

THE QUESTION OF MAJORITY-MINORITY RELATIONSHIP IN A NATION STATE: THE INDONESIAN CASE

UMAR KAYAM

I.

Old societies (Edward Shils) seem to have developed themselves into nation state due to several reasons. Firstly, in the course of their development process they come to a conclusion that they have arrived at a stage of involution. The ratio of agriculture economy infrastructure and population growth of the regions have reached a status of alarming imbalance. The output of the economic infrastructures have not produced enough yields that could catch up the population growth of the regions. They realize that a total review of the condition needs to be done which would be able to restore the imbalance. One of the options was to reorganize the social structure and its infrastructures. Old societies social structures were based on genealogical lines where social and economical infrastructures were derived from the basic condition. Rice fields were social and economical assets and infrastructures of the genealogically arranged families of the regions. A reorganization of the social structure and its infrastructure should be done through the loosening of traditional rigid families relationship and its complex social obligations. In the past the traditional genealogical interrelationship secured the region cohesiveness and to a certain degree the social and economical balance in the region. When the imbalance between field production ratio and population growth occurred it also disturbed the existing traditional social and economical arrangement. When family sizes have become much larger due to the rapid growth of the population, the sizes of the rice-fields shrink to smaller plots as a consequence of the redistribution of the family rice fields "cakes". The continuous population growth rate has pressed the economical value of agriculture to an ever low position. Cohesiveness of the extended families web tended to disintegrate when agriculture as the basic economic asset of the community lost its competitive value. The growing belief in the community was that the need to control the population growth and to stabilize the economy would not be considered as possible so long the country consist of small ethnic communities and is under foreign domination, the status of a colony. Secondly, a radical solution is sought which is the reorganization of rearrangement of the ethnic communities into a (nation) state. There was a notion of a state which could be taken from an almost mythical perception of a remote past state or kingdom that has existed in the region. A state or kingdom that was strong and prosperous. A state that once was in a position to include and incorporate many ethnic communities and regions under a strong central government. The state was accepted as a model of state that was capable to maintain its independence from foreign domination and as a model of effectiveness in

exerting control over infrastructures of the whole realm. Independence movements and its leaders in various colonized old societies draw many of their inspiration from the mentioned model and even exploit it as their oratories and demagogies in their campaigns. In the case of Indonesia, the 15th century kingdom of Majapahit in East Java was a favourite model.

The notion of a nation, however, is more difficult to describe or even conceived. Majapahit, for instance, had reached its integrated hegemony after many regional and ethnic wars. Before it acquired her status as empire she had to conquer not only many different ethnic communities but even her same ethnic group. The Mataram kingdom in 18th century in Central Java had to conduct several expeditions to Surabaya before she finally manage to subdue the East Javanese region. Could we label Majapahit and Mataram as nation states when their base of population are numerous ethnic communities which are in constant latent conflicts? Apparently the notion of a nation requires an abstraction — or “imagination” as Anderson has put it — of communities that have become an amalgam of a solidarity of causes under one state. It seems that a kind of common imagination of an accepted symbol of a central power is another reason for the establishment of a nation state. However there should be a distinction between an old nation state and a modern nation state. An old nation state could be a kingdom that gets her cohesive imagination on a central authority from an accepted belief that the king is a direct descendant of the gods. But the accepted belief and recognition of a central power in old nation states do not necessarily mean that there is an effective direct control from the central government of the kingdom to the regions. Ten regions are more or less independent and control its own subjects and express their acceptance of the central government through annual taxes or gifts and personal audience with the king. The central government shows its effective direct authority when the king goes to war expeditions where he would have to mobilize men to arms from the population.

Modern nation states are mostly republics or constitutional monarchies which could take the form of a highly centralized government or federation. The government could function effectively through an effective modern bureaucracy and political and economic infrastructures in the nation. With the advance development of communication and the mass media the modern nation state achieves more cohesion than the old nation states. However, although the state functions well through direct or delegated control, power of the state is seen by the people who are inhabitants of the state as abstract imaginations. Although the Javanese — as observed by Anderson — are used to conceive the power of the king and his heirloom dagger as concrete, their imagination of the bureaucracy machine power, however, is not concrete. It will be concrete if they translate the power in concrete human beings such as a district head or other bureaucrats.

II.

