

RELATIONS BETWEEN MEDIA AND CONFLICT: Challenges To Civil Society Life In Indonesia¹

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Abstract

Civil society is considered to be the arena of voluntary and collective action among shared interests, purposes and values that strengthens the social foundations of democracy in a state. As a part of the civil society, media enable every layer of the society to access free and open information. In other words, media with its journalistic products has become a free market to every element of the society to promote their ideas. Media will fight for influence, claim for the truth, and perform their own version of social reality. Not only as a channel, media can also place itself as a doer in defining social reality and pick any important and relevant issues. The content of mass media cannot be separated from news about conflict, especially those related to human rights. The term “Bad news is good news” seems to be the perspective use by reporters in their writings. News on conflict always becomes major headlines in many world newspapers, including Indonesia. Hard to deny that media, unaware or even aware, has make news on conflicts as a commodity, thus creating widespread public opinion. In a fragile democracy directed public opinion could jeopardize the structure of democratic civil society and human rights basis. That is why conflicts could threaten civil society life, especially here in Indonesia. Media role in reporting conflict has become a serious challenge for Indonesian democratic civil society life.

Keywords: Media, Civil Society, Conflicts, Public Opinion, and Construction of Reality.

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Introduction

Civil society is considered to be the arena of voluntary and collective action among shared interests, purposes and values that strengthens the social foundations of democracy and the state.⁴ Remarkable progress in the area of civic participation has been made during the “reformation” period. For example, the first two post-Suharto governments, president Habibie and Abdurrahman Wahid, loosened the control over press and initiated an ambitious program, called decentralization (local autonomy). During their time of reign, they also paved the way for independence in East Timor, established special autonomy packages for Aceh and Papua, began reforming the electoral system, and took important first steps to reduce the role of the military in politics and the economy. As a result, fair and democratic general elections were held in 1999, 2004, 2009, and this year. Direct elections of mayors and governors took place for the first time in 2005, and still going smoothly until now. Decentralization (local autonomy) policy rolled ahead amid some attempts to rein in the excesses of local officials.⁵

However, freedom from Soeharto’s authoritarian regime, which is still very recent, interpreted incorrectly by some parties. Excessive democracy characterizes civil society life in Indonesia, one of the example is freedom of thought. For that reason, the role of media in civil society life in Indonesia is very interesting to look. For example, in information era media plays a major role in terms of human rights promotion and upholding democracy. Social reality is generated and constructed outside formal authority. In this case, media is able to influence public opinion by doing framing analysis to particular news. This could certainly a threat to democracy and human rights because it can generate conflicts. Thus, it is very intriguing for to discuss in terms of media role in a new democratic country, such as Indonesia.

Media and Civil Society

Civil society has always becomes integral part of democracy. Indonesia is an important example of a new democratic country. Its progress has implications for its own citizens, for other nations moving toward democracy, and also for international actors assisting them. Meanwhile,

⁴ Christine Cubitt, “Constructing Civil Society: An Intervention for Building Peace,” *Peacebuilding*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2013): 93.

⁵ Hans Antlov et al., “Civil Society Capacity Building for Democratic Reform: Experience and Lessons from Indonesia,” *Voluntas*, Vol. 21 (2010): 420.

civil society can be defined as autonomous representation of civilians, distinct from but part of the political sphere. It formed of rational rights bearing individuals working together for the social good.⁶ Considering media as part of civil society, it means that we recognize the power media posses. Therefore, access to them is critical to actors involved in a transitional politics, from single (authoritarian) to multiparty democracy (reformation). Media can be a dominant actor in civil society, hence creating a strong civil society. That is why the role of the media can be greatly enhanced by the support of other democratic social forces in civil society.⁷

As a part of the civil society, media enable every layer of the society to access free and open information. Media, printed or electronic, has becoming a social arena and public stage, enable every individual or group to market their ideas and discourse. In other words, media with its journalistic products has become a free market to every element of the society to promote their ideas. Such condition will bring different understanding from each communicant. Media will fight for influence, claim for the truth, and perform their own version of social reality. Ideally, journalistic products must be independent, neutral, and give balancing report. However, the reality shows that there are no such things as objectivity, neutrality, and absolute truth in media broadcasting.

At least there are two basic changes that national media in Indonesia went through following the downfall of Soeharto's authoritarian regime. First, media serves its journalistic products overtly. Media is getting braver to write stories and building a social reality, outside formal sources of power. This condition, in a way, resulting in media ability to influence public opinion by doing framing analysis towards a report. Media ability to engineered stories has become a basic assumption, stating that media has less role in conflict prevention efforts.

