each other. This study suggests that ethnicity needs to be considered when dealing with conflicts in local areas, and state government should take into account the local political and economic constellation before enforcing transmigration policy.*

**Keywords:** *Sambas conflict, Dayaks, Madurese, Ethnicity, Religion*

**Abstrak:** *Walaupun ada beberapa suku yang berada di Kalimantan seperti Melayu, Tionghoa, Bugis, Jawa, dan Madura, hanya dengan suku Madura saja suku asli Dayak berkonflik, meskipun sama-sama beragama yaitu Islam. Tulisan ini membahas tentang konflik etnis yang terjadi di Kabupaten Sambas, Kalimantan Barat pada tahun 1999 antara suku Dayak dan pendatang asal Madura. Dengan menggunakan kerangka teori Schmidt dan Schroder (2001) mengenai tindakan kekerasan dan dampak sosial, artikel ini mengkaji faktor-faktor yang berkontribusi terhadap konflik ini dan bagaimana faktor-faktor tersebut saling terkait. Studi ini menemukan bahwa kerusuhan Sambas didorong oleh faktor internal berupa persepsi negatif terhadap etnis Madura dan faktor eksternal seperti kebijakan transmigrasi pemerintah pusat yang berdampak pada dikuasainya tanah dan hutan adat Dayak yang kemudian menyebabkan deprivasi sosial dan ekonomi. Selain itu, juga terjadi akumulasi benturan sejarah antara Dayak dan Madura yang memicu kebencian terhadap kelompok transmigrasi. Temuan penting untuk dicatat adalah bahwa orang Dayak dan Melayu juga memiliki keyakinan agama yang sama seperti Dayak Muslim dan Madura, tetapi mereka tidak saling bertentangan. Agaknya, kesamaan antara Dayak dan Melayu seperti ciri fisik, bahasa, nilai, pandangan hidup dan ritual adat adalah yang membangun solidaritas antara dua kelompok. Kajian ini menunjukkan bahwa etnisitas perlu dipertimbangkan ketika menghadapi konflik di daerah, dan pemerintah pusat harus mempertimbangkan konstelasi politik dan ekonomi lokal sebelum memberlakukan kebijakan yang berdampak luas.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Konflik Sambas, Dayak, Madura, Etnik, Agama*

## Introduction

Dayaks are indigenous people of Borneo and make up between 41 and 43 percent of the population in West Borneo.<sup>1</sup> At the time, most Dayaks in the region were farmers who produced rice and depended on forest products such as fruit, rubber and herbs.<sup>2</sup> As the transmigration policy was enacted by the central government, there are also Chinese, Javanese, Buginese and Madurese in the area. Most Dayaks are Protestant or Catholic, and there are still many believers of traditional animism.<sup>3</sup>

During the Sultanate era in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Dayaks in the coastal area of Sambas converted to Islam and commonly known as Malays (*orang melayu*). Despite their convert, Dayak Muslims still respect and practice their traditional customary law (*adat*), which was descended from their ancestors to the modern generation. The role of *adat* is very central to the Dayaks by which they perceive, value, and understand their relationship with outsiders and also between themselves and the sacred, or between the profane and the sacred world.<sup>4</sup> The Dayak's ritual of communication with their ancestors is a way to show their high respect to their *adat*. There is no Kayan term for "religion," but

*adat*...is an approximation ... "Adat" covers religious rituals as well as non-religious forms of socio-culturally regulated behavior. Good manners are an element of *adat*, as are the legal principles and precedents, and the essence of Kayan jurisprudence. "Adat" could be translated as "socially-established activity." It also refers to "usual behavior," both for individuals and collectivities ... "adat" covers a wider field than "religion" (Rousseau, 1998, pp. 6-7).

Following the collapse of the New Order government in the late 1990s, a dramatic ethnic conflict arose between Dayaks and Madurese in the Sambas district known as the "Sambas Incident". Hundreds of Madurese were left dead and thousands became homeless.<sup>5</sup> This was not the first conflict between the two. As noted by Alqadri,<sup>6</sup> over a period of 47 years, 11 conflicts erupted between two ethnic groups in Sambas and Pontianak, West Borneo, meaning such conflict occurred every five years.<sup>7</sup> This article aims to examine this long withstanding conflict between the Dayaks and Madurese to look into factors that contributed to the conflict and what the government could do the prevent the next ones. The following sections will describe the conceptual framework from which the incident was examined, followed by the research findings and discussions.

