

SOCIAL MOVEMENT IN FARMERS' RESISTANCE (A CASE STUDY OF THE UNITED SIMALINGKAR FARMERS UNION (SPSB) IN SIMALINGKAR A, DELISERDANG)

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Abstract

In 2017, farmers in Simalingkar A Village, Deliserdang, and security forces were involved in clashes. Many farmers were injured, and some were detained at the local police station. Until now, there has been no resolution of the conflict to lead to peace. The farmer conflict in Simalingkar A Village illustrates how complicated the agrarian conflict is in Indonesia, especially in North Sumatra. This research is a case study that provides an in-depth investigation into a single case or a small number of cases to better understand the conflict between farmers and PTPN II. With the existing limitations, farmers in Simalingkar who are members of the Simalingkar United Farmers Union (SPSB) made efforts to accommodate the hopes and demands of farmers to create a solution that benefits both parties. Based on the analysis using this theory, it can be concluded that the SPSB played a role in resolving the conflicts. They made efforts using several channels of interest articulation, including rallies, demonstrations, lobbying, and walking from Medan to Jakarta.

Keywords: agrarian conflict, North Sumatra, social movements, farmers' unions

INTRODUCTION

Land is an important resource that often becomes a source of conflict between stakeholders, including government departments and agencies, local communities, and companies holding licenses granted by the government. In the context of agrarian conflict issues, Surambo (2010) notes that an effective and efficient resolution mechanism has not yet been found to overcome them. The flow of agrarian conflict seems to always move in cycles: it explodes, goes down, explodes again, and goes down again.

Agrarian conflict is a social phenomenon that involves the interaction between two or more groups fighting for the same object, such as land, water, plants, mines, or the air above the land concerned (Wiradi, 2000). One such conflict occurred in 2017 when farmers in Simalingkar A Village, Deliserdang, and security forces clashed, resulting in many injuries and some detentions at the local police station.

The conflict began when PTPN II Deliserdang installed a signboard on land managed by farmers with a usufructuary certificate number no. 171/2009. This dispute was prolonged and finally peaked in 2020, when members of the Simalingkar A Deliserdang Bersatu Farmers Union took a walk to Jakarta. However, unfortunately, there has been no resolution of the conflict to lead to peace up to this point. The farmer conflict in Simalingkar A Village is one illustration of how complicated the problem of agrarian conflict is in Indonesia, especially in North Sumatra.

The main concern of agrarian conflict is the conflict between farmers and the state or corporations, as well as social movements that demand agrarian reform (Rachman, 2011; Lucas & Warren, 2013). Several studies have focused on agrarian conflicts, especially those between farmers and corporations in North Sumatra. Some of these conflicts have been well described by researchers such as Subhilhar, Rosmery, and Harahap (2019); Lee (2022); and Medaline, Rafianti, and Sembiring (2021).

New cases of agrarian conflict often appear with almost the same characteristics. The national land management system is still imperfect, resulting in many cases of agrarian conflicts. Conflicts over land grabbing between communities and plantations typically occur in three zones. First, in the field of usufructuary rights, where companies operate on land issued as the basis for their plantations, which affects the livelihoods of nearby communities. Second, land without cultivation rights, where the company manages the land outside the issued usufructuary rights. Third, conflicts over former land use rights (Subhilhar et al., 2019).

Land grabbing is of great concern to researchers because it affects the public interest. Many scientists, such as Ben White, McCarty, and Tania Li, have conducted research on land grabbing in Indonesia. Land tenure conflicts arise because many parties have an interest in land management, leading to interpersonal conflicts as well as conflicts with state institutions or companies (Ambarwati, 2018).

Ben White et al. (2012) argue that the role of the state is always required for land grabbing to take place. This is generally done through development policies, giving the state a significant role in land grabbing. However, as Hall et al. (2011) note, land grabbing always generates a political reaction from the bottom, not only in the form of resistance but also acceptance without protest and incorporation of the local population into the process of capital accumulation in the production of new commodities.

The loss of access to land experienced by sharecroppers has triggered agrarian conflicts between them and the company. This change in socio-economic status has triggered the fulfillment of the dimensions of the peasant movement. The movements carried out by farmers are solely aimed at reclaiming their rights or demanding social justice (Lestari, 2014).

Social movements are social groups that are sensitive and concerned about changes in conditions in the surrounding environment. They build common goals to solve existing problems (Akbar, 2016). Social movements are also described as a form of community resistance movement to oppose existing public policies, political and social changes. Community participation is demonstrated by the emergence of several social movements both in the social-community, political, gender, and environmental fields (Irfan, 2019). Social movements have a power that is hard to fathom, but a power that is totally real (Tarrow, 2011).