Second, the birth of hundreds of new media and the revitalization of older media. This is a logical consequence of the conveniences in applying license for media publishing from the government. Now, there are no more strict terms and condition in managing and publishing mass media, like it happens in the old days. In other words, anyone with more money and power has the right to own mass media publishing rights as many as they wanted to be. This condition drive

⁶ Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy: Towards Consolidation*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 221.

⁷ Peter Wanyande, "The Media as Civil Society and Its Role in Democratic Transition in Kenya," 1996, accessed September 15, 2013, <http://erepository.uonbi.ac.ke/handle/123456789/38904>.

media reports to be subjective because the content is decided by their owners, not facts in the field. In a way, we can categorize this as provocative. Media has become a channel to certain interests (sometimes business, or even politics), so the content is no longer neutral, and have the potential to create conflicts among people.⁸

Democratic politics like any other human activity, involves communication and dialogue between and among adversaries as well as between or among supporters. For such communication to have an impact it must be carried out in the public realm. It is in this way that the public is made aware of the issues being debated and contested. This is a role that mass media are best suited to undertake and/or facilitate precisely because of their wide reach. This is also very important in the developing countries where the tendency is to consider channels of mass communication such as radio, and to some extent television, as authoritative, and their broadcast messages are taken as the sole truth. This is why governments and ruling elites in general, and indeed any serious political contenders in a democratic political system, strive to control channels of mass communication. This is also a perfect example of media power in civil society.

In public arena, various issues and social problems in our daily lives has become public consumption. Every stake holders compete to take part, also to define the problems based on their own version or paradigm. They are competing to make this definition as an absolute truth for public. As a social arena, printed and electronic media cannot be seen as neutral and passive channel, nor as a simple mean to communicate information about social reality. Media is not just a meaningless line of letters or pictures, but more than that. Media act as a message carrier. Indonesia as a new democratic country is very acceptable to new ideas and interpretation. This condition will certainly become a challenge to civil society life due to its numerous effects created.

Not only as a channel, media can also place itself as a doer in defining social reality and pick any important and relevant issues. We can see this phenomenon with the variety and sophisticated media industry who serve all kinds of information, especially after the downfall of Soeharto's regime, where media has finally liberated from strict government control. In the reformation era media has more space to express themselves, so the possibility for media to construct the reality in their report is very much open.

⁸ Firman Yursak, *Eddie Widiono: Di Bawah Pusaran Media* (Jakarta: Next Reign Media, 2007), xix-xxi.

Media has also undergone a character change following political alteration happens earlier in this country. As one of the social power media is no longer addressing the reality, but work based on tendency, interest, and partiality that are considered important for their business sustainability. Civil society life determines on what the media say. One of its worst consequences is a multi-interpretation society leads to various conflicts potential. We have to remember that at its early stages, democracy tend to be unstable. This is because when opinion running around in the midst of the society, inconveniences might occur among them. Eventually, friction among them is most likely to happen.

In the end, it should not be difficult to see why media is a strong part of civil society, one of them because they can generate conflicts. It also needs to be noted that the contradictions exhibited by civil society, as indicated above, applies also to media. In other words, media like any other association in civil society are not homogeneous, rather, they consist of groups and individuals with different interests, that some may be conflicting and even contradictory.

Media and People

People need update information everyday to catch up with everything happens surround them. One way to find this new or update information is from media (news), broadcasted or printed. Therefore, media corporations always try to find selling news. As a result, journalists are competing to produce interesting, valuable, and eye catching news. According to Mcquail and Wolfsfed, there are several points for journalist to write this sort of news, these points are, magnitude, timing, and straightforwardness. Magnitude means how big the incident or events are.⁹ For example, news about conflict between Palestine and Israel becomes one of the top issues to discuss in almost all media for past more than fifty years. Recently, the report on missing Malaysian flight (MH370) dominated world news for months, at least until this paper was made. The second point is timing. Journalists should always update their news (recently happens). People want to have new information every day. They hope that they are aware of any incident or event which happened in a matter of minutes. How much and how quick they got informed is what really

⁹ Gadi Wolfsfed, *Media and The Path to Peace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 57 and Denis McQuail, *Mass Communication Theory*, 4th ed. (London: Sage Publication, 2000), 48.

counts. News on celebrities are always interesting for many people because their popularity, and the fast nature of gossip itself.

The last point is straightforwardness. Most journalists like to report events or incidents in a simple way because of limited space or time. Besides that, simple news is easier for people to understand. News about labor demonstration usually only covers the demonstration and what the labor demand without any background information regarding the cause. It means that people will only get half of the picture. Finding an event complicated or ambiguous, media will generally work towards simplification. One approach is to single out those items (or attributes) within a complex story that are unambiguous, such as actions, which may be direct and clear-cut whereas the causes of those actions are more complicated.¹⁰

There is a close relation between mass media and community. One of media important role in the community is to function as a source of information.¹¹ Interaction between people and mass media is part of communication process. People look for information from broadcast or printed media, and accept or take it as knowledge. This interaction process produce what is called public opinion. Based on Redi Panuju, public opinion is compilation of images which create or is created by communication process.¹² Construction process of public opinion starts from a factual reality of something and then this factual reality turn into discourse in the process of communication.¹³ The purpose of public opinion is to influence people or other party.

Throughout the century, media also use as persuasive tools. Newspapers shape public opinion through its article. The article contains facts which use to create public opinion. In reality, facts describe in the article may be able to change or influence public opinion. Effect of news from printed media, like newspapers, can modify people's behavior. It can also bend pattern of behavior or attitude of the community on certain issue.¹⁴

According to Elizabeth Perse, news could modify people's behavior. There are several studies of media effect. The effects are cognitive, affective, and behavioral. Cognitive effect is concerned with how people process the information to learn something from it. It also concern

¹⁰ James Watson, *Media Communication: An Introduction to Theory and Process*, 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 71.

¹¹ Helena Ollie and Novi Erlita, *Opini Publik*, 2nd ed. (Jakarta: Indeks, 2011), 91.

¹² Redi Panuju, *Relasi Kuasa Negara Media Massa dan Publik* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2002), 37.

¹³ Panuju, *Relasi Kuasa Negara Media Massa dan Publik*, 38.

¹⁴ William Riverset al., *Media Massa dan Masyarakat Modern*, 2nd ed. (Jakarta: Kencana, 2008), 36.

how people's belief are formed or reformed by the information, and how the information could satisfy people's curiosity. The second effect is affective. This effect is about how people get emotionally attached with the information from the media. Emotional reaction impacts significantly on people's understanding of news events and may lead them to change their position to more positive or negative way of thinking about certain issues.¹⁵

Last, behavior effect is connected with how information can influence actions which are done by people after processing information. Thus, it can be said that media influence public opinion regarding to certain issues. However, although media sometimes gives limited information about certain issues, most of their audience received it as the fact or truth, even solution. Based on this little knowledge, people tend to react and take sides. In this case, the power of the media is the power of the many because it drives people to segmented conclusion, sometimes resulting in violence. Seeing from this effect, we can imagine how powerful media is.

Media and Conflict

Conflict becomes media main dish around the world because they are very interesting and invite attentions from viewers around the world. The content of mass media cannot be separated from news about conflict, especially those related to human rights. The term "Bad news is good news" seems to be the perspective use by reporters in their writings. News on conflicts always becomes major headlines in many world newspapers, including in Indonesia. Hard to deny that media, unaware or even aware, has create news on conflicts as a commodity. That is the reason conflicts could threaten civil society life, although it can also defined as potential civil society power. This is why it is very interesting to discuss more on the relation between media and conflict.

To be worth selling, various issues on conflict publish by media in many ways. Sometimes media even accused to contribute to the escalation of violence or provocation, for instance war journalism. War has long been the object of media coverage. The worst the war can become, the reports are getting for more interesting and sexy for media coverage. The "bad news is good news" principle has become the main benchmark for reporters nowadays. This principle is tend to be provocative than give solution, consequently, directly or indirectly, media also help to trigger conflict, even become provocateur to existing conflict. Media tend to "treat" conflict as

¹⁵ Elizabeth M. Perse, *Media Effects and Society* (New Jersey: Inc. Publisher, 2001), 98.

commodity, thus the publications usually display sensation, misinterpretation, bias, and also provocation.