## Conflicts, violence and ethnicities

Conflict correlates with competition among two or more individuals, groups, or species in obtaining or mastering restricted resources.<sup>8</sup> According to Spielmann,<sup>9</sup> competition occurs when two or more individuals, populations, or species simultaneously use a resource that is actually or potentially limiting (p.17). Further,

Schmidt and Schroder illustrated the relationship between violent acts and social ramifications, as follows:

- 1) Violence is never completely idiosyncratic. It always expresses some kind of relationship with another party and violent acts do not target anybody at random (although the individual victim is likely to be chosen as representative of some larger category).
- 2) Violence is never completely sense- or meaningless to the actor. It may seem senseless, but it is certainly not meaningless to victim or observer. As social action, it can never be completely dissociated from instrumental rationality.
- 3) Violence is never a totally isolated act. It is--however remotely—related to a competitive relationship and thus the product of a historical process that may extend far back in time and that adds by virtue of this capacity many vicissitudes to the analysis of the conflictive trajectory.<sup>10</sup>

Taking Schmid and Schoder's notion into account, therefore, when violence occurs, there are at least three components: 1) specific objects (victims) and specific actors of violence, 2) external factors causing violence and, 3) historical backgrounds in which accumulation of conflict in the past will potentially contribute to perpetuate conflicts manifested in violent acts.

When dealing with ethnic conflict, it is important to understand how ethnicity is described. According to Fenton,<sup>11</sup> "ethnicity has a structure and an action context. The structure context is constituted by the political and economic conditions of a social system insofar as they are racialized and ethicized". This means that ethnicity can be called upon over either racial or ethnic performances: to unite the solidarity or differentiate the world under a classification of "the internal and the external", "we" and "they", "you" and "I", "enemy" and "friends", and so forth. Ethnic solidarity was studied, for instance, in Africa when two different groups of Fang of Gabon and of Cameroon united of using their family idioms while ignoring their familiar disunity.<sup>12</sup> Since ethnicity is viewed as a product of human construction, it can be created or presented negatively and positively with various purposes.

### **Dayaks and Their Perceptions of Madurese**

Before the Sambas outbreak in early 1999, the relationship between Dayaks-Malays and Madurese was not in harmony where economic and social gaps were prevailing. On the other hand, social involvement between Dayaks-Malays community and Chinese, Bugis, Javanese and the rest were peacefully working. The negative view of the Madurese among Dayaks can be inferred from the results of International Crisis Group (ICG) research explaining common Madurese stereotypes expressed by Dayaks. Accordingly, Dayaks often view the Madurese as arrogant, exclusive, prone to violence and untrustworthy. Dayaks, on the other

hand, have been portrayed, especially in the international press as “barbarian warriors bent on reviving their ancient headhunting tradition”.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, the Madurese also have negative impression towards Dayaks, as will be addressed in the followings section. The report adds that Dayaks had no complaints against the Javanese, the Banjarese and other communities who treated Dayak culture with respect and were able to adjust to Dayaks’ values.

Indeed, several Dayak informants admitted that there were some ‘good’ Madurese, especially among those who had lived many years in Borneo and those who belonged to second and third generation families. However, Dayaks acknowledged that in general, Madurese were characterized by a deep sense of ethnic solidarity (exemplified by their tendency to pray at exclusive Madurese mosques), prone to violence and contemptuous of Dayak values. These characterized Madurese seemed in contradiction to Dayaks’ expectation to their neighbors of being respectful to their tradition while stating that they have a traditional principle of “*di mana bumi dipijak di situ langit dijunjung*” (When in Rome, do as the Romans), which implies the notion of acceptance of the customs of the place where one lives.<sup>14</sup> According to Susetyawan, a member of the Kanayatan Dayak Presidium, “Madurese cannot be adaptable with our culture”.<sup>15</sup> The following explanation shows the Dayaks’ perception upon the Madurese, collected in an ICG interview:

- A non-Madurese who bargains with a Madurese seller in a market will be verbally abused if he fails to make a purchase.
- Madurese stall-holders threaten non-Madurese if they sell goods at lower prices.
- A senior Dayak civil servant said how he had ordered some furniture to be brought to Palangkaraya by boat from Banjarmasin. The furniture was then brought by Madurese informal workers directly to his house although he had not asked them for assistance.
- The Madurese then demanded payment at a rate set by themselves
- Madurese are notorious for renting land and then refusing to leave when their lease has expired.
- Madurese are said to often harvest crops grown on land owned by others, be involved in crime and bribe police.
- Madurese always carry a sickle, which they will use if they get involved in a conflict with others.<sup>16</sup>

Additionally, as reported by the HRW, it has been popular among Dayaks that most Madurese who came to West Borneo brought their old traditions and customs, such as carrying sharp weapons, murdering, stealing, robbing, raping and forcing their will on others.<sup>17</sup> These cumulative stereotypes of the Dayaks upon their Madurese neighbors, and cultural misunderstanding between the two dominant

groups, may have been the significant factor contributing to the outbreak of Sambas incident. While Dayaks perceive carrying a weapon as a kind of violence or fighting, for example, Madurese view it as just a custom of their homeland without any connotation of violence or killing.

