Media Role in Democracy and Human Rights: Challenges to Civil Society Life in Indonesia

Peran Media dalam Demokrasi dan Hak Asasi Manusia: Tantangan untuk Masyarakat Sipil di Indonesia

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Abstraksi

Sejak era reformasi, dimana demokrasi telah dipraktekkan sepenuhnya, Indonesia memasuki era baru dan lebih toleran. Ini ditandai dengan apresiasi yang tinggi pada hak asasi manusia dan cara hidup demokratis. Namun, hak asasi manusia berdiri di atas berbagai asumsi yang benar-benar rapuh, misalnya, kebebasan berbicara memungkinkan kita untuk berbicara tentang masalah yang sangat sensitif. Dalam era informasi, media memainkan peran besar dalam penegakkan hak asasi manusia dan demokrasi. Ancamannya realitas sosial yang dihasilkan dan dibangun di luar kewenangan formal. Dalam hal ini, media mampu mempengaruhi opini publik dengan melakukan analisis framing berita. Analisis framing merupakan pendekatan untuk mengetahui penggunaan perspektif wartawan dalam memilih isu-isu dan menulis cerita. Perspektif akhirnya ditentukan fakta mana yang diambil, bagian yang ditampilkan atau dihilangkan, dan juga tujuan dari mana cerita ditampilkan. Hal ini tentunya merupakan ancaman terhadap demokrasi dan hak asasi manusia, karena dapat menghasilkan konflik.

Keyword: Media, Demokrasi, Hak Asasi Manusia, dan Masyarakat Sipil

Abstract:

Since the reformation era, where democracy has been fully practiced, Indonesia entered a new and more tolerant era. It characterized by high appreciation of human rights and democratic way of living. However, human rights stand on various assumptions that really fragile, for example, the freedom of speech enables us to talk about problems that are very sensitive to some people or culture. This is where media take part. In an era of information, media plays a big role in terms of human rights promotion and upholding democracy. Media role in the era of information technology has developed rapidly, especially in democratic environment. Media not just play as an information carrier, but had also transform themselves as the center of information itself. As a part of the civil society, media enable every layer of the society to access information freely and openly. Such condition will bring different understanding from each communicant. Media as communicator, 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. 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, and various sources also. Media provide their journalistic products in much more businesslike and straight-out. Social reality is generated and constructed outside formal authority. In this case, media is able to influence public opinion by doing framing analysis to a news. Framing analysis is an approach to find out the perspective use by reporters in selecting issues and write stories. The perspective eventually determined which facts are taken, which parts are shown or omitted, and also the purpose of where the story leads. This is certainly a threat to democracy and human rights, because it can generates conflicts.

Keywords: Media, Democracy, Human Rights, and Civil Society

I. INTRODUCTION

The thought on human rights obtain strong foundation after the end of World War II, after the world witness one of the most horrible form of power in its history, fascism. At the same time, in various colonies emerged new independent states, including Indonesia. The spirit of the time was justice, freedom, and the fight against any kind of oppression. Indonesia's first president, Soekarno, plays an important role in fighting colonialism in the world.

During President Soeharto's regime, Soekarno's successor, discussion on human rights is very limited and duplicity. On one hand, there was euphoria upon the fall of Soekarno's regime, but in other hand Soeharto's despotism were not much discussed, even justified in order to protect the nation. Quiet many thinkers and activists assessed the early time of the New Order (term for Soeharto's regime) as the most democratic period in Indonesian history, but turn a blind eye to one of the greatest human rights crimes occurred at the same time.

Relation between democracy and human rights stand on various fragile assumptions, for example, the freedom of speech enables us to talk about problems that are very sensitive to some people or culture. Another assumption of the relation between democracy and human rights is representing various interests and by itself be a tool for checks and balances process in the government. Limited political democracy was then assessed as a

cure that can solve a variety of problems once the mechanism is formed.

The definition of political democracy is no other than the presence of a political party that is free but responsible, and the presence of a strong leader to sustain the system. This condition is clearly displayed in the country's election process. Many groups and people unable to fight for their interests directly in the system, eventually entrusted their interests to existing parties. Marginal people in certain areas unable to fight for their interests, even though they form a political party, it would be very difficult to pass strict selection from the electoral commission, moreover to compete in a costly political process.