This is in line with what Peter Frumkin defined as civil society. He said that civil society fulfills a variety of functions in the space between state and market, providing services, mobilizing interest and engagement, enabling the expression of values and faith, and fostering social entrepreneurship. Media is definitely part of it and requires market to grow.¹⁶ That is why media work is basically to construct the reality. Media is not an open and free channel, instead mostly based on truth reconstruction. Almost the same with constructivist paradigm, in which fact is seen as a result of a reality construction. Media and its reporter, act as construction channel, is choosing the reality they want to construct. They choose the facts they want to publish and omit which are not needed in their reports (news). This reality shows media enormous power as member of civil society.

Media defined reality, in such becomes a medium for ideological struggle competing between each other. Indonesian democracy give plenty opportunities for many ideology to compete. The ideology represented in media as opinions, eventually create and influence the public. Indonesia post Soeharto's era facing an enormous openness in all sectors of society. Tendency to differ between right and wrong becomes unclear. Moreover, in a fragile democracy, directed public opinion could jeopardize the structure of democratic human rights basis in Indonesian civil society. Media as the producer of public opinion plays a part if conflicts were eventually generated.

Ideological representation can be seen implicitly in media news. The interpretation of reality always involves the value owned by each media, sometimes by their owner. To that end, it is rather difficult for media to give solution or positioned themselves as a means for conflict prevention. Numerous interests and the use of business logic are of course legitimate because media has no obligation whatsoever to prevent conflicts from occurring. There are only rules of ethics, such as the principle of balance, impartiality, honesty, humanity, avoid provocation by

¹⁶ Peter Frumkin, *On Being Nonprofit: A Conceptual and Policy Primer* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 59.

taking into account the impact of a news report, and others similar to that.¹⁷ There are no rules and legal consequences on how media should do their coverage.

News on violence eventually become propaganda despite media claims to use objectivity on certain standards of journalism. Ideologically in a capitalist system, media is part of political superstructure. As a corporation owned and controlled by capitalist, media depends on commercials as the main source of financing and also plays an integral part of the overall corporate system. Media therefore can survive if the laws of production and circulation of capital is not compromised. Market promotion has become an integral part of their existence. Instead of giving solution, media tend to take sides.

This media role of reporting conflict could be a serious challenge for Indonesian civil society life. For instance, media gives an overview of various perspectives on an object of a news that will enrich public perspective. However, this phenomenon in other hand could also engineered public opinion, sometimes result in conflict, even violence. In the end, it all comes back to the public themselves to choose what kind of news they prefer. Based on various perspective offers by media, actually public can increase their intellectuals, because they can choose which message containing facts, which one is looking only for sensation, entertainment, or even only for high circulation. If Indonesian civil society possessed such awareness and intelligence level, any construction of reality made by media will not necessarily lead to conflict. Therefore, media does have an important role in forming civil society life in Indonesia. It proves that media is also can be potential civil society power, instead of creating conflicts

Media Independency in Conflict

Media, as a matter of fact, could definitely contribute to an objective manner, and therefore have positive impact, in terms of giving proper solution to a conflict. Many media still put element of objectivity in giving different point of view, being proportional, balanced, and comply with journalist code of conduct. Such media certainly do a lot to help community reconciliation, changing misperceptions, and increase understanding on causes and consequences of conflict. I would like to give one case example in Indonesia, during religious conflict in Poso, Central

¹⁷ Hasundungan Sirait, *Jurnalisme Sadar Konflik: Meliput Konflik dengan Perspektif Damai* (Jakarta: Aliansi Jurnalis Independen, 2007), 218.

Sulawesi. According to Poso Post Senior Journalist, Samsu Yadi, media neutrality during conflict was considered to be good and constructive, although many are still not considered neutral. According to him, relation between journalists covering conflict in Poso is in a strong level. They have full awareness that media can supply energy to de-escalate the tension, even to stop the conflict.

Nevertheless, in another case in Ambon (Celebes) where religious conflict also happens, journalist association and network located there is somewhat different than in Poso. In Ambon, journalists covering conflict are still fragmented. Muslims has journalist and media of their own, as well as Christians.¹⁸ Another conflict area, In Pontianak, Borneo, there is an electronic media name Global TV. They still try to maintain social integration in the society by not presenting news that might lead to social disintegration. For example, the Alley 17 incident in 2007. Global TV actually already has in their possession reports on the incident. However, their editor decided not to broadcast because the reports could result in racist sentiments towards the Chinese people there, and perhaps throughout the country.¹⁹

What happened in Alley 17 actually was just a normal incident, without any potential to escalate. The incident started from a car scratch did by a Chinese. The car belong to a person from Sambas Malay person who was going to a religious ceremony. When the Malay person scold the Chinese, considered scratching his car, several other Chinese people came to defend him. Soon after, they eventually beat the Malays person brother-in-law who was actually come to break up the fight, not to defend his brother. As a result, his nose broken and his face covered in blood. After the ceremony, the Malays people then pelt the Chinese person's house with stones.

The rumor grows in the society was that Chinese people attacked Malays people during their religious ceremony. The Malays people finally came to the Chinese people house and pelt it also with stones. In the same day, Malays people attacked a temple located not far from Alley 17 and damaged the car and house of the Chinese people. The next day, most media in Pontianak published story about this incident. Unfortunately, since the conflict already escalate most media publish it the way the rumor grows, until eventually led to a prolonged conflict. Learning from this

¹⁸ Irfan Abubakar and Muchtadlirin, *Media dan Integrasi Sosial Jembatan Antar Umat Beragama* (Jakarta: CSRC UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, 2001), 94.

¹⁹ Abubakar and Muchtadlirin, *Media dan Integrasi Sosial Jembatan Antar Umat Beragama*, 95.

case, media was not always use intentionally to support one group. If eventually they involved in a conflict and support one of the disputing parties, it is not because of their own will, but more because of the conflict escalation that force them to take sides, or because their lack of reporting skills that might lead to misperception.

During the Ambon conflict media existence was encouraged to balance information from two sides, unfortunately what actually happened was the opposite. According to Eriyanto, the problem was first emerged due to media location in Ambon. TVRI, RRI, Antara, and Suara Maluku are located in Christian territory. This condition is not surprising because Christian territory has long known to be the location of bureaucratic offices. Muslim territory in the other hand is a place for businesses, markets, and shopping centers. TVRI, RRI, Antara, and even Suara Maluku, employed Christian and Muslim reporters. But since the Ambon conflict started, Muslim reporter was not allowed to enter Christian territory, vice versa. Since then, Muslim lives with fellow Muslim and Christian also lives with fellow Christian. Ambon was divided into two sections, Muslim and Christian, both in control of their own territory.²⁰

One example I would like to present is the Suara Maluku newspaper. Eriyanto explained that objective news from either side can still be applied by Suara Maluku at the beginning of the conflict. At the time, Ambon was not very tense, although one should be careful when entered into different villages with different religion. Balance news from each Christian and Muslim sides can still be presented by Suara Maluku.

In March 1999 the situation was getting tense. Muslim cannot enter into Christian territory, vice versa. Suara Maluku office is located in the Halong Atas area, and the location itself is a Christian territory. Suara Maluku's Muslim reporters were unable to enter their own office. At that point, there were an agreement stating that Muslim reporters only operates in Muslim territory, Christian reporters only operates in Christian territory. Suara Maluku's Muslim reporters then do not have to come to office, but enough to send faxes to be printed by editors in Suara Maluku's office. Although not perfect, news from Muslim territory can be included in Suara Maluku's news publication.²¹

²⁰ Eriyanto, *Media dan Konflik Ambon* (Jakarta: KBR68H, 2003), 23.

²¹ Eriyanto, *Media dan Konflik Ambon*, 27.

From above explanation, there is segregation among working areas in Ambon. Like it was mentioned before, Muslim reporters work in Muslim territory, vice versa. Due to escalating conflict, media in Ambon find it difficult to maintain their independence and stay neutral in their news publications. Escalating conflict effected many reporters in Ambon. They cannot set themselves apart from their own religion. This condition tend to result in image construction over the conflict as a religious disputes that might brought massive hate and anger among the people. Therefore, media does have interest in conflict coverage, either political or economic interest. The case example in Ambon, show us that escalating conflict might be regarded as the prime factor why media tend to take sides.

Construction of Reality

One of the most important part of this paper is how media generate its power. Media can perform themselves in a way to create alternate reality, used to known as “construction of reality”. Such action is very powerful because it can separate facts from reality. Another provocative traits. Construction of reality is an effort to give image or tell a particular event, situation, or object. Basically, what mass media do is to construct the reality. This is because media reports and tell various events to become news story. Talking about public opinion in the earlier paragraph, actually we will only see the downstream of an opinion being delivered. The upstream starts from what we define as personal opinion. In this case, personal opinion of a reporter, or media where the opinion is being delivered to public. Personal opinion consists of verbal and nonverbal activities, serves image and individual interpretation on certain object in setting, usually in a form of an issue. In order to construct public opinion, it has to be spread extensively through collective activities with more people involve.

The first stage in publishing personal conflict is the emergence of dispute with large potential to become an issue. Second stage is the emergence of leadership to do the publishing. This kind of leadership comes from a type of communicator that constantly make use of the means to publish the issue for personal gain, or more general interest, such as politician, professional communicator, and activist. If this leadership emergence stimulate communication through mass channel, interpersonal, and organization, the way to the third stage is eventually open, which is the emergence of personal interpretation.

For short, personal interpretation give picture on existing opinion, what others might do and what individuals might be accepted. This goes to the final stage of making opinion. This stage adjust everyone personal opinion on a much wider one, which is public opinion. Noelle-Neumann creating a hypothesis that people willingness to express their opinion in front of public is depended on their own perspective about their environment. So, if someone perceived that his/her opinion is in line with their environment, he/she has the tendency to act in front of public in a way to express their personal opinion. The people followed the perceived opinion can express their thoughts with secure feeling, without generating or creating any hesitation whatsoever. Through revealing personal opinion a person can feel relax, and according to Sullivan's theory, this is a part of human essential needs.²²

There are several social implication in public opinion that will be discussed in this writing. One of them pointed to a role played by mass media in opinion making process. It means that media helps to create public opinion, leading people about what to perceive (this is a part of agenda setting). As far as people still rely on media, they will still give images on social phenomena, constructed in a way suit their interest

Previous facts about media show the potential of the power media posses. Media nowadays are very powerful because it has great influence on public opinion, like it was mentioned earlier on. In one of the seminar on media reconstruction I had attended, the speaker was talking about social political engineering in a context of media role in the future. He said that media reporting is no longer based on reality or facts on the field, but as a construction of reality. It means that reports made by media are not based on facts, but on interest from certain parties to direct the subject to whatever direction they want to take.

Media has played their part as second hand reality that is usually very tendentious. Media also has become a teacher and guide us to define their products according to their will and interest, and people follow that direction. In making judgment and decision, we are no longer based on the reality happens in the field, but by the perspective media brought to us. This is the part when we see clearly that media is very potential to act as a constructor of reality, therefore have potential power.

²² Dan Nimmo, *Komunikasi Politik: Khalayak dan Efek* (Bandung: PT Remaja Rosdakarya, 2005), 24.

After constructing the reality, media will act as a communicator and distorted the essence of information that leads to misinterpretation. If a communal society unable to clearly digested or misunderstand information, conflicts will be potentially arise among them. Like I have said before, Indonesian democracy is fragile because this country only undergone true democracy for the last 16 years post the Soeharto's era. Indonesian civil society must be aware that media development grows rapidly to a stage require of special attention. Media must be watched, so they will not harm their own people and brought conflicting circumstances. Poverty, ethnic diversity, repressive political system, and fight for resources are conventional sources of conflict, but media is a modern means to create conflicts at all level of society, with various sources also.

Why Media Take Sides?

Media in the reformation era has the freedom to expand their news model, form, and content according to individual or owner interest. It gives birth to new hypothesis, which are the possession of political, economic, social, and cultural orientation for mass media in their report. Such condition dragged media to a political and business journalism. Of course, this practices are partial and take sides. Therefore, it is difficult for us to believe that media still have their neutrality, full autonomy, even independency in their report.

This reality awake the public that media is not just collecting, producing, and serving journalistic products (reality) to their readers. Behind every journalistic products serves in display of every newspapers, magazines, online news, even every narration and visualization, media has the potential and also big opportunity to include their own assessment, evaluation, or redefinition towards news facts build in a package, based on certain politics and economic interest. We can also say: "made by order". Such reporting pattern could trap media in a subjective condition, have specific interest or tendency, and bias in reporting.

Media freedom in expanding their discourse, view, or their way of thinking enable them to use rhetoric language structure, with certain connotation to their reporting products. As an institution, media use a certain logical system to publish a reality they think important to be published. They act as secondary definers of reality.²³ This certain logical systems will eventually lead to self-justification or even blame others that will definitely create conflicts. For this case,

²³ Stuart Hallet al., *Policing the Crisis* (London: Macmillan, 1978), 74.

media is not a state tool to marginalize other parties. Media work has facilitated the dominance of group interest, rather than best interest of the people. Through a symbolic media reporting, the common people have been once again marginalized by other groups, who are strong and even stronger since they have “new tool” to play with.