Meanwhile, the relationships between Madurese and other groups varied. For example, the relation of Madurese and Buginese was generally characterized by economic activities. Their shared belief of Islam which to some extent contributed to maintaining their harmony. Such an economic-based relationship was apparent between Madurese and the Chinese, the business sector is a shared sector between the two.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, the relationship between Madurese and Malays was strained by the exclusiveness of the Madurese. Although both groups were Muslims, most Madurese lived in their local religious pattern. For example, even though there were many public mosques in Sambas, they built separate mosques for their groups. In addition to their religious exclusiveness, the Madurese also practice distinct social activities. For instance, when they had a wedding party, they did not invite other ethnic neighbors to come and celebrate. As addressed by Tangdiling, a sociologist at Tanjungpura University, "It's too hard for Madurese to adapt with their neighbors in West Borneo".<sup>19</sup> Lack of education and their communal life put these Madurese in difficult situation and unable to be open to others. Madurese were also known to be easily breaking the law and involving in crime and violence.

This exclusiveness of Madurese resulted in conflicts with the local Dayaks. In attempts to resolve the conflict, at least 36 agreements were signed by both groups, but the Madurese often violated these agreements, until a conflict broke in Sambas, West Borneo. As noted by *Tiras* magazine, during 47 years, 11 conflicts erupted between the two ethnic groups in Sambas and Pontianak.<sup>20</sup> The Sambas incident in 1999 was the climax of the ongoing conflicts between the two groups.

### **Madurese characters and their attitudes towards Dayaks**

Madurese are people inhabiting the island of Madura in East Java. Unlike other Indonesian islands, Madura Island with its high temperature and barren landscape does not provide its population with natural resources like forests or mining, except for particular mineral salt. Therefore, most Madurese are fishermen or farmers. This natural limitation cause Madura inhabitants escape their homeland, looking for their livelihood. For many decades, West Borneo has been one of the Madurese's economic destinations. Their arrival in West Borneo began in the 1930s and 1940s as indentured laborers to work in forest or plantation areas.<sup>21</sup> The number of Madurese in West Borneo increased significantly when the central government formally moved them under the national transmigration program in the early 1970s. Presumably due to their harsh natural conditions and limited educational

background, Madurese have high temper and strong sense of social solidarity among them.

In terms of their religiosity, most Madurese are strong-faith Muslims. It can be said that more than 90% of Madurese are Muslims. The names of Madurese people are usually using Arabic words to signify their Islam faith. Madurese have been known as loyalists towards their religious leader called Kiyai. A Kiyai is someone from whom people request advices and instruction for their daily affairs, from personal, social and political to religious ones. For the Madurese, Kiyai is very central in their life.

Towards the Dayaks as the host ethnic in Borneo, the incoming Madurese seemed unsuccessful in adapting their character and manner to live harmoniously in the region. Generally speaking, their lack of education along with their exclusiveness may perpetuate their long-lasting bad impression and treatment upon the outsiders, especially Dayaks. One derogatory expression by the Madurese upon Dayaks as weak people has been contemptuously uttered. The notion of “Dayaks are chips” (Dayak kerupuk) is common among the Madurese population.<sup>22</sup> In addition, the Madurese themselves acknowledged that their culture approves of dueling as a response to a slight to honor<sup>23</sup> even towards the local host.

### **Sambas Outbreak**

As reported by Davidson and Kammen, on December 7, 1967, Dayaks burned Madurese homes in a village between Anjungan and Mandor. Similar destruction occurred on December 15, followed by fliers circulated outside Pontianak, calling the Madurese “the black Chinese” (*tjina hitam*) and demanding them leave the region.<sup>24</sup> Dayaks identified the Madurese as “the black Chinese” may have indicated that Dayaks also had a serious aversion to the Chinese community before the New Order came into being.

It was in Parit Setia, a village in the sub-district of Jawai, Sambas, that everything happened. It was January 17, 1999, when Muslims over the region were preparing to celebrate *Idul Fitri*, an Islamic celebration ending a Ramadhan the month of fasting. Suddenly, the public were shocked when around two hundred armed Madurese arrived at Malay-inhabited Parit Setia, attacking their Muslim Malay neighbors with their machetes and sickles while yelling “*Allahu Akbar*” (God is the Greatest). Three Malays were killed during the incident.<sup>25</sup>

Following the attack, leaders in Parit Setia and Rambeyan, a neighboring village, met and agreed not to pursue the case further in spite of losing three casualties to the riot. Their fear of the Madurese character was obvious (Petebang & Sutrisno, 2000). However, news of the murder in Parit Setia spread throughout Sambas city. As a result, the Malays’ anger towards Madurese spread up. Conditions were

worsened by the police's unfair treatment of the murderers. Though the police arrested one of the murderers, three Malays were captured without adequate reasons.<sup>26</sup> The Malays' response was so severe that the Malays' antipathy toward the Madurese and the police elevated even more.

A month later, on February 22, 1999, a quarrel occurred in Pusaka, a village in the sub-district of Tebas, when Kacong, a Madurese, got on a bus without speaking or giving his payment to the conductor, Bujak Lebik. As a Malay, Lebik felt he had been insulted by Kacong, and spontaneously confronted him by staring in Kacong's face. What happened after this tiny incident is unbelievable: Kacong quickly stopped the bus, bringing out his sickle to hurt Lebik. Lebik was injured and brought to the hospital, but rumors flew across the region that Kacong had killed Lebik. Provoked by the rumor, about 300 Malays came to Kacong's house, asking him to send himself up to the police. However, the mass request was rejected, even one Malay was shot. As usual, news of the injured Malay spread over the region with claims that another Malay was killed by a Madurese.<sup>27</sup>

In the aftermath of the Kacong incident, Malays were in their patience limit of tolerance towards Madurese. Consequently, following the February 22 incident, communal riots between Malays and Madurese erupted, characterized by killing and burning Madurese' houses. The riots continued for four days. According to the formal report, 17 victims in Tebas, mostly Madurese, were killed, and 65 houses were burned. Later on, the riots extended to other regions of Sambas characterized by killing Madurese and driving them out of their houses. Most of victims' heads were cut off, while the survivors fled to other districts.<sup>28</sup>

Many efforts were made to halt the riots, but they occurred on a massive scale in March, 1999. Malays provoke their fellow Malays to participate in the 'revenge attack' by sending them human body parts (from killed Madurese) to encourage them to get involved in mass killing of Madurese.<sup>29</sup> Malays' anxiety over Madurese revenge caused them to continue their ethnic cleansing of Madurese from their homeland. In sum, the killing and burning continued until April, 1999, with hundreds of Madurese killed and decapitated. Thousands of them became refugees.<sup>30</sup> In this kind of situation, the negative perception towards the Madurese among the Dayaks has played a vital role in supporting their violent acts against them. Additionally, historical disputes and hatred motivated by and towards Madurese had manifested in brutal actions.

### **Factors of ethnic conflicts in Sambas**

By using Schmidt and Schroder's conceptual framework of conflict and social ramifications,<sup>31</sup> the Sambas' incident between Malays-Dayaks and Madurese, can be analyzed through three conflict factors. First, the factor of *victim* and *oppressor*. In

the Sambas' case, although Dayaks felt that they were also victims of Madurese economic power, Madurese were the physical target of the violence. Madurese were the only target of the conflict, while the other ethnic groups (Javanese, Buginese, Chinese) were safe. This means that killing Madurese was not aimless, but a specific target chosen by the Dayaks. Second, the factor of *precondition*. The conflict in Sambas was committed Dayak-Malay people for some profound reasons. Political and economic disadvantages of Dayaks due to the migration of Madurese were factual elements causing the conflict<sup>32</sup> and elevate groups tension.<sup>33</sup> Most Dayaks said that their involvement in the killing of Madurese was not merely for economic grievance, but also for government policy towards their traditional lands and forests in West Borneo. Third, the conflict in Sambas also contain a factor of history, as it was born by a historical accumulation of the past conflicts between the two groups.