The absence of understanding of human rights broadly, leads to the underlying issues included in the protection of social, economics, and cultural rights get less attention because it is more concentrated on the protection of civil and political rights. Two things support the process. First, political repression from the New Order regime makes civil and political rights violations very prominent. Second, increasing international support for the protection of these rights.

Efforts to fight for fundamental rights in the field of social, economic, cultural often closed if there is no repressive elements provide space on a civil and political rights campaign against regime repression at the time. In this context, the primacy of civil and political rights has not become priority because of

strategic reasons, but more because of the principle of opportunity. Can also be said, such a view is far behind when compared to the notion of democracy set in world conference on Human Rights in Vienna, Austria, in 1993. Vienna conference formally establishes the principle of non-separation between civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights as basis for human rights enforcement. Thus, if democracy starts from the principle of human rights, it must come from the will of the people, freely expressed, in order to change political, economic, social, and cultural system.

After Soekarno's regime fall, the emerged of the New Order with President Soeharto in charge, seems to be regarded as the triumph of democracy. This is because President Soekarno closeness with communist leader from China and the Soviet Union. However, the reality showed us that Soeharto's regime gave tremendous misery due to various human rights violations during his 32 years in power. Pseudo human rights displayed authoritarian regime hide in the face of democracy. No wonder, in 1998 student movement overthrow the despotic ruler. Also, a strong civil society is recognized as an important contributor to both launching and sustaining a transition from authoritarian to democratic governance.

In the reformation era, after Soeharto's downfall, discussion on human rights grows and sharpen various terms. For instance, environmental rights and civil and political rights. The

most important thing is that people directly involved in formulating and defining human rights notions. Dilemma between expansion of human rights notions or terms on one hand and narrowing definition of democracy on the other hand, appears repeatedly and eventually becomes separate discourse. In this process, human rights perceptibly as an abstract concept and formulated as equality before the law, guarantees personal protection, and freedom of conscience. In this sense, political democracy provides great opportunities to the establishment of basic freedom and equality. Basic freedom and equality will establish if there is an effective mechanism for the process of reminding each other about what is right, and which becomes common good.

Civil society is considered to be the arena of voluntary and un-coerced collective action among shared interests, purposes and values that strengthens the social foundations of democracy and, in the end, the state. Remarkable progress in the area of civic participation has been made during the "reformation" period. The first two post-Suharto governments, under presidents Habibie and Wahid, loosened controls on the press, paved the way for independence in EastTimor, initiated an ambitious program of decentralization, 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. Free and fair general elections were held in 1999

and 2004. Direct elections of mayors and governors took place for the first time in 2005, and decentralization rolled ahead amid some attempts to rein in the excesses of local officials.

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 big 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 a particular news. This could certainly a threat to democracy and human rights, because it can generate conflicts. This condition is very interesting for us to discuss in terms of media, democracy and human rights.

II. DISCUSSION

A.Media and People

People need new or update information everyday to catch up with anything happen surround them. One way to find this new or update information is from news which is broadcast or print media. Therefore, media company always try to find news which sell. So journalists are competing everyday to produce news which interesting, have values and eye catching.

According to Mcquail and Wolfsfed, there are several points to ponder s for journalist to write this kind of news. The points are: magnitude, timing, proximity, and straightforwardness. Magnitude means that how big the incident or events are.[1] For example, news about Rohingya community becomes one of the top issues to discuss almost in all media. The second point is timing. Journalists should always covers news which is new. People want new information every day. They hope that they know any incident or event which happened a minute ago. How well people know the place or people in the news is what is mean by proximity. News about celebrity is always interesting for many people because they know who the person is. 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 of why this happened. It means that people will only get half of the picture.

Finding an event complicated or ambiguous, the media will generally work towards simplification; and 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

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[1] Gadi Wolfsfed. 2004. Media and The Path to Peace. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. P. 57; Denis McQuail. 2000. Mass Communication Theory, 4th ed. London: Sage Publication. P. 48.

clear-cut, whereas the causes of those actions are more complicated.[2] Thus, there is a close relationship between mass media and community. One role of media which play an important role in the community is as a source of information.[3]

The interaction between people and mass media is part of communication process. People look for information from broadcast or printed media and accept it as knowledge. This interaction produce what is called public opinion. Based on Redi Panuju, public opinion is compilation of images which create or is created by communication process.[4] 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.[5]

Purpose of public opinion is to influence people or other party. Mass media also use as persuasive tools for centuries. Newspapers as one form of mass media shapes the public opinion through its article. This article contains facts which use to create public opinion. In reality, facts describe in the article could change or influence public opinion. Effect of news from printed media like news papers can modify people's

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[2] James Watson. 2003. Media Communication: An Introduction to Theory and Process, 2nd ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. P. 71.
[3] Helena Olii and Novi Erlita. 2011. Opini Publik, 2nd ed. Jakarta: Indeks. P. 91.
[4] Redi Panuju. 2002. Relasi Kuasa Negara Media Massa dan Publik. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar. P. 37.
[5] *Ibid.*, 38.

behavior. It can also bend pattern of behavior or attitude of the community on certain issue.[6]

River's opinion that news could modify people's behavior is also supported by EM Perse. According to Perse, there are several studies of media effect suggest that "media and their content have significant and substantial effects".[7] Result of this study point to three general effects from the media: cognitive, affective and behavioral. It means that media not only influence people's behavior. Cognitive effect is concerned with how people process the information to learn something from it; 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 reach emotionally toward 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 some more positive or negative way of thinking about certain issues. Lastly, behavior effect is connected with how information can influence actions which are done by people after processing information. Thus, it can be said that indirectly, the media influences public opinion about certain issues. Although the media sometimes gives a little information

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[6] William Rivers, *et al*. 2008, Media Massa dan Masyarakat Modern, 2nd ed, Kencana, Jakarta.
[7] Elizabeth M. Perse. 2001. Media Effects and Society, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. New Jersey: Inc. Publisher. P. 98.

about certain issues, many people receive it as the fact or truth. Based on this little knowledge, people react to and take a position on certain issues.

B. Media and Civil Society

Indonesia is an important example of a newly democratizing country, whose progress has implications for its own citizens, for other nations moving toward democracy, and for the international actors who assist them. Meanwhile, civil society can be define as autonomous representation of civilians, distinct from but part of the political sphere, made up of rational rights bearing individuals working together for the social good.[8] Considering the media as part of civil society, access to media is critical to actors involved in the politics of transition from single (authoritarian) to multiparty democracy (reformation). However, it is postulated that the role of the media in this enterprise can be greatly enhanced by the support of other democratic social forces in society.[9]

As a part of the civil society, media enable every layer of the society to access information freely and openly. Media, printed or electronic, has becoming a social arena and also public stage, enable every individual, or group to market their

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[8] Larry Diamond. 1999. Developing Democracy: Towards Consolidation. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press. P. 221.
[9] Peter Wanyande. 1996. The Media as Civil Society and Its Role in Democratic Transition in Kenya. Accessed from http://erepository.uonbi.ac.ke/handle/123456789/38904 on September 15, 2013.

ideas and discourse. In other words, media with its journalistic products has become a free market to every element of the society to again 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. But, 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 a 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 media reports to be subjective, because the content is decided by their owners, not facts in the field. 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 the people.[10]

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 the 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 the radio and to some extent the television as authoritative to the extent that any message broadcast on these channels is taken almost as the 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.

In public arena, various issues and social problems in our daily lives has become a public consumption. Every stake

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[10] Firman Yursak. 2007. Eddie Widiono: Di Bawah Pusaran Media. Jakarta: Next Reign Media. P. xix-xxi.

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, serve all kinds of information. Especially, after the downfall of Soeharto's regime, where now 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.

Media has also undergone a character changes, 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. When opinion flying around among the people, unconveniences might occured among them. Friction among the people is most likely to happen.

In the end, it should not be difficult to see why media are part of civil society. It is one of those associations outside of government that seek not only to guard their interests against state encroachment but also try to promote the interest of other civil associations using available political space and its unique characteristics. It also needs to be noted that the contradictions exhibited by civil society as indicated above applies also to media. In other words, the media, like any other association in civil society, are not homogeneous. Rather, they consist of groups and individuals with different interests some of which may be conflictual and even contradictory. It is, for example, not uncommon for media organizations to compete with one another and even call on the state to ban their rivals. In some instances media publications even commend an action taken by the state against another media organization or publication.

C. Media and Conflict

We are now begin to talk more about media, but first I would like to present the challenge media present to civil society

life in Indonesia, in terms of creating conflicts. Conflict become media main dish around the world because they are very interesting and invite lots of attention 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 a 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 made news on conflicts as a commodity. Conflict could threaten civil society life, especially in Indonesia. This is why it is quite interesting to discuss a little bit about the relation between media and conflict.

To be worth selling, various issues on conflict publish by media in such a way. Sometimes, media even accused to contributed to the escalation of violence. For instance, war journalism. War has long been the object of media coverage. The worst the war can be, the reports is getting for more interesting and sexy for media coverage. The "bad news is a good news" principle has become the main benchmark for reporters nowadays. This principle is tend to be provocative than solutive. That way, directly or indirectly, the media also helped trigger conflict. That way, directly or indirectly, media also help to trigger conflict, even become provocateur to existing conflict. Media tend to "treat" conflict as commodity,

so the publication usually display sensation, misinterpretation, bias, and of course provocative.

This in line with what Peter Frumkin define 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 require market to grow.[11] That is why media job basically is to construct the reality. Media is not an open and free channel, instead mostly based on truth reconstruction. Quite the same with constructivist paradigm, in which fact is seen as a result of a reality construction. Media and its reporter, looked as construction channel, is picking a reality they want to construct. They choose the facts they want to publish and omit those not needed in the news.

Media define reality, so it becomes a medium for ideological struggle competing between each other. Indonesian democracy nowadays give enormous opportunity for many ideology to compete. Those ideology represented in the media as an opinion, 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,

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[11] Peter Frumkin. 2002. On Being Nonprofit: A Conceptual and Policy Primer. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. P. 59.

directed public opinion could jeopardize the structure of democratic civil society and human rights basis.

Ideological representation can be seen implicitly in the 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 be solutive or positioned themselves as a means for conflict prevention. Numerous interests and the use of business logic, is of course legitimate because media has no obligation whatsoever to prevent conflict from occuring. There are only rules of ethics, such as the principle of balance, impartiality, honesty, regards humanity, avoid provocation by taking into account the impact of a news report, and others similar to that.[12] 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, in general, is not compromised. Promoting market is not just media job, but at the

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[12] Hasundungan Sirait. 2007. Jurnalisme Sadar Konflik: Meliput Konflik dengan Perspektif Damai. Jakarta: Aliansi Jurnalis Independen. P. 218.

same time become an integral part of their existence also. Excessive democracy may well contribute to this problem.

This kind of media role in reporting conflict has become a serious challenge for Indonesian democratic civil society life. Indirectly, media gives an overview of various perspectives on a news object, which will enrich public perspective, but in other hand could also engineered public opinion. In the end it all comes back to the public to choose what kind of news they want. Based on various perspective offers by media, actually public can increase their intellectuals, because they can choose which message containing facts, where the news is just looking for a sensation, entertainment, or high circulation only. If Indonesian civil society has awareness and intelligence level like this, then any construction of reality made by media, conflict is not necessarily going to happen. Therefore, media does have an important role in forming civil society life in Indonesia.

D. Media Independency in Conflict

Media as a matter of fact can contribute to a more objective manner, and have positive impact. Numerous media still puts 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 City, Central Sulawesi. According to Poso Post senior journalist, Samsu Yadi, media neutrality during the conflict is considered to be good in a way, although many media are still not considered neutral. Relations between all journalists covering conflict in Poso is strong enough. They have full awareness that media can supply energy to deescalate the tension, even to stop the conflict.