Indonesia, as many newly established nation states, has the status of a semi modern nation state. By this it means that it is a kind of nation state that is half-way in its process toward its modern status as a nation state. It has long histories in the past of kingdoms and old independent societies and consists of many ethnic communities. Among its many ethnic communities eight ethnic groups are considered as the more populous with the Javanese (70

millions people) as the largest ethnic community in a country of 150 millions population. The figure obviously suggests an uneven balance of numbers among the population. The condition creates an immediate challenge to the state. Java, an island which is as small as New York State, is at present not in a position to accommodate the overwhelmingly large population. Although the central government has been relatively successful with her birth control program, nevertheless it has not been successful enough to keep the right balance between the population and the economic growth. Urbanization goes almost unchecked due to the limited jobs opportunity in the villages although the cities are not in a position to accommodate the need for jobs of the villagers. The number of industries that could take semi-skilled or even no-skill workers are not enough in the urban areas to accommodate the villagers drop out. The government's temporary solution to the problem has been the so-called "transmigration program" which is meant to migrate the Javanese from the poor areas to the relatively underpopulated islands outside Java where they will be given lands to open new rice fields for their living. The program has been only partly successful. Those who have been successful in settling down in the new lands have to experience psychological problems with the recipient hosts. The Javanese, because of its large number is seen as a threat to the hosts economic security. But, even before the transmigration program was launched by the government, the Javanese has been present in almost every region in the archipelago. The bureaucracy of the nation state is a continuation of the old Netherlands Indie which has been mostly recruited from the Javanese. When the size of the bureaucracy got larger, the size of the Javanese also expanded to a larger size. The phenomenon, although understandable due to the long experience and education enjoyed by the Javanese during the colonial period, again brewed jealousy among the non-Javanese. The Javanese are seen everywhere in the bureaucracies in the archipelago holding key and commanding positions. The phenomenon also leads to the rising influence of the Javanese in spreading their cultural idioms in the field of political communication. The Javanese leaders, who have been cultivated in the finesse of the traditional Javanese cultural political idioms, who view the state and its bureaucracy as an intricate hierarchical system but combined with the know-how of modern colonial administration, practice the art of governing with the mentioned experiences and knowledge to regions outside Java which are practically new in modern administration and have total different view about state and government. The phenomenon, understandably, brewed conflicts between the Javanese leaders and the non-Javanese local leaders and intellectuals. The Javanses who thought that they did their job dedicatedly and scrupulously were confused and did not understand the dynamics of the new situation. The local leaders and intellectuals who thought that they would naturally know their regions better could not understand why outsiders as the Javanese should be their superiors.

The new nation state which has chosen a unitarian system, instead of a federal system, over the years has developed a very strong central government at the state capital, Jakarta, and exert a very highly centralised control over the regions in Indonesia. The rich regions viewed the political arrangement as unfair since they felt that they were the ones which contribute the most to the nation's chest and therefore should deserve a much broader autonomy in governing their own regions. The complaint was combined with the already existing grudges of the regions over the Javanses, who then identified the central government as a Javanses oriented government. The situation led to a confrontation between the central government and the regions, especially North Sumatra, West Sumatra, Aceh (Who has been at

odd with the government over many issues), South Sumatra, South Sulawesi and North Sulawesi, which eventually resulted in 1958 an open rebellion against the central government in Jakarta. The rebellion that was subdued in 1962 has resulted to an easier attitude of the central government toward the regions albeit the continuation of the strong central government system of the state. The adjustments of the central government were appointments of bureaucrats and regional heads who are gradually less Javanese oriented. More universities and schools are opened in the regions, resulting over the years additional numbers of trained people in the regions.

Beside the existing disharmony between ethnicities, such as the Javanese with the non-Javanese, Indonesia has another problem of majorities. What is meant here is the problem of Islam as a majority religion in Indonesia. The religion of Islam claims to have followers not less than 90% of the whole Indonesian population. The huge number, however, is not a monolithic organized religious mass. There are numerous Islamic schools, the *pesantren*, which are scattered throughout the country especially in Java, Madura, Sumatra, South Kalimantan and South Sulawesi. These are independent schools which teach the Quran and the Islamic *shari'ah* or law. The schools are led by kharismatic Muslim teachers the *kyai*, who have strong influence in the community. Their influence go sometimes beyond religious teachings and in some cases also penetrate regional, even national, politics. Their advises are sought after by prominent regional as well as national public leaders. Although Islam in Indonesia knows many social movements the larger and most influential are the Mohamadiah, which is a reformist Islamic movement which is influenced by the teachings of Muhamad Abduh of Egypt, and the Nahdatul Ulama, the orthodox Islamic movement, which is led by traditional *ulamas*, religious community leaders. There is also one political Islamic party, the Partai Persatuan Pembangunan, which is an amalgam of individuals from several Islamic social movements.

Despite the diversified condition of the Islamic social movements which represent many nuances of the observing of the religion, there is, however a shared opinion among the Muslims that they are under-represented in many social institutions such as the bureaucracy, the national cabinet, the regional as well as the national representative bodies. They feel that they have not been given opportunities to share the key positions in the mentioned institutions which according to their opinion have been dominated by "seculars" and the Christians. In the 1950's a radical Islamic movement, the Darul Islm, launched an armed rebellion against the national government, demanding bigger political sharing in the national government which eventually would be conducive for the forming of an Islamic State, the Negara Islam and the banning of the P.K.I., the communist party. The rebellion which was started in West Java, was spread to Aceh and South Sulawesi. The rebellion was finally subdued in 1962. The grudge, however, has not been totally subdued until the present day despite the banning of the communist party and the dissolution of the ideology of an Islamic state. A kind of latent dissatisfaction among the muslims concerning the under-representation of the muslims, which is a religion majority in the state, in public and state institutions still linger on. The government responding to the dissatisfaction by opening more opportunities to the muslim communities to enter public institutions, providing financial subsidies to private religious schools and opening more Islamic universities in the provinces.

The presence of an overwhelming majority such as the muslims is a precarious situation to the state and the community. The existence of the very large numbers of the muslims

could pose a psychology of intimidation among the minorities such as the christians, the hindu and the budha followers. The much better financial funding and system of the private christian schools, for instance, are sources of jealousy for the muslims. The muslims are now competing vigorously by opening more and more Islamic public schools. The competition is not limited to opening public schools but also in entering positions in public institutions.

III.

Apparently, a nation state which has multi ethnic communities and several religions has, from the start of its existence, problems of balancing the majorities and the minorities. As we have seen from the Indonesian case an early awakening of a nation state myth or "imagination" of it aiming at the ethnic communities and her religions prior to the forming of the state did not guarantee an automatic lasting harmony between the communities and the religion. The nation state seems from the start to have to count on possible frictions and disharmony between the communities and her religions. The caution which could be clouded by the early national sentiments and emotions should, apparently from the beginning, be firmly established. Early national sentiments and emotions and romantic notions about a nation state are short lived and quickly cheked by the hard realities of conducting the right balance of various kinds of interests of the communities.

It must be remembered that the forming of a nation state was motivated by rational and irrational motives. It has been rational when it comes to the awareness of the ineffectiveness of the economic infrastructures of the traditional agrarian communities. But irrational when it comes to the awakening of a nation myth, an imagination of an amalgam of ethnic communities into a state. The combination of the mentioned rationality and irrationality are, apparently, the only reason to have a nation state. The rational motif, the acceptance of the sluggish condition of the traditional agrarian economy, leads immediately to plan a more efficient and effective economy. This means that the organization of the new nation state must be organized according to the demands of modern economical and political infrastructures. The moment the plan of reorganization is executed, demands for fair sharing (political as well as economical) are risen by the communities. It has been an almost automatic expectation or even wishes among the community members that sustain the establishment of the nation state that fairness in common sharing should be a priority. The irrational motif, the emotion about the imagination of a new state, or the dream on a nation myth, also romantically expect an automatic sharing between the communities. The cohesiveness of a traditional agrarian community has been accepted as an important cultural root that should be retained in the new state.

The two motives, however, have further developments. The rational wish to have a rational reorganization of the infrastructures demand further scrutinization of the existing productive trained and skilled manpower to fill the organization. Bureaucracies must be established which require well educated bureaucrats and technocrats. But the moment the scrutiny process was on soon was discovered that there was an imbalance of trained bureaucrats and technocrats among the communities. The imbalance has been closely connected with the past histories and experiences of the communities during the colonial years of foreign domination. The more thorough was the experience with the colonial power, the more exposed were the

communities to western or modern administration and organization. The consequence of the imbalance was also an imbalance in the proportion of the recruitment of trained officials from the ethnic communities. Modern organization and management demand the right skilled man in the right job regardless the ethnic origin of the man. This means that the Javanese in the early years of the formation of the new nation state gets most of the jobs and placed in various offices in the archipelago.

The irrational motif which sees the harmony and the homogeneity of the old communities should be retained in the new state is also reflected in the way ethnicities play a crucial role in the placement or recruitment of government officials. An office is viewed by a particular ethnic community, say the Javanese or the Minangkabau as a rice field where its effective productivity would depend on the way they could include their close kin in the management of the rice field. The inclusion does not only mean a kin is a trustworthy ally, but it also means the fulfillment of a solidarity obligation of a community member. The Javanese bureaucrat who represents an overwhelming majority ethnic group and majority of the placements in offices, including his relatives in jobs of the office is seen by the minority group accelerating the so-called process of "Javanization". But on the other hand, if a Minangkabau does the recruitment he would do exactly the same as the Javanese does since what they actually do is a continuation of a traditional duty. He would do the same process of "Minangkabauization".

The rational motif was also at work when the Indonesian founding fathers prepared the Constitution of 1945. The muslims prepared a preamble which declared that every muslim in the whole nation had to practice *the shari'ah* or Islamic law. The insistence of the muslims on this preamble was based on the consideration of the muslim leaders that Islam was an overwhelming majority in the country. The christian minorities leaders who were represented in the Independence Preparation Committee rejected the proposal of the preamble which was also called the Djakarta Charter. After long deliberation both sides, the muslims and the non-muslims, agreed to abolish the Djakarta Charter from the constitution draft. The mentioned constitutional incident was also an example of the working of both rational and irrational motives. The decision of both parties to agree in abolishing the Djakarta Charter draft had prevented the newly born nation state from a collapse. It was a narrow escape triumph of a precarious face-saving diplomacy or negotiation between majority and minority.

IV.

Apparently there has been no "fixed rule" that could be executed in preventing a nation state from disintegration due to the constant confrontation between the majorities against the minorities. Nation states are established based on rational and irrational motives. The two motives would continue to work in the minds of the nation and form the internal dynamics of the nation. The moment a majority group shows signs of expanding its existence the minority group would react, protest or even risk an open rebellion. The rational and irrational motives of the nation are in a constant status tug of war as far as majority-minority problems are concerned. There seems to exist a precarious balance between the motives in dealing with the other balance of majority and minority. The logical solution in preventing the balance from collapsing seems to be a constant working of common sense between the confronting

parties. Where common sense does not work it seems that the confrontation cannot be solved peacefully.

But we are dealing with a state, a nation of a state. The state is sustained by people, by a nation and many infrastructures and systems. How could a situation of common sense reign collectively in a nation state? Indeed it could. At the beginning of independence the sub-continent of India agreed to split peacefully into India and Pakistan, albeit latent confrontation with sparkles of incidents between the two countries followed the split. The nation state of Czechoslovakia agreed to split themselves peacefully into two smaller nation states, the Czech and the Slovakian states. But common sense does not happen instantly. It happens through a process of deliberation and negotiation. The rational and irrational motives would be working back and forth influencing the process of deliberation. The art of creating an atmosphere of common sense is then a continuous atmosphere of dialogues, of deliberations.

A nation state is a web of organizations. Organizations are translations of many minds. To make organizations work it needs lines of commands. In democratic and open nation states lines of commands are subdivided into an open hierarchy of commands where the subordinated commands have direct access to the highest command. The rebellion of Sumatra and South Sulawesi in 1958 broke because of the rigidly centralised line of command of the republic. The regions felt that they were left out from dialogues with the central government. With the already latent dissatisfaction of their relationship with the Javanese majority, the rebellion could not be prevented from an open arm rebellion. The disintegration of the once mighty super-power of Soviet Union took place seems to be of the same case of rigid high centralized system. The socialist system that has been adopted and executed in the Soviet Union has been strongly influenced by Stalin's view on the execution of the "proletariat dictatorship" concept.

The most possible way constantly create an atmosphere of common sense in the nation state. The feasible way is to keep the dialogues open in the society, in the whole nation. It could be done through schools, the media, the non governmental agencies (the NGO's), and the people's representatives institutions. Through the web of constant open dialogues on equal basis among the majorities and the minorities alone could an atmosphere of shared common sense be developed.

UNIVERSITAS GADJAH MADA