### **Image of Violence in Dayak and Madurese Culture**

Seeing the conditions of victims and the method of killing, what happened in Sambas was beyond horrible. It was unbelievable that something so horrendous could occur in modern times, especially because Dayaks in general were known for their good manners and polite and respectful ones.<sup>34</sup> Sambas' incident was completely full of violence from both Dayak-Malays and Madurese, with different presentation. Dayaks' violence was marked by head-decapitation while Madurese's violence was marked by Carok. Headhunting in Dayak culture is a custom by which they manifested their grievances and hatred towards the outsiders. The head-hunting practice closely correlates to Dayaks' *adat*.<sup>35</sup> In the Sambas massacre of Madurese, such *adat* instrument was assumed to be inevitable towards the Madurese. The victims were murdered in violent ways: most victims' heads were cut off and victims' blood was drunk, the livers and intestines were extracted, and other body parts such as ears, arms, legs and feet were cut off.<sup>36</sup>

### **Headhunting: Image of Violence in Dayak Culture**

Historically, the head-hunting tradition among Dayaks cannot be separated from their ancestors' head-hunting tradition, namely *Ngayau*, symbolized by the influence of *Kamang Tariu*.<sup>37</sup> In the head-hunting custom, Dayak fighters were acting under the influence of a demonic supernatural being, or being in the state of *Kamang Tariu*. According to documents, the *Kamang Tariu* is imbued with a strong mystical force, *pajokng*. Exposure to *Pajokng* drives people to commit intensively brutal acts. Out of fear and respect for the anticipated consequences, the fighters only dare to call down *Kamang Tariu*'s spirit at certain supernaturally-charged sites, where they were ready for a fight to death (Schiller & Garang, 2002, p. 251). After the killing, a second ritual is performed to release *Kamang Tariu*'s influence. In this stage, a fighter



representing *Kamang Tariu* mourns, decapitating a red hen or a dog. Later on, the brain and blood are collected in a bowl, known as “a red bowl”, which has been identified with the Dayak ritual of head-hunting. Then, the red bowl is passed among the fighters as a signal calling to fighting and war.<sup>38</sup>

Head-hunting custom was also found in other Southeast Asian regions. Besides West Borneo of the Dayaks, other parts of Indonesia, like the Sumbanese, people of Sumba Island located between West Timor and South Flores, have been familiar with the practice. Outside Indonesia, the custom was also found in Ilongot of Northern Luzon of the Philippines, in Serawak of Malaysia, and in Burma.<sup>39</sup> As noted by Russel,<sup>40</sup> the head-hunting had been apparent in Southeast Asian regions before 200-350 AD with various purposes of religious ritual, mythology, human fertility, cosmological views and social privilege. In the spiritually aimed ritual, the head of a sacrificed victim was a unifying symbol between the person’s soul and their ancestors. “By displaying a victim’s head in public and treating it through ritual purification, one could conceivably be recruiting the soul of the enemy into an ally”.<sup>41</sup> The head-hunting was also done because of the belief in gods’ power for increasing agriculture product. “...the gods instructed them to take heads as a beneficent virtue that would enable them to increase the fertility of crops”.<sup>42</sup>

The head-hunting practices apparently shifted as social conditions changed. As Russell<sup>43</sup> states, the head-hunting practice could also be a means of emotional expression (see Michelle Rosaldo’s finding in Ilongot people of Northern Philippines in 1968). For the Ilongots, they hunted heads not for recruiting enemy souls into their ally, rather, they hunted heads as an expression of resistance or emotional feeling. For the same purpose, the Sumbanese in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century committed headhunting against the Dutch and then later was as examined by Russell, “What they did say was that it was part of an emotional feeling: man said they took heads when they had a ‘heavy heart’ or felt angry or strong pressures”.<sup>44</sup> Later on, the colonial government viewed the displaying of victims’ heads in public places as uncivilized. Therefore, because of their own concept of morality, the colonial rule in Southeast Asia banned the practice of head-hunting in the 1930s and made the people their combatants to defend against territorial threats.<sup>45</sup>

The violence among Dayaks was also related to the Indonesian military policy that made Dayaks the bumper to depress Indonesian Communists in West Borneo in the 1960s. The image of Dayaks as the Borneo head-hunters was exploited by the military in order to create a fear and shock among Communists. The military believed that the Dayaks’ head-hunting tradition symbolized by the *Mangkok Merah* (red bowl) could be a suitable way to suppress Communist members in the border areas of West Borneo. As a result, thousands of communists and their sympathizers under the flag of the Serawak People’s Guerrilla Force and North Borneo People’s

Force (PGRS/PARAKU), most of them Chinese, were thrown out of the region. Their land, was later inhabited and owned by Dayaks.<sup>46</sup> Subsequently, the image of Dayaks cannot be fully inseparable from the notion of cannibalism across the nation.