Nevertheless, in another case in Ambon, Celebes, where religious conflict also happens, journalist association and network there is different than in Poso. In Ambon, all journalists covering conflict there is still fragmented and not unite. Muslims has journalist and media of their own, as well as Christians.[13] Another conflict area, In Pontianak, Borneo there are electronic media call 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 have in their possession reports on the incident, however their editor decided not to broadcast because the reports could result in racist

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[13] Irfan Abubakar and Muchtadlirin (ed). 2001. Media dan Integrasi Sosial Jembatan Antar Umat Beragama. Jakarta: CSRC UIN Syarif Hidayatullah. P. 94.

sentiments towards the Chinese people there, and perhaps throughout the country.[14]

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 to scratch his car, several other Chinese people came to defend him. Then, they eventually beated the Malays person brother-in-law, who came to break up the fight, not to defend his brother. As a result, his nose broken and his face covered in blood. Then, after the ceremony, the Malays people then pelt the Chinese person's house with stones.

However, 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.

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[14] *Ibid.*, P. 95.

Actually, from the beginning media was not use intentionally to support one group. If then media involved in the conflict and support one of the disputing parties, it's not because of their own will, but more because of the conflict escalation that made them have to take sides. For example, during the Ambon conflict, media existence was encouraged to balance information from two sides.

But 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* was 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.

Either *TVRI*, *RRI*, *Antara*, and even *Suara Maluku*, they all employed Christian and Muslim reporters. But since the conflict started, Muslim reporter was not allowed to enter Christian territory, vice versa. Since Ambon conflict started, 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.[15] One example I would like to present is the Suara Maluku newspaper. Eriyanto explained that objective news from either side can still

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[15] Eriyanto. 2003. Media dan Konflik Ambon. Jakarta: KBR68H. P. 23.

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. Balanced news from each Christian and Muslim sides could still be presented by Suara Maluku. However, in March 1999 the situation were getting tense. Muslim cannot enter into Christian territory, so is Christian cannot enter to Muslim territory. Incidentally, 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.[16]

From above explanation, there is segregation in working areas in Ambon. Like I said 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 also cause many reporters in Ambon is not free from their primordialism, resulting in image construction over this conflict

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[16] *Ibid.*, P. 27.

as a religious conflict, that might brought massive hate and anger inside the people. Therefore, media does have interest in every coverage on conflict, either political or economic. However, unfinished and escalating conflict could be regarded as the cause why media tend to take sides.

E. Construction of Reality

Media can perform themselves in a way to create alternate reality, used to known as "construction of reality". Construction of reality is an effort to give image or tell a particular event, situation, or object. Basicly, what mass media do is to construct the reality, because media reporting and telling various events to become a 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 call, personal opinion. In this case, personel opinion of a reporter or media where the opinion is release to public. Personal opinion consist of verbal and nonverbal activities, serves image and individual intepretation on certain object in setting, usually in a form of issue. In order for construct public opinion, it has to be owned extensively through collective activities with more people involve.

The first stage in publishing personal conflict is the emergence of dispute with a big potential to become an issue. Second stage is the emergence of leadership to do the

publishing. Such leadership can be carried out from a party from the previous dispute, someone who communicate surpass all the people that the person know personally. This kind of leadership comes from a type of communicator taht constantly make use of the meaning to publish the issue, for personal gain, or more general interest, like politician, proffesional communicator, and activist. If leadership has stimulate communication on an issue through mass channel, interpersonal, and organization, so then the way to the third stage is open, which is the emergence of personal intepretation.

For short, personal interpretation give picture on existing opinion, what others might do, and what individuals might accepted. This goes to the final stage of making opinion. This stage adjusting everyone personal opinion on a much wider opinion, which is the public opinion. Noelle-Neumann creating a hypothesis that people willingness to express their opinion in front of public is depend on their own perspective about their environment. So, if someone perceive that his/her opinion is in line with their environment, he/she has the tendency to act in front of publict in a way to express their personal opinion. This helps a collectively arrangement public opinion. The people that follow 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 is part of human essential needs.[17]

There are several social inherent implication in public opinion that we will discuss also. One of them pointing to a role played by mass media in opinion making process. It means that media helps to create publict opinion that tells the people about what to perceive (this is a part of agenda setting). However, there is also other meaning, which is what media do to report the truth that people should think. As far as people still rely on media, they will still give images on social consensus, although not many media like this still exist now.