Recognizing the importance of social movements in agrarian conflicts, this research investigates social movements carried out by farmers in Simalingkar A Village, Deliserdang in their resistance to corporations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social movement

From a sociological perspective, a social movement is a collective alliance of a large number of people who come together to promote or hinder a specific aspect of social change in a society (Syawaluddin, 2017). The concept of "agrarian movement" is closely aligned with Gunawan Wiradi's definition, which refers to the collective efforts and activities aimed at restructuring the social order in the agrarian sector because the current system is perceived as unjust and unsuitable for improving the welfare of the people (Wiradi, 2000).

Social movement theory guides the study of the dynamics of social movements as a whole, highlighting the most relevant factors in the causal universe driving collective action. Early sociological thinkers such as Du Bois, Durkheim, Marx, Perkins Gilman, and Weber developed theories that have since become more refined to address certain aspects of the mobilization process (Almeida, 2019). Individuals build protest or riot arrangements based on past conflicts with certain groups or governments, which describe what must be done in certain circumstances as well as explain the reasons for the action (Tarrow, 2011). Hartoyo (2010) explains that the main trigger for peasant movements is usually agrarian structural tensions caused by development policies that are not responsive to the interests of farmers.

Geritt Huizer in Ghimire (2001) states that cases in many countries show that agrarian structural tensions peak due to the extreme frustration experienced by farmers. This is not only due to poverty and marginalization of farmers, but also due to modernization or development that creates mismatches, is in an area that is already open (not isolated and easy to access or communicate with the city center), and occurs in a relatively densely populated area. As farmers experience the erosion of the status quo generally caused by economic development, structural tensions become the main motivation for farmers to join organizations and get involved in social movements (Ghimire, 2001).

Mustain (2007) conducted a study on Kalibakar farmers who opposed PTPN XII in South Malang, focusing on the influence of social-historical aspects. The roots of farmer resistance began with erfpacht rights, which were then converted into HGU on plantation land. In practice, there were frequent deviations in allotment, control, and alienation of the local population, thus triggering conflicts. Wahyudi (2005) identified several factors that determine farmer resistance, including: 1) structural conductivity, 2) structural tension, 3) growth and development of general trust, 4) activities and mobilization of participation, 5) social control, 6) network support (internal and external organizations), 7) taking the opportunity to realize the actor's interest, and 8) social structure differentiation. Genuine resistance carried out by farmers, based on their ideologies and norms, can also improve social welfare (Sulistyaningsih, 2013).

The emergence of peasant movements is caused by social, psychological, political, and technical conditions. Social conditions include the size of the landless and land-poor

peasant class in the tenancy system, the heavy pressure on the land, and the existence of rural intelligence. Psychological conditions include peasant dissatisfaction with the status quo and demands for change, as well as awareness of the exploitation of landlords and the bankruptcy of rural power structures. The political condition refers to the role of revolutionary organizations, such as the communist party, and the weakening of the rural elite. Technical conditions refer to the organizational capabilities of the farmers and the revolutionary movement (Chung, 1980).

Farmer Rationality Study

The moral-economic perspective is one of the many approaches, such as political economy and historical approaches, used to study the peasant resistance movement. The moral-economic approach focuses more on sources of threats to the existence of farmers as a social subsystem that is affected by changes in the political and economic policies. These changes often disrupt the farmers' welfare, causing them to feel threatened. Siahaan (1996) describes his research findings, which show a mix of the theory of everyday forms of peasant resistance and the theory of rational choice, linked by the strong factor of state hegemony, both ideologically and materially.

Peasant resistance in rural communities is caused by threats that affect their economy. The economic basis in rural communities in Indonesia is not only agricultural land but also subsistence resources that are traditionally controlled. These resources can be pastures and forests. The right to these resources is a collective village prerogative, even though poor farmers have a greater interest in defending them. Therefore, the state or individuals should not violate the control of these resources. The peasants' reaction is a manifestation of how vital these resources are for their subsistence (Scott, 1993).

According to Scott, economic moral values can arise because of the economic dilemma that occurs, where most traditional farming families in the village find their existence as farmers in subsistence for a long time who are always in a subordinate position, vulnerable to becoming victims who are treated unfairly and arbitrarily by local authorities who are stronger in the social structure of society (Rusmanto, 2012).

The emergence of class disparities that shaped the class awareness of poor farmