

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF CONFLICT

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ABSTRACT

Every conflict needs to be resolved. However, doing such intervention requires acknowledgment to many aspects of conflict. History of conflict is the first step to be taken in order to compose effective resolution. Through this first step then some aspects will be figured out namely social perceptions of the conflicting groups, ethos of conflict, social identity, dehumanization process, delegitimization and deindividuation. The intervention available from social psychology, then addressing cognitive dissonance through behavior modification

Keywords: *Conflict, social perceptions, ethos of conflict, social identity, dehumanization, delegitimization, and deindividuation*

Introduction

Reformation in Indonesia has led, partially, the citizens into greater freedom especially in expressing their attitudes, social thoughts and attribution. It is confirmed that the side effects of this freedom sometimes bring us to difficulties in our daily social life. Sometimes, to express freely means undervaluing and misjudging other people. These might lead to social discomfort and finally bring conflict among us.

Considering that Indonesia is very diverse in lot of aspects, namely religions, beliefs, norms, ethnics, tribes as well as political directions, then conflict is sometimes inevitable. The majority and minority approach have led us into a sense of majority and minority. This walling block has successfully segregated us into conflicting dichotomies. The sense of majority and minority has also brought effect a wide social polarization which could end in conflict.

There is no doubt that in this country, the sense of disintegration is growing due to social expression of social identity. In 1990's the sense of cultural majority (Javanese culture) had been transformed into religion orientation, which inevitably created clearer religious identity.

What is considered harmful is that sometimes this religious identity tends to be exclusive and expansive and it is the beginning of deadly embryonic cells of conflict.

Now, we have seen in our daily lives that conflict emerges in many regions in Indonesia, ex. unresolved yet Poso, Mataram, Ambon and Papua Barat. These conflicts, even though exist in other regions, far from Java for example, have permeable power to influence daily lives in Java. This due to what we sometimes call 'false' solidarity.

So much less tangible than the physical destruction of war, the effects of conflict on the psychology of individuals and a society are as profound as they are neglected. If the attitudes that lead to conflict are to be mitigated, and if it is taken that psychology drives attitudes and behaviors of individuals and groups, then new emphasis must be placed on understanding the social psychology of conflict and its consequences. The suffering and trauma that are the results of war need to be addressed and prioritized in plans for peace. Effective means for dealing with these less-visible consequences of violent conflict must be developed if a true and sustained peace is to be realized.

Components of the Social-Psychological Dimension of Conflict

Druckman (1994) proposes his notion that Social psychology permeates all aspects of intractable conflict. While history, perceptions and identity are inherently present in the escalation of conflict, they are also intrinsic to managing conflict and contributing to a sustainable peace. Acknowledging history, building awareness, learning empathy, according legitimacy, and recognizing fears are among the most powerful tools for building peace.

Discussion

a. History

Any analysis of conflict requires learning its history, the progression of events which led to the violence eruption. As social groups interact with each other, patterns of interaction develop over time. Repeated experience leads to the formation and solidification of beliefs and perceptions of self and others. While this can be a positively reinforcing process in which the relationship between the two parties is based on trust and cooperation, in situations of conflict such processes are largely negative. When there is a history of domination of one social group over the other, there is little basis for trust or cooperation. Each of these past experiences lays the foundation for interactions in the present and the future. In assessing the conflict in Indonesia, the conflicting parties must trace their unique historical interaction, to determine whether it is reinforcing or punishing.

In the social-psychological analysis of conflict, emphasis is placed on the importance of acknowledging history. Previous wars fought, previous aggressions committed, or previous actions that led to the loss of trust are not easily forgotten. Denying these past realities does not remove them from history. On the contrary, denying claims rooted in history creates fear and insecurity, challenging the existence of other groups and nations, exacerbating tensions, and heightening conflict.

It is important to acknowledge the negative experiences and consequences of history between parties in order to reduce tensions. Tensions can thus be limited to contemporary issues over which control and change can be affected. Acknowledging the aspects of history in the national discourse, specifically its darker aspects, allows for at least the possibility of positive transformation, where lessons can be learned and new relationships are built.

b. Social Perceptions

Perceptions between social groups are formed by interactions over time. Values of and threats from others, power distribution, and resource control, each contribute to these perceptions. In social-psychological terms, it is the perception of power, rather than the actual possession of power, which is important. Power is most often perceived in military, economic or political terms. If these terms are perceived as zero-sum, it is likely that conflict will erupt or escalate. However, if the terms of conflict and their perception can be moved from zero-sum to positive sum, then options for conflict management are greatly augmented.

Kelman's exposition of mirror image theory describes how parties develop parallel images of the other, with self-perceptions largely positive and perceptions of the other mostly negative (Druckman, 1996). Violence and aggression become associated with the other party while virtue and justice are qualities possessed by oneself or one's own group. Deutsch's folk theory of war as cited in Susan (2000), in which one side perceives itself as only good and the other side as only evil can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy, where violence rapidly escalates. In cases, the best tools to counter the negative effects of mirror-imaging and the good-versus-evil dialectic is empathy, a capacity rarely found in the realm of conflicting relations. The realistic conflict theory (Bobo, 1983 in Baron and Byrne, 2004) also states the same phenomena that are in-group is usually considered superior, has better moral than

the out-group. Usually negative emotion is the central ingredient of this perception.

Empathy may be sought by exchanging group programs or group workshops. In this activity the other group may share their unique visions, values and interests. Hopefully through direct contact liking toward other group increases (Pettigrew, 1997; and Wright, et al., 1997 in Baron and Byrne, 2004). Exchange programs and group workshops can be valuable opportunities to learn empathy, build trust, open communication, increase sensitivity, and augment perspectives and appreciation for the other.

c. Social Identity

Social identity self definition about who they are, including personal attributes and shared attributes with other people like gender or races. Identity can also be described as the norms, beliefs, practices, and traditions with which one engages one's environment (Rothmans, 1997). Self-perception underlies the notion of identity, a pivotal component of social-psychological analysis. Identity and perceptions of the self provide the lens through which one views others. Identity is not an immutable concept, rather, it forms and changes depending on the particular historical moment. Conceptions of identity influence the process of conflicts. Yet identity is still overlooked when attempting to understand the origins of conflict, or in planning its management. Social intervention is then needed in order to resolve conflicting identities within this country. Maybe broader social identity might help overcoming this situation. The writer believes that the government's effort to produce national identity card for the citizens is very useful to deescalate the threat potency of having regional identity. This will build a sense of awareness that hopefully bring unity in us.

d. Ethos of conflict

The concept "ethos" is defined as *the configuration of central societal shared beliefs that provide a particular dominant orientation to a society* (Bar-Tal, 2000).

The ethos, along with the goals and aspirations, is what binds the members of society together, gives meaning to societal life, imparts legitimacy to social order and fosters integration among society members. The societal beliefs which make up the ethos are typically organized around several themes: one's goals, one's identity, one's role in society, etc. These beliefs are widely shared by society members, appear as central topics on the public agenda, are frequently discussed in public discourse, are expressed in cultural products, are transmitted in educational system, serve as relevant references in decisions made by the leaders, and influence the choices regarding courses of action. They provide a sense of similarity and thus constitute one of the contextual bases of social identity.

The beliefs which make up a society's ethos evolve from the conditions under which the society lives over a long period of time, and the particular collective experiences that shape the society during this period. Under prolonged conditions of intractable conflict, when violent experiences are common collective experiences, the conflict comes to preoccupy most members of the society. They therefore develop an "ethos of conflict," which provides a clear picture of the conflict, its goals, its conditions, requirements, and images of one's own group and of the rival. The narrative of the ethos of conflict is supported by society's collective memory.

e. Delegitimization

Every conflict is accompanied by the parties' psychological repertoire, which evolves with time, and plays a determinative role in its dynamics. In general, delegitimization refers to extremely negative stereotypes that are used to describe a specific group. Delegitimized groups are viewed as violating basic human norms or values, and are therefore excluded from being characterized as "good" or even "acceptable" people. Delegitimization does not appear in every inter-group conflict. It tends to emerge especially in very violent and intractable conflicts, when the contes-

ted goals are perceived as endangering the fundamental goals of the group. In such situations, most of the information that the rivals receive about each other is dominated by conflict-related themes. These themes present the malevolent characteristics, intentions, and acts of the other side. (Kelman, 1999).

There are at least five types of delegitimization (Bar-Tal, 2000) namely dehumanization, which involves categorizing a group as non-human (e.g., devil, monsters); trait characterization, which consists of attributing traits that are considered extremely negative and unacceptable in a given society (e.g., aggressors, idiots,); out-casting, which consists of categorizing the adversary into groups that are considered as violators of pivotal social norms (e. g., murderers, terrorists); political labels, which involves categorization into political groups which are absolutely rejected by the values of the delegitimizing group (e. g., for example, Nazis, communists); group comparison, which occurs when the delegitized group is labeled by a name of a group that traditionally serves as an example of negativity in the delegitimizing group (e.g., Vandals, Huns).

Often, such delegitimization occurs on both sides of the conflict. For example, in the case of the confrontation between the U.S. and Muslim countries, the U.S. is considered as the "Zionist protectors", "capitalist", and "Dajjal". Similarly the U.S. branded some of Muslim countries as "Terrorist", "barbaric", and "Violence lover".

Delegitimization affects inter-group relations in the context of intractable conflict because of its following features:

1. It consists of extremely negative labels that are salient and unique in the group's repertoire of characterizations of other groups.
2. It has the aim of denying the delegitized group's humanity.
3. It magnifies the difference between the groups in conflict.
4. It homogenizes the delegitized group as one entity, not allowing individual-

lization of its members or differentiation among its subgroups.

5. It automatically arouses strong negative emotions.
6. It provides rigid, persistent durable categories that are unlikely to change while the conflict lasts, and most probably long after.

In order to maintain peace, then we need to reverse our delegitimization over enemy. The following processes are considered necessary to take into action:

1. *Legitimization* allows viewing the opponent as belonging to an acceptable category of groups, behaving within the boundaries of international norms, with whom it is possible and even desired to terminate the conflict and construct positive relations. Legitimization thus plays crucial role in changing the nature of the intergroup relations. It enables initiation of negotiation with the opponent to achieve peaceful resolution of the conflict and eventually building peaceful and cooperative relations.
2. *Equalization* makes the rival into an equal partner with whom it is possible to establish new relations. This requires recognition of the principle of status equality between the groups, a principle that is brought to bear first in negotiations and later in all types and levels of intergroup interactions.
3. *Differentiation* leads to heterogenization of the enemy group. It enables a new perception of the rival which has hitherto been viewed as a homogeneous hostile entity. The new perception implies that the other group is made up out of various subgroups, which differ in their views and ideologies. Differentiation thus also makes it possible to see that members of the rival group differ in their opinions regarding the conflict and its resolution.
4. *Personalization* allows one to view the rival group not as a depersonalized entity, but as made up of individuals with ordinary human characteristics, concerns, needs, and goals. This is a process of individuation after a period

of de-individuation and consists of a further step after differentiation. Differentiation among individuals allows the acknowledgement of individual differences, namely to view groups as composed of individuals who differ in appearance, characteristics, opinions, concerns, needs, and goals. It also enables viewing members of groups in different personal or social roles such as mothers, sons, students, teachers, physicians, peasants, etc. Any type of individuation of group members defuses generalizations and enables one to perceive similarity and even commonality with them. These may include shared features, ideology, beliefs and feelings with at least with some members of the rival group. It facilitates the development of new individual and group representations that go beyond the stereotyped ones. These, in turn, facilitate personal references to members of the rival group, and may even evolve empathy for their hardships and identification with some of their needs or aspirations.

f. Dehumanization

Dehumanization is a psychological process whereby opponents view each other as less than human and thus not deserving of moral consideration. This process makes it difficult for conflicting parties to recognize that they are part of a shared human community. Such conditions often lead to feelings of intense hatred and alienation among conflicting parties. The more severe the conflict, the more the psychological distance between groups will widen (Rubin and Pruitt, 1994)

g. Deindividuation facilitates Dehumanization as well.

This is the psychological process whereby a person is seen as a member of a category or group rather than as an individual. Because people who are deindividuated seem less than fully human, they are viewed as less protected by social norms against aggression than those who

are individuated. It then becomes easier to rationalize contentious moves or severe actions taken against one's opponents.

While deindividuation and the formation of enemy images are very common, they form a dangerous process that becomes especially damaging when it reaches the level of dehumanization. Once certain groups are stigmatized as evil, morally inferior, and not fully human, the persecution of those groups becomes more psychologically acceptable. When say for example, Christian community and Muslim community in Poso stigmatize each other as evil or bad, then the persecution toward each of the community is seen just.

It is thought that the psychological process of dehumanization might be mitigated or reversed through humanization efforts, the development of empathy, the establishment of personal relationships between conflicting parties, and the pursuit of common goals as the children of the nation. We should over emphasize the individuation and humanization in the nation framework, Indonesia in brothers.

Application of Cognitive Dissonance and Conflict

This theory focuses on consequences of incompatibility between two related cognitions (Franzoi, 2003). For example- if we are one brother and sister of Indonesia, then why should we hate and attack each other? - dissonance is aroused.

Cognitive dissonance can play a tremendous role in conflict -- both in its perpetuation and in its elimination. Both large-scale and small-scale conflicts can be aggravated and/or lessened because of cognitive dissonance. An example from ethnic conflict may help to demonstrate.

A large-scale conflict, particularly one based on identity such as a religion or an identity conflict can be perpetuated by cognitive dissonance. For example in Poso, once negative cognitions are in place, they are often reinforced by other similar cognitions while contradictory thoughts are ignored or avoided.

This all means that a Christian or Muslim who otherwise may strongly believe in the teaching that "You shall not murder" may participate in terrorist activities. Although these two cognitions are dissonant, this dissonance can be overcome by creating new cognitions ("they aren't my brothers" or "they're rivals," etc.). Perhaps more importantly, the conflict can be perpetuated by the fact that these people aren't open to new information that might dispel these false ideas about the other side.

In spite of people's desire to avoid it, the proper use of cognitive dissonance can be a useful tool in overcoming conflict. Cognitive dissonance is a basic tool for education in general. Creating dissonance can induce behavior or attitude change. By creating cognitive dissonance, you force people to react. By introducing cognitive dissonance (pointing out the conflict between what people know and do), we can encourage a change in thought or action.

Turning again to the conflict in Poso, by pointing out the contradiction between religious beliefs and terrorism, people can be forced to rethink their actions. A Christian or Muslim can participate in violent activities because they have dehumanized the other side in their mind. This eliminates any dissonance between their actions and their beliefs against murder or violence. By introducing new information -- perhaps emphasizing the humanity of the other side (their families, their lives, letting the two sides meet in a casual environment, etc.) -- a new dissonance is created between what they are doing and what they now know to be true. This forces a reaction. The individual must now either change their actions or readjust their thoughts to account for this new information.

Then, how to produce a cognitive dissonance? Dialogue between the conflicting parties is then inevitable. Dialogue is one method to produce cognitive dissonance and thus attitude change that has been used in both these and many other cases. While people do not leave these dialogues having changed sides, they do

come out of them with a new respect for people "on the other side" and an understanding that logical, rational, "good" people can feel the opposite way they do about this issue. This tends to tone down their approach to advocacy, generally making it more constructive than it might otherwise have been.

Disarming behaviors are another way to create cognitive dissonance. This is done by simply learning what the other side thinks of or expects of you, and then doing something very different. For example, if you are considered by the other side to be uncaring and cruel, make a small gesture that demonstrates that you care about the other sides' feelings or situation. This causes cognitive dissonance. In case of Christian belief, there is a teaching to love whoever the enemy and no matter how cruel they are. Just showing the teaching through behavior may create consonant information, on the other side, failing to do this may create dissonant cognitive in the Muslim side. However, just doing this once may not be enough to change anyone's attitudes or behavior, as they are likely to ignore the dissonant information. If it is done several times, however, or if the behavior is visible enough that it cannot be ignored, the results are sometimes striking. On the other side what we see, hear or read is sometimes half - baked. We sometimes see the flag brought by "some" Muslim groups are depicted in "violence" as represented with Arabic sword. However, if what the other group expects - to be violent - is countered by opposite behavior then changes in attitude and behavior are hopefully occurred.

Any way to increase interpersonal communication and contact is another way to produce dissonance, break down stereotypes, and start building trust where none existed before. Joint projects, problem solving workshops, prejudice reduction workshops, and tolerance education all are ways to create cognitive dissonance and change hostile attitudes between disputants into attitudes that are likely to be more conciliatory to conflict transformation.

Conclusion

To conclude, it is important to consider the history of conflict as detector of conflict causes. The long relationship between the conflicting groups may be identified bad or good. In this case, whether trust and cooperation or distrust and negative competition are built through the groups' histories will determine the quality of group relations. It is also considered important to change negative-biased social perception toward other group. More importantly, creating national identity and transforming ethos of conflict are challenging effort that sometimes requires political will from the government. Applications of cognitive dissonance are also important intervention that might reduce the conflict.

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