Previous facts about media shows the potential of power that media has. Media nowadays are very powerful because it has a great influence on public opinion, like we discuss earlier on. In one of the training I've ever attended, the speaker was talking about social politics 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. What's that mean? Reporting by today's media are not based on facts, but on interest from certain parties to direct the subject to whatever direction he wants to take.

Media has play their part as a second hand reality, a second reality that are usually very tendensius. Media also has

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[17] Dan Nimmo. 2005. Komunikasi Politik: Khalayak dan Efek. Bandung: PT Remaja Rosdakarya. P. 24.

become a teacher and guide us to define their products according to their will and interest, and sometimes we follow that direction. In making judgement and decision, we're no longer based it on the reality happens in the field, but by the perspective that the media brought to us. This is the part, when we see clearly that media is very potential to act as a contruction of reality.

After constructing the reality, media will act as a communicator, 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 15 years post the Soeharto's era. Indonesian civil society must be aware that media development grows rapidly in a stage require of special attention, so it will not harm their own people and misght resulting a conflictual 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.

F. 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 a new hypothesis, which are the possession of political, economical, social, and cultural orientation for mass media in their report. Such condition dragged media to a political and business journalism. Of course, this kind of practices are partial and take sides. Therefore, it's quite hard for us to believe that media still have their neutrality, full authonomy, 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 it, made by order. Such reporting pattern could trap media in a subjective condition, have spesific interest or tendency, and bias in reporting.

Media freedom in expanding their discourse, view, or their way of thinking enable them to use rethoric 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. This certain

logical systems will eventually lead to self-justification, or even blame others, that will definitely create conflicts. Media, unaware, acting as a secondary definers of reality.[18] For this case, media is not a state tool to marginalized other parties. But, the entire media routines and professional ideology in working, unaware, has facilitate the dominance of group interest, rather than best interest of the people. Through a symbolic media reporting, the common people has 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 conflict will influence their perspective on conflictual events, and in turns will create public opinion for their readers. News packaging, or commonly knows as media framing, is often called as the reporter 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 for the public, and 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, in a picture, caption, or in leads. This ways are conducted in order for the readers to quickly notice the purpose of this reporting from the media. However, media framing also preserve the interest of the

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[18] Stuart Hall, *et al*. 1978. Policing the crisis. London: Macmillan. P. 74.

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 muslim readers. The policy, of course bring 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, they still have all the rights to do that.

Perception is a sensing process, 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 interpreted 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's how the theory works. Why perception is important in this matter? As we talk about construction over reality, this media framing is definitely part of it. Construction has a very close relation with perception,

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

G. 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. This kind of type are quite many, they are tend to be reductionist, fragmented, less facts, full of opinion, and put forward talking news aspects.[19]

Another drawback is that 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. Underlined in 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 is rarely publish by media, especially in *straight* or *hard news*. If gunfire had occurred, media only publish magnitude aspect

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[19] Sirait., *Op cit*. P. 220.

of the story, such as how many were injure, or even killed during the incident.[20]

Reporter weaknesses in covering conflict:[21]

1. Less historical knowledge and conflict characteristic
2. Less field knowledge
3. Do not prepare respondent list before going to the field
4. More concern on the conflict or war aspect, instead of humanity aspect
5. Less concern on the news impact, indirectly or directly
6. No mentioned respondent identity
7. Unbalanced
8. Tend to take sides, even dishonest
9. Do not offer conflict solution
10. There is no verification on information acquired
11. Using bombastic title, tend to be provocative
12. Less analitical skill, causing inability to explore problems in the field deeply

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[20] *Ibid.*, P. 221.
[21] *Ibid.*, P. 216-217.

III. CLOSING

People 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 established civil society life, that goes along with democracy and human rights. I hope in the future, Indonesian will be able to move on from excessive democracy into modern kind of democracy where civil society goes hand in hand for better Indonesia.

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