How mass media packaged story about a particular conflict, will influence public perspectives and create public opinion for their readers. News packaging, or commonly known as media framing, is often recognize as reporter’s way to interpret the meaning of the news itself. It happens also in news about conflict. They have their own understanding about it and serve that understanding to the public, eventually the public will definitely influence by it. Media framing influence the interpretation of conflict situations.

Media framing can be done in various ways. Some of the ways are putting it in the heading, subheading, picture, caption, or in leads. This ways are conducted in order for the readers to quickly notice the purpose of this media reporting. However, media framing also preserve the interest of the readers themselves. Media and the people have the same interest to keep, and even promote norms and ideology that they live by. For example, the nationalist newspapers published daily in Indonesia, such as Kompas, Media Indonesia, Suara Pembaruan, etc. This newspapers targeted general readers, not like Republika let say. Republika has their own segmentation, which are the Muslim readers.

I’m not saying that Republika is not a nationalist newspaper, but their market captive is much narrow, so they sell their newspapers mostly to loyal and ideologist moslem readers. Their policy brought effects to their reporting. Islamic content and perspective must be a priority for their readers. At some cases, specific tendency could play an important role in this kind of reporting. Although, still have all the rights to do that.

Perception is a sensing processes, stimulus is receive by individuals through sensory organs. Then, being interpreted in order for the individuals to understand about the stimulus they receive. The process to interprete the stimulus is commonly influence by experience and each individuals learning process. So, every individual will have different perception from stimulus they receive. At least, that is how the theory works. Why perception is important in this matter? As we talk about construction over reality, this media framing is definitely a part of it. Construction has a very close relation with perception because the outcome is determined by the receiver

perception. A process of public opinion driving over an event in the society is displayed by media because they have their own perspective and also interest over the event. Such interest could be various, has long term effects, and continued in a massive scale.

Media Weaknesses in Covering Conflict

Indonesian media have many weaknesses in covering conflict stories. Some like to twist the news because having conflict of interest, some take sides, or some may not have enough competence as a good reporter, so that they might be seen as subjective in their reports. They tend to be reductionist, fragmented, less facts, full of opinion, and put forward talking news aspects.²⁴

Another drawback is quite often seen is media reactionary nature, which is only cover if there is an incident happens. For instance, media only covers Aceh conflict if there is a shooting or separatist movement occurred. Underline this kind of reactionary report is the 5W + 1H aspect, ignoring the conflict historical background and the resolution steps. Fundamental problems on what really lies behind the conflict are rarely publish by media, especially in straight or hard news. If gunfire had occurred, media only publish magnitude aspect of the story, such as how many were injure, or even killed during the incident.²⁵

Reporter weaknesses in covering conflict:²⁶

- Lack of historical knowledge and conflict characteristic
- Lack of field knowledge
- No preparation on respondent list before going to the field
- More concern on the conflicts or war aspect, instead of humanity aspect
- Lack of concern on the news impact, indirectly or directly
- Not mentioning respondent identity
- Unbalanced
- Tend to take sides, even sometimes dishonest
- Do not offer conflict solution
- No verification on information acquired

²⁴Sirait, *Jurnalisme Sadar Konflik*, 220.

²⁵Sirait, *Jurnalisme Sadar Konflik*, 221.

²⁶Sirait, *Jurnalisme Sadar Konflik*, 216-217.

- Using bombastic title, tend to be provocative
- Lack of analytical skill, causing inability to explore problems in the field deeply

Closing

Media and conflict is a pair we cannot separate. Therefore, the people themselves will be an important factor because not everyone in Indonesia has a level of intelligence and high moral consciousness to comprehensively understand news coming from media. Taken for granted is a perfect term to define most Indonesian people in understanding the contents of a media. Usually they do not try to cover all sides. Easy to provoke and agitated, close minded, and many more of immature nature that has to be change by Indonesian people in order to develop a well establish civil society life.

Although media cannot be separated from conflicts, they still has to go along inside democratic realm as a part of strong civil society, in order to prevent conflicts from happening. We cannot neglect media role in civil society because we need them as a watcher to oversee the quality of our democracy. I believe media has the power to do so. Eventually, I hope in the future Indonesian will be able to move on from excessive democracy into much modern one, where all element of civil society goes hand in hand, working together for better Indonesia. Media with solution is more preferable in our society.

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