For the Muslim-Dayaks (the Malays), the headhunting tradition was unapproved of, due to their Islamic teaching. Parsudi Suparlan, a well-known Indonesian anthropologist, mentioned that Malays were like Javanese people who do not have a tradition of conflict. They usually avoided a conflict or they prefer to discuss or negotiate. They were not aggressive people; they tend to be obedience. However, the fact that the Malays eventually joined the Dayaks was due to their long-lasting hatred upon the Madurese which had been accumulated. Dayaks and Malays shared cultural binderies united them in ethnic solidarity. According to Libertius Ahe, a chief of the Sambas district Dayak Tradition Board, “Dayaks’ involvement in Sambas Incident was because of their marriage relationship with Malays” hence modest cultural solidarity profoundly developed.<sup>47</sup>

According to Parsudi Suparlan, “Although Malays did not drink the collected blood of the red bowl, perhaps they were influenced emotionally”.<sup>48</sup> As a result, although the Malays were not known as an aggressive community, their similar grievance and hatred toward the Madurese eventually persuaded them to follow the Dayaks’ expression through decapitating Madurese without any fear because they were under control of their ancestors’ spirits.<sup>49</sup> Later on, such a bowl passed throughout West Borneo and even across the border into neighboring Dayak tribes in Malaysia. Hence, the existence of a red bowl ceremony seemed to be a communication tool. “It was likely a kind of communication utility, such as a telephone machine today, used by Dayaks to announce a war,” says Rachmat Salahuddin, a member of Dayaks *Kanayatn*.<sup>50</sup>

### **Carok: Image of violence in Madurese Culture**

While the Dayaks’ image of violence is associated with headhunting, the Madurese’s image of violence is symbolized by the Carok tradition. Carok literally means ‘to kill someone with a sickle’. According to Wiyata,<sup>51</sup> Carok for Madurese is closely connected with their honor and sense of embarrassment (*todus*). When their honor is violated, a Madurese particularly from lowly educated group, would quickly respond through Carok. Most the Carok’s incidents were related to the family or wife’s dignity.<sup>52</sup> In other words, like head-hunting among Dayak, for Madurese Carok has played a cultural instrument when they failed to resolve their problems peacefully.

As a cultural symbol among the Madurese, Carok contains a specific value. Similarly, the concept of honor is also found in Bugis society in Makassar of South Sulawesi, in the concept of *Sirri*’ which is related to honor and human dignity. The

word *sirri* means “feeling embarrassed” or “self-dignity”. Like Carok in Madurese, *sirri* in Bugis society results in violence when honor is violated by others in an improper manner or conduct. Taking out their female family members without permission, for instance, will be generally understood as disgracing their honor and potentially leads to violent acts such as those with Badik [a Bugis traditional weapon].<sup>53</sup>

Historically, Carok is a product of Madurese social construction from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century when Madura was under indirect rule of a colonial government.<sup>54</sup> While the Dutch directly ruled Java, Madura retained its traditional feudal power and elite consumerism. Meanwhile, the peasants in Madura were forced to support their elites’ economic status. As a result, the prestige of the rulers declined while crime increased within Madurese society. The law and security were ineffective and unjust treatment was widespread. In other words, the Madurese were out of control and out of order. Therefore, to obtain justice and economic needs, they resorted to violence.

Furthermore, historical violence among the Madurese also contributed to the violent image of the Madurese today. There was a legend of the old Madura Kingdom of Medangkamulan in which Raden Segoro, a local warrior with divine power, drove out the kingdom’s Chinese enemy. There was also violent event occurred during Dutch colonialism. For example, when the Dutch arrived at Madura in the 1700s, they found that the Madurese revolted against the Mataram Kingdom of Java. As a result, several local kingdoms emerged in Madura and were politically independent from the colonial intervention who were known to be unjust. The Dutch then oppressed the locals through economic and security crisis, pushing the locals to flee from their homeland for their own safety. Ironically, based on political rights gained from the Dutch, Madurese rulers were required to provide troops for Dutch defense. Therefore, Madurese mercenary troops called Barisan were created by the Dutch in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, for fighting against Dutch enemies, notably in the Bone War (1825), the Java War (1815-1830) and the Aceh Wars (1837, 1875, 1876, 1886). According to Wiyata, these historical facts were subsequently labored as a way to create Madurese stereotypes, through which the outsiders view them as a community accustomed with the violence symbolized by the Carok.<sup>55</sup>

