
SARA IN INDONESIA: THE CONSTRUCTION OF ETHNIC VIOLENCE IN NEWS MEDIA AT THE END PERIOD OF NEW ORDER

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ABSTRACT

This research examined newspaper coverage of ethnic violence during the New Order and transition eras in Indonesia. The regime controlled the press through the limitation of press license. It also pressed the press through the prohibition of reporting of Suku (ethnic), Agama (religion), ras (race) and Antar golongan (inter-group) (Sara) issues. If the press had to report these issues, they must report them from the government point of view. This raised problems for the press in reporting ethnic violence in Indonesia in relation to standards of ‘fairness and balance’ and the ‘fourth estate’ role. This research adopted Cultural Studies approach of text. The approach identifies text in relation to its contextual background. Data gathered from two national newspapers was analyzed using textual analysis. Research finding shows that in terms of national press coverage of the 1999 ethnic violence, the fall of the New Order regime and the rise of civil society had led to a freer press signified by the change of reportage style, orientation, and perspective. The Indonesian press had become more open and critical in reporting the issue. The press had oriented itself toward society instead of the state and implemented a standard of ‘fairness and balance’. As the result, the press was able to play a role as the ‘fourth estate’.

KEYWORDS: Sara, ethnic violence, New Order, Indonesian press, text and context

INTRODUCTION

Researching sensitive issue like ethnic violence in Indonesia strongly relates to the political condition under Soeharto’s New Order that governed from 1966 to 1998. Soeharto suppressed issues of pluralism and ethnic heterogeneity through various policies and programs on behalf of national integrity and unity. For Suharto, the idea of nationalism had become an ‘ideological reason’ for uniformity and a way to help him sustain the power. As part of nationalism, it was intolerable to have conflict and ethnic difference in society.

The reconceptualization of ethnicity came to its peak when the government introduced the policy of ‘Suku’ (ethnic), ‘Agama’ (religion), ‘Ras’ (racial) or ‘Antar golongan’ (inter-group). The policy, known as Sara, limited and controlled public interpretation over all socio-political conflicts that endangered national stability and restricted languages used in the news media. It became the main foundation of all government policies. Conflicts and difference within society were intolerable.

The Indonesian press then faced a dilemma when it came to reporting issues of ethnicity. On one side, they have an obligation to report the news to the public; on the other side, the concept of Sara had become an unwritten law to restrict the press from reporting the issue. Furthermore, the government could revoke the publishing permits without any warning it thought that the press had broken the law. As Hill and Sen (2006, p. 12) had mentioned, “For most of the New Order, the media appeared to be under the command of the government, controlled through layers of formal and informal censorship processes and, increasingly, through ownership.”

Despite the fact that Indonesia has now entered a reformation era for 20 years, Sara still becomes a sensitive issue. Further, the fast growth of social media can be a potential medium to proliferate this issue. The recent case of this was how the court had sentenced to jail former governor of Jakarta, Ahok for insulting the religion of Islam in his speech. Thus, analyzing how the media reported the issue of Sara at the transition period of the New Order regime and reformation era would give a basis for understanding the way Indonesia news media report issue of Sara in a more recent social and political condition of Indonesia. To date, this research found few studies on Sara and media in Indonesia. Sudiby (2001), Ramage, (2002), Hill (2006) Sen and Hill (2010), Susanto & Zhang (2017) were some of them. However, none of these studies focused on ethnic violence, Sara, and media within the context of the New Order and the transition era of Indonesia.

The objective of the study was to analyze how news media institutions portrayed issues of ethnic violence in Indonesia. These included the content of news coverage, the orientation of news sources, and the tendency of news reporting of the issue. In particular, the analysis focused on ethnic violence that occurred in West Kalimantan Province. Further, this research analyzed the changes of press policies from the New Order era through to the Reformation era.

How media outlets construct their reports have direct consequences for what people think about an issue (Bolsen, 2011). News media coverage of an issue is principally a journalistic practice that is inseparable from various influences such as the state, culture, ideology, editorial policy and the mission of media institutions. The interplay of these various factors appears in the ways in which journalists and editors conduct their work. It is evident that texts are generated through professional practices, priorities and cultural grounding of a news organization and its practicing professional staff. While seeking to contribute to the formation of a specifically Indonesian civil society, the news media under study are also subject to their own cultural-ideological priorities and predispositions. In this sense, these priorities problematize broader issues of news balance and objective reporting—critical elements of the news publications' fourth estate role. Media institutions need to consider all of these factors if their reporting is to represent the events accurately. However, the interplay between various factors may result in imbalanced reporting of an issue. Thus, when media institutions report an issue with a particular orientation, how do we explain it?

In principle, what the media does is mediate meaning. Text producers may consist of people, institutions, rules, and processes that contribute to the formation of texts. The text covers all forms of mediation in language, sound, image, and taste. Text media includes books, newspapers, television and so on. Text readers include all forms of text consumers at all stages of production or acceptance. The relationship between these three elements takes place simultaneously and in a dynamic cultural context. In other words, this media making process can be understood as culture. Culture is the context of the existing meaning and dynamics that stimulate the production and dissemination of new meanings (Lewis, 2002).

The development of Cultural Studies as an interdisciplinary science has brought significant impact to a better understanding of the text. Many events, news or advertisements in the media can be interpreted in various ways. Cultural Studies has three distinct advantages—first, it allows researchers to apply a range of methodologies; secondly, it provides an expansive framework for an understanding of 'representation'; thirdly, it is sensitive to the processes of meaning-making and mediation, particularly in relation to the ways in which cultural politics contribute to the formation of social knowledge. As a theoretical and methodological framework, Cultural Studies provides the most effective conceptual framework to identify and analyze the ways in which specific media producers and texts have generated meaning (Flew, 2018). Cultural Studies allows researchers to focus on language and text; the production and organizational processes that form around journalism and the media industry; and the cultural-political context in which these texts are generated.

This approach emphasizes the understanding of media content in relation to media institutions and the environmental context. The cultural approach or what Curran et al. (2012) and Newbold et al. (2002) call Cultural Studies principally tries to explain the manufacturing of media content through the understanding of the interplay of various levels of influence from within media organizations and also those from outside the media such as political economy factors. It is possible that in some cases the internal influences are greater than the political economy factors and vice versa in the production of media content. In Cultural Studies, a great deal of power and influence is attributed to meanings, signs, ideas, and language as among the primary determinants of the human world (Newbold et al., 2002). These studies focus not on who owns the media, but on how those media are positioned relative to the power elites within society. Thus, content is not simply a function of ownership, or of journalistic practices and rituals, but of the interaction between news organizations, the sources of their output and other social institutions (McNair, 2009). Molotch, Lester and Tuchman state that the fact that news is 'constructed' suggests that it is socially constructed and elaborated in the interaction of the news making players with one another (Schudson, 2011).

Journalists play important role in writing news about an event, as they have to consider and integrate various factors from within the media organization. According to McNair (2003), there are some things that journalist must note to be objective. The journalist must present both sides of a story (or, in the case of a more complex debate, all credible sides), support evidence for any assertions made in

the story, quote authoritative sources, and 'fact' must be structured with the most important issues coming first, at the 'top' of the story.

The classical understanding that the text is only synonymous with writing or word has shifted to a broader understanding. The text is basically inextricably linked with social practice, institutional processes, political and economic activity. The meaning of the text cannot be viewed by itself from the influence and performance of the culture in which the text appears.

The text may be in the form of writing, speech, drawing, music or any other form of a symbol (Lehtonen, 2000), (Jackson, 2016). The point is that these symbols are organized and there are clearly defined symbolic combinations. Messages, information or news (text) submitted by a media will not be out of context. This means that the process of message reconstruction will be influenced by various aspects, such as socio-political situation. According to Thwaites et al. (2002), the text is always socially constructed to have a certain meaning and to achieve certain goals (such as the formation of identity or the creation of an impression).

The relevance of texts and contexts can be learned in various ways, just as learning the emergence of various texts. Through this understanding, the concept of 'context' can be understood to contain a deep emphasis on public activity. Context refers to the fact that meanings in the news text are created not only in activities traditionally thought to produce meaning - oral, written, audiovisual - but also in accepting texts. So there is the principle of interaction with the text. Context includes all situations and things that are outside the text and affects the use of the language, such as participants in the language, the situation in which the text is produced, the intended function of text representation, and so on. A more detailed understanding of the factors that influence the writing of a text, can be seen in Shoemaker and Reese (2013).

MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY

The objective of this research is to investigate Indonesian news media coverage of issues of ethnic violence during the New Order and transition eras. Archival research was conducted to provide the contextual background for the research including a historical understanding of the New Order era, the Indonesian press, and interethnic relationships. An in-depth analysis of the political context which influenced national newspaper coverage of ethnic violence in Indonesia was conducted. Data were gathered from two national newspapers and analyzed using textual analysis. Interviews were undertaken in Jakarta with editors and journalists of national press institutions. The range of values, politics and regulation strategies was examined and the findings have been synthesized to provide an in-depth picture of the politics and practices of the press during the New Order and transition eras.

Sample Selection

For the purposes of the analysis of news media coverage, the term 'population' refers to the total number of units of analysis which contain the characteristic of interest. Meanwhile 'sample' refers to

the small portion of the total population which is selected and used for the purpose of generalizing about the entire population (Frey, et al., 1991). The population includes all newspapers in Indonesia, and the newspapers which have been selected for detailed analysis are the two main national newspapers, Kompas and Republika. The sample which has been analyzed in this research includes all news items and headlines collected from Kompas and Republika which covered ethnic violence in West Kalimantan.

Data collection

The following fieldworks were undertaken:

1. Archival research

Archival research was undertaken at the National Archival Centre in Jakarta to obtain information about the history and development of the press. The research also collected articles of news media coverage of ethnic violence in West Kalimantan from Kompas and Republika news media institutions.

2. Interviews

Interviews were undertaken in Jakarta with editors and journalists of national press institutions (Kompas and Republika newspapers) as these were the sources of the articles about ethnic violence. The interviews were conducted to obtain information which would strengthen the analysis of the news coverage and provide a more in-depth understanding of the political and organizational contexts. Information was collected about the following issues:

Data Analysis

This research employed textual analysis. Textual analysis enables us to discuss the texts within their contextual background (Berger, 2018). This approach is based on the notion that the text produced cannot be separated from the news media institutions and social and cultural environments within which news is produced and interpreted. Text is always socially constructed to have certain meanings and to achieve certain outcomes (such as creating an identity or impression) (Thwaites et al., 2002). Loizeaux and Fraistat (2002) say, "To talk about texts and textuality, then, is ultimately to talk about culture, the ground on which we and our texts inhabit the textual condition". Principally, media text analysis is aimed at enhancing our understanding of the part media representations plays within the wider construction of meanings within the culture. Media text analysis is always moving from the text to the wider culture, or from the text to the audience (Turner & Cunningham, 2002).

In understanding news (text), it is possible what the news does not say is as important as what the news does say. Knowing what a text says is not straightforward. We need to look carefully at what texts actually say and what they do not say, to identify the points where there is vagueness, ambiguity, lack of obvious coherence (Johnstone, 2018), (Bell & Garrett, 1998). Thus, to understand the news, we need to see why the media report the event through a particular perspective and what social, political, and other factors affect news media policy in reporting the event. Emphasis is given to headlines and text of news items that were considered important. Though only some part of the

news items analyzed was presented, principally the analysis covered the whole texts of the news items to extract stronger evidence.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Politic of Ethnicity

Ethnic violence that had occurred in some parts of Indonesia during the New Order era and afterward strongly related to the concept of nationalism which had been imposed by Suharto's regime through various policies. According to Anderson (Anderson, 1990, p. 37), from the late nineteenth century on, this nationalism expresses a fundamental drive to solidarity and unity in the face of the disintegration of traditional society under colonial capitalism and other powerful external forces.

The policy of Sara principally was the form of state domination over various ethnic groups. Though it has to be admitted that years 1971-1981 can be classified as a period of 'rapid growth' (H. Hill, 1994) and some unrests with ethnic dimension occurred, the implementation of the policy itself along with the repressive approach to legitimizing Suharto's development program invited tension within society. Economically, Suharto had misused the policy of Sara to explore natural resources in both Java and non-Java islands for the benefit of his family and cronies. Politically, this policy had legitimized Suharto to place his trusted men (Javanese) in important positions in the local government structure, ignoring the political participation of indigenous people. Thus, the policy led to conflict. As the result of the prohibition of ethnic groups' expression of their ethnic identity, bonds within groups were strengthened. Exclusivity emerged within some particular ethnic groups. This led to particular ethnic group domination over another. Thus, the policy of Sara itself may be one source of ethnic violence in pluralistic Indonesia.

Beneath the banner of Sara, the New Order government culturally and politically had constructed ethnic violence by letting exclusivity of ethnic identity and bigger political roles of certain ethnic groups to grow at the expense of others. As the disparity in political participation increased, so did the conflict potential. It was only a matter of time before ethnic violence finally erupted. When it occurred, the army, as part of New Order's security instrument, played its role to reduce the conflict. Since ethnic groups were busy with war and consolidating power to protect them, they would not have much time to focus on government policies and programs. Thus, the government could sustain its power and legalized the presence of the army in the region.

Theoretically, the concept of Sara is hardly acceptable. The New Order's assumption that inter-ethnic relations tended to create conflict and violence reflected more on the New Order's anxiety toward its sustainability, rather than the unity and integrity of Indonesia. There are some arguments to support this. First, the concept of Sara is based on the idea that cultural difference always leads to conflict and violence. It is possible that cultural difference may be the source of conflict, but it may also be the source of unity.

Second, there is an assumption that conflict takes place due to purely ethnic factors. In fact, from various ethnic conflicts in Indonesia, it is rare to see ethnic conflicts solely caused by ethnic factors. Most of the conflicts occurred under the New Order were triggered by the New Order's political and developmental strategies that involved particular ethnic groups.

Press Under New Order

The strong domination of the state during the New Order regime in Indonesia was the principal influence on the journalistic practice of the Indonesian press. Government sources dominated the coverage. Media institutions were required to set strict self-control to avoid criticism directed toward the state. Also, large and influential media institutions only employed journalists if they became members of journalist associations organized by the government.

In relation to the practice of the press in Indonesia, especially under the New Order regime, the state created the fact that must appear in the news. It was strengthened with the introduction of 'development journalism' where the press was required to report on the process of development instead of criticizing the state (D. T. Hill, 2006). Journalists were required to incorporate state and public interests along with their press idealism. Thus, there were conflicting interests which explain how these issues were presented in the media. The condition of the Indonesian press, however, has been different in the Reformation era.

One strong characteristic of the press in the early New Order was its spirit for the struggle. This had been proven when the press along with political powers within society and supported by Suharto's power successfully toppled Sukarno and his PKI associates. Noticing the power of the press in mobilizing the public, the New Order government decided to control the press by issuing Indonesia 1966 Act and later revised to 1982 Act on the Basic Principles of the Press. This Press Act, which was based on Chapters 28 and 33 of the 1945 Constitution, MPRS decree No. 32/1966 on Indonesian Press and the state ideology, stated that the nurture of the press was in the hand of government and press members elected by the government (H. Hill, 1994), (Hanazaki, Wardoyo, & Luwarso, 1998).

News Media Portrayal of Ethnic Violence

Big national press institutions like Kompas and Republika still showed quality and accountability as national newspapers that were professional in their coverage of an event. The freedom of the press had enabled the press to present the news to society in a more open and democratic way. The implementation of self-censorship and self-regulation by the press in order to avoid reporting news in ways which could be considered to exacerbate the event was not due to fears about government suppression, rather this was an attempt to present news that was congruent with the press mission, vision, law, and code of ethics.

Through textual analysis, it is possible to examine the coverage of ethnic violence in the Indonesian Press after the press gained its freedom and how well the press had reported the event as part of its

role as the 'fourth estate'. Although the press gained its freedom after the fall of the New Order regime, the rise of civil society had also become a strong consideration for the press to carefully report the issue. One phenomenon during the Reformation era was the action taken by a specific group when it disagreed with the ways the press reported the issue. The group would come to the press institutions and demand the press apologize for reporting the issue in ways which they considered may lead to misunderstandings, and if demands were not met, the group would occupy the press office. This was obviously against the freedom of the press. Thus, although the press was free to report sensitive issues, it still had to carefully consider the impact of their reportage.

How had the press represented the 1999 ethnic violence in Kalimantan? Kompas portrayed the 1999 ethnic violence as a human tragedy. This is represented through news items discussing the impact of the violence, the current situation and the conditions of victims. This representation can be analyzed in some of Kompas news items entitled Refugee Moved to Sambas (25/02/1999), 500 Families of Pemangkat Evacuated (17/03/1999), Unrest in Sambas: 15,000 People Evacuated (20/03/1999), Baby Savitri Had to be the Victim (22/03/1999), Unrest in Sambas: 51 People Dead, 1,000 Houses Burnt (19/03/1999), Hundreds of Houses Burnt (22/03/1999), and Tens of Corpses Found in Sambas (25/03/1999).

The emphasis on a humanitarian perspective signifies that Kompas was still concerned about this issue. It also implies that the transition government should have acted more quickly to stop the violence that resulted in the loss of lives and properties. The 1999 ethnic violence was the most prolonged violence that had ever occurred in West Kalimantan and the most extensive in terms of refugees that had to evacuate and properties lost. News items exhibiting a humanitarian perspective, for instance, appeared as follows:

Baby Savitri Had to be the Victim

Mas'un (20), didn't understand why his daughter, Savitri (2), his beloved wife, Musrifah (17), and his brother, Farid (40), had to be the victims of mass brutality. Early on Friday (19/3) his village, Sungaipalai, Pemangkat Sub District, Sambas District, West Kalimantan Province, was surrounded by hundreds of mass. Tens of houses were burnt and people were murdered. "Why isn't the guilty person brought to justice if he breaks the law? Why must my daughter, wife, and brother that have nothing to do with it have to also responsible for it?" said Mas'un with weak voice.... (Kompas 22/03/1999)

Hundreds of Houses Burnt

...Violence that erupted since early last week had caused the death of 110 people. This is unofficial amount considering some dead bodies that were abandoned in the forest or directly

buried by local people. While the sum of houses burnt from seven districts reached up to 1,800 units....

Health conditions of thousands of victim of Sambas violence who evacuate to Pontianak were in apprehensive condition. Hundreds of refugees were attacked by diarrhea, fever, and pneumonia. Most of those who got sick were children. According to a doctor, the attacks of these diseases were caused by their weak condition, less nutritious food and the unclean environment in the settlement. This condition was worsened by stress. From Friday to Sunday, the sum of refugees that required medical treatment reached to 299 patients.... (Kompas 22/03/1999)

These two news items presented a broad perspective on *Kompas* readers based on their social values about the impact of the violence and how the government managed the violence. The first news item above, for instance, implies the police unreadiness in anticipating the possibility of the attack toward the Madurese by mass brutality though they were in the police headquarters. Whereas the second news item represents the description of the misery that one of the victims of the violence had to bear. This representation of human tragedy is then strengthened with the coverage of the victims of the violence that had to live in poor and unhealthy condition. It is noteworthy that to achieve this humanitarian perspective, *Kompas* interviewed all possible news sources that might relate to the issue. The goal is to obtain complete and as objective as possible the description of the event.

The change of reportage style as the result of political changes can be seen from the mention of the numbers of people murdered in the violence in the headlines, which in some cases were based on journalist's observations. Under the New Order regime, it would have been unlikely to find these sorts of headlines or the number of people murdered unless from the government sources, as it would be considered to be exacerbating *SARA* issues.

In the case of *Republika*, it tended to represent the 1999 ethnic violence as a human tragedy. This was signified by the coverage of the current situation and the condition of refugees. Where *Republika* still portrayed the issue as politicized ethnic violence, it put the issue within the context of an attempt by particular political interest groups to interrupt the recovery process of the state led by Habibie's transition government. By doing this, *Republika* tried to create an impression that Habibie was not involved in the New Order's politics of development.

The representation of the human tragedy aspects of the ethnic violence could be analyzed in some news items like *55 People Dead and 1,030 Houses Burnt: Refugee Leaves Sambas* (20/03/1999), *400 Refugee Cast Ashore to Sarawak, Silent in Ambon, Clash in Sambas* (24/03/1999), *Sambas Refugee: Don't Know Where to Go* (24/03/1999), *Sambas Opinion Leaders Agree to Stop the Violence* (26/03/1999). News items describing ethnic violence read as follows:

55 People Murdered and 1,030 Houses Burnt: Refugee Leaves Sambas

Ambon not yet restored, violence with *SARA* atmosphere now occurred in Sambas District, West Kalimantan Province. Until yesterday, 55 people were murdered, 1,030 houses were burnt and 1,225 refugees were evacuated to Pontianak. Police Commander of West Kalimantan Province said that the number of victims killed in the violence – which occurred since 15 March – may increase. Government officers had not received the data of violence victims from the hinterland.

...Head of Police Information Service stated that the violence started from the death of a man in a fight. The victim was suspected to have violated inter-ethnic agreement not to carry sharp weapon. This event that first occurred in Pemangkat Subdistrict had spread to other six subdistricts. (Republika 20/03/1999)

Sambas Refugee: Don't Know Where to Go (24/03/1999)

“Don't know. Confused about where else to go,” said Gamar 23), a refugee from Selakau, in a refuge. Gamar was not alone. Some of the violence victims also faced the same problem. They did not know what to do after staying in the refuge...

Ali Daud (43), another refugee, entrusted his future to the local government. He wished the decision made was the best. Daud and his wife had five children. He lived as a farmer with a 0.5 ha rice field and coconut plantation. He had not had a chance to harvest his ricefield when ethnic violence erupted. Daud claimed that he had lost his parent while running from mass blocking...Gamar and Daud admitted that they had no relatives in Madura Island.... (Republika 24/03/1999)

From the two news items above, *Republika* portrayed the event as a human tragedy by describing the loss of lives and properties and the sorrow and uncertain future the refugees had to experience. It also implies that principally *Republika* represented the event as ethnic violence. Though not explicitly written, the mention of ‘violation of inter-ethnic agreement’ and ‘Madura island’ in the two news items signify *Republika*'s attempt to relate this violence to previous ethnic violence in Sambas District, West Kalimantan which involved the same ethnic groups. Thus, it implies that the root of the problem was not really solved in the past. Also, the coverage suggests that the police and the military should have been able to identify the symptoms of ethnic violence and therefore prevented it from becoming more widespread. The portrayal of ethnic violence as a human tragedy signifies that *Republika* had dared to vary its perspective though still dominated by news items derived from the state news agency.

Political changes also affected the way *Republika* represented the issue in which it did not only orient its perspective toward the state, but also toward society. The changing of editorial policy regarding the 1999 coverage was congruent with *Republika* idealism in which *Republika* claimed to be the aspiration vehicle of the low economic class. Since they were economically weak, this group had

little access to information sources and centers of political, economic, social and cultural decision making. *Republika* then tended to side with these class interests and this was transformed into the editorial policies. *Republika* gave considerable space for the articulation of these interests, either in the form of news, editorial, and opinion.

Further evidence to support the argument that political factors affected the way the Indonesian press reported ethnic violence is signified by the coverage of ethnic violence as a social dispute. This is represented by the coverage of the clash between ethnic groups and the attack of one ethnic group toward another over an extended, three-month period, and included big and small clashes between conflicted ethnic groups during this period.

The representation of social dispute appears in some *Kompas* news items like *Clash in Sambas and Bolaang Mongondow* (22/01/1999), *Unrest Occurred in West Kalimantan* ((23/02/1999), and *Mass Attacked Police Headquarter of Tebas Sector* (24/02/1999) News item representing this issue, for instance, appears as follow:

Unrest Occurred in West Kalimantan

Three people were murdered due to social dispute in Tebas Subdistrict, Sambas District on Monday (22/2). Meanwhile, 20 houses and 2 trucks were burnt down by mass. The situation was still anxious. Police and military were sent to restore and maintain the situation of coastal cities under control...

...At 2 am on Monday, mass burnt 17 houses in a housing complex. At the same time, another mass also burnt three houses in Tebas Kuala Village.

At 5 am, unknown mass attacked a hired house in Sungai Kelambu Village. One person was killed in that attack; another one, Sukri, died while on the way to the hospital. The other tenants successfully run. (Kompas 23/02/1999)

The *Kompas* news item above gave the reader a description of what really happened and how it happened. Though it was obvious that the violence involved some ethnics, *Kompas* preferred to report the violence as a social dispute. This decision strongly related to *Kompas'* policy not to get involved in the violence by supporting one particular ethnic group. Another reason for *Kompas* not to represent the event as ethnic violence is the fact that *Kompas* as a reputable newspaper tried to stand for the plurality of Indonesian society as explicitly mentioned in its vision. The representation of the issue as social dispute also signifies military and police weakness in handling the violence. The violence that occurred in several subdistricts but still within the same district where previous violence had occurred indicates the military and police incapability of preventing the violence.

In relation to the freedom of the press, *Kompas* would certainly have avoided portrayal of the violence as a social dispute under the New Order authoritarian regime. In 1999, the appearance of two meanings in one news item (human tragedy and social dispute) was possible through longer

articles applied by *Kompas*. Although the press was free to report *Sara* issues in the Reformation era, the selection of these two meanings by *Kompas* signifies that *Kompas* still carefully chose its perspectives toward the issue. *Kompas* editor in chief argued that political changes affected the relations of power between society and the state in which the social and political force within society became stronger. This condition led to an increased social awareness which increased social sensitivity toward particular issues and therefore should be considered. While the *Republika* editor stated that the press must put the issue within the right context, there was no absolutely objective reportage.

In summary, the dynamic change within Indonesian politics, mainly the changes of national leadership and the rise of civil society, and the impact of the openness era post-cold war had provided an opportunity for the press to report *Sara* issues such as ethnic violence without the worry of being banned. However, freedom of the press did not automatically make the press forget its responsibility toward the public. Therefore, in the coverage of ethnic violence, the press still carefully reported the issue. In relation to this issue Jakob Oetama, general manager of *Kompas*, commented,

“...In order that a newspaper may properly conduct its call of duty, it needs freedom and independence. Press freedom is one of the pillars and instruments of democracy. Press freedom is needed so that the people, holders of the sovereignty of the state, may obtain actual and adequate information. It will also subject power to control and accountability. Press freedom will have its full significance if it provides room for continuous improvement and enhancement of the professional competence of journalists and press employees. This freedom is also coupled with responsibility with its origin in conscience, public interest and a code of conduct that is voluntarily drawn up and which is binding to journalists as their own volition. Ethics is an obligation to oneself and to other people.”

One significant change that occurred in the life of the Indonesian press after the fall of the authoritarian regime and the strengthening of civil society was that it became more critical toward the government. Government news sources were no longer considered the only legitimate sources. A larger proportion of coverage included other sources and the content could contradict the discourse the government tried to develop. In relation to the coverage of ethnic violence, it is important to examine the extent to which *Kompas* and *Republika* portrayed the violence as not merely a conflict between villagers or between a passenger and inspector, but as the impact of the New Order government policy of *SARA* after the fall of Suharto.

CONCLUSION

In general, press coverage of ethnic violence in Indonesia during the New Order era had gone through two phases. In the beginning, the press also tended to orient its coverage toward the state. Whereas in the later phase, political changes that occurred in some Asian countries at the end of Cold

War had led to an era of openness and the weakened structure of the New Order regime at the beginning of 1990s affected political policies of the state toward the press. These conditions affected the way the press reported *SARA* issues such as ethnic violence. During this later phase, the press was able to report ethnic violence issues, although when it related to military involvement in the violence, the press still covered it carefully. The press developed and maintained its editorial policies in order to accommodate the political situation occurring outside the press institutions.

In its coverage of the 1999 violence, the press was more open and critical toward government-related issues and, as the result of the rise of civil society, the press was more strongly oriented toward society rather than the state. In the Reformation era, as various social and political groups within society became stronger, the press adopted a role that was more oriented toward social responsibility.

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