### **State policy that contributed to ethnic conflicts**

In many conflicts in Indonesia, an external factor such as government policy or treatment of its people may have contributed to the long-lasting conflicts along with ethnic dynamism. Further, the state policy of Indonesian inter-ethnic, religion and race relationships, namely SARA (*Suku, Agama dan Ras*) under Soeharto’s regime,

for example, shaped people's behavior and manner towards and perception of each other. Accordingly, the policy banes speaking openly of these three matters, partly because it would threaten the national political stability, as happened before the New Order (*Orde Baru*). In addition, the security approach policy of the New Order government has appeared more as the cause of ethnic problems than as an integrating or mediating force. In other words, in Indonesia ethnicity lies not in the vacuum of external influence so far. The birth of a modern state in Indonesia, in doing so, has led the notion of ethnicity.<sup>56</sup> During President Soeharto era from 1965 to 1998, he enabled his military colleagues to occupy and control the nation, politically and economically. In economic field, Soeharto's military officers were also directly guaranteed in dealing with business affairs where in many democratic states' civilians used to be. During his regime, most strategic political positions, like governors and political parties either in central, provinces or remoted areas, were led predominantly by the military officers.<sup>57</sup>

With its very centralistic character of the regime, the exclusion of indigenous leaders from the local development occurred, especially in some regions with abundant of natural resources like Aceh, Riau, West Papua, and West Borneo. In order to implement his development agendas, Soeharto appointed his military officers to handle and control natural resource projects while excluding the indigenous people's leaders, arguably assuming that they had no skills needed to be involved in industrial programs. In the West Borneo case, the New Order issued many regulations on lands and exploited the forests where the Dayaks had inhabited and depended upon them since the centuries. The *Orde Baru's* Basic Forest Law of 1967 stated explicitly that customary rights are permitted to take benefits from the forest as long as they do not disturb the achievement caused by this law.<sup>58</sup> With this law, the traditional forest in West Kalimantan was systematically destroyed, replaced by high pollution and acute environmental crisis. Socially, correlated with this policy, any Dayaks including those Malays, who claimed to be the true heirs of the forest were being marginalized, politically and economically. Moreover, those excluded people were very often accused by the government of destroying the forest in West Borneo.

The transmigration policy was another factor triggering the ethnic conflict in West Borneo. Although voluntary immigration had been a natural movement in the region since the 1930s, the New Order's transmigration policy, began in the 1970s, engendered social and economic effects. Historically, since West Borneo was well-known because of the historical event in Soekarno's period through his policy of Indonesian confrontation against Malaysia in 1950s, it also was viewed by the New Order as a strategic region for the implementation of national program of transmigration from the overcrowded regions of Java, Bali and Madura Islands.<sup>59</sup> In

early 1973, the New Order government started to carry out transmigration programs in the region, intending that an influx of Indonesians (mostly Javanese) “would counterbalance the province’s large ethnic Chinese population and ‘civilize’ the Dayaks groups of the interior”.<sup>60</sup>

While the official policy of placing Javanese transmigrants in selected areas was a success, spontaneous Madurese migrants not only settled along the coast from Ketapang to Pontianak and north of Sambas, but they also moved inland to occupy areas abandoned by the relocation of Chinese, particularly in Sanggau Ledo and Samalantan sub-districts. As a result, “this wild [*liar*] transmigration,” the daily *Utama* explained in 1973, created unwanted social problems.<sup>61</sup> The social life between the indigenous people and the Madurese transmigrants was disharmonic.

The alienation of local people was also found in other wealthy Indonesian regions like Aceh, West Papua or Riau as the result of transmigration policy. In these areas, indigenous people became spectators rather than participants in social, economic and political life. Similarly, Dayaks were also alienated from the process of development in their homelands during the New Order period. The control of the New Order through its military and civilian loyalists in the region reduced Dayaks’ rights and ownership of their traditional lands. In terms of local politics, Dayaks were also dominated by immigrants within the local government bureaucracy. In addition, lack of education and negative perceptions of Dayaks as backward further hampered Dayaks’ ability to participate in the development process. Meanwhile, the central government policy toward plantations and transmigration had indirectly damaged their forests.<sup>62</sup> It means that Dayaks were trapped in the worst situation structurally and culturally. Therefore, when the central government excluded local people in the changing process, because of their lack of skills and “backwardness”, Dayaks were automatically eliminated from protecting their forests, and they were not able to obtain the forestry benefit from their traditional lands. According to Dayaks, destroying the forest means destroying their life individually or collectively. “The forest, the earth and all its inhabitants are part of the life itself where and when Dayaks want to utilize them, they should give something or offering to the “forest guard”.<sup>63</sup>

Meanwhile, since their land had become an economic destination for outsiders, the Dayaks were economically eliminated gradually from their homelands. They were forced to move to the outer parts of the land simply because their lands were inhabited by the immigrants and became newly industrialized areas. Later on, these areas appeared as new settlements, while Dayaks were not able to participate in those development processes. For the Dayaks to follow the new customs settled by the government, that would mean changing their customs and values that had been handed down from their ancestors across centuries. In addition, massive

industrialization of the forest coupled with increasing industrial pollution in the region narrowed the Dayaks' settlement and destroyed their rivers and lands where they had traditionally been dependent on products such as fish, water, fruits, food, medicine, etc. Most of their traditional lands was owned by the government and private forest companies. As a result, the accumulation of such grievances among Dayaks was visible and increased.

On the other hand, the economic prosperity of the immigrants, especially Madurese immigrants increased. The combination of ecological grievance and culturally-ethnic differences between both groups found its moment to explode up when the central government was not able to control national stability. It was a critical point that led the conflict in Sambas. The inability of the military and police to prevent and handle the conflicts has strengthened this popular assumption. Consequently, when the central control appeared incapable, some regions with the ongoing potential grievances expressed their discontent in various ways: from ethnic or communal sentiment, destroying government offices or local parliament buildings, to human rights abuses.<sup>64</sup>

### **Ethnicity as a triggering factor to conflicts**

As can be seen in Sambas conflict, the riot occurred between the Dayaks-Malays and Madurese people, two groups who share the same faith that is Islam. Apparently, the shared religion between these groups was not strong enough to build harmony. There is another factor that became trigger in the conflict, that is ethnicity. Young states that "ethnicity has psychological properties and discursive resources which have the potential to decant into violence".<sup>65</sup> Ethnicity can be used as a simple tool to unite and justify the purpose of any movement or activity. In such social and economic deprivation as experienced by the Dayaks, ethnicity has provided a chance for them to articulate their enmity and anger.

In regard to Sambas ethnic incident, Fenton's explanation that the ethnicity is prone to be manifested over conflict and violence, *adat*, in doing so, may have played as a critical factor within the notion of ethnicity and is relevant and helpful to understanding the role of Dayaks' ethnicity during the that of incident.<sup>66</sup> Dayaks mobilized their ethnicity in order to build a solidarity of similar deprivation. Their discontent with the central government's policy toward their traditional lands and forests, district politics and transmigration, followed by their hatred of Madurese immigrants drove the Dayaks to ally with their Malay brothers in fighting the Madurese. Malays agreed to support Dayaks to overthrow the minority of Madurese. Both also agreed to forbid the return of the Madurese migrants to West Borneo that had been "their homes" over decades. The fact that Dayaks could still work together with Malays was due to the similarities in physical ethnic properties, such as: physical

appearance, and language, values, worldview and traditional rituals. Dayaks-Malays shared hatred upon the Madurese, coupled with their shared ethnicity, made them the instrument of expression.

The abstract notion of ethnicity of human beings can appear as a real power that manifests itself in varied forms of conflict under the umbrella of group solidarity. This is a potential power of the ethnicity may prevail when people fail to tolerate to deprivation and their historical bitterness alike. Also, the notion of shared ethnicity has played more dominant than that of shared belief of Islam between Dayaks and Malays. The study has showed that blood is thicker than water. Mutual understanding and cooperation are necessarily needed in order to eliminate the conflict.

## Conclusion

Many factors triggered ethnic conflict between Dayaks and Madurese in Sambas, including the violent legacy in both cultures, the central government's policy in West Borneo that disadvantaged the Dayaks, the Madurese' inability to adapt to local cultures and values and long withstanding social conflicts between the two. Series of conflicts between the two groups was inevitable during Soeharto's regime of the New Order. Strong military policy towards prolonged conflicts made them always under government control. When the weakness in the central government appeared, no agency was capable to handle the conflict.

The exploitative and exclusive policy of the central government in West Borneo was another element that escalated the conflict. Economic and ecological hardships caused by the central government's policy led prolonged conflicts between the two dominant groups (the indigenous Dayaks-Malays and that of immigrants of Madurese) in the region. In such situation, Dayaks and their Malay fellows engineered their sense of ethnicity as a way to manifesting their social, political and economic grievance caused by the government through the head-hunting incident towards the Madurese.

This study suggests that the role of Islam seemed not so contributive to overcome the conflict among the two ethnicities. Although Malays are identified as Muslims of Dayaks and called *orang Melayu* (Malay people) who shared similar religion of Islam with that of Madurese, yet the faith was not strong enough to prevent or resolute the conflicts between Dayak and Madurese Muslims. The implication that can be drawn from this study is that, in managing ethnic conflicts, central government should consider the voice of local leaders and local communities, to hear from both sides of conflicting parties, and develop a locally-oriented policy that can accommodate the needs of all ethnics or parties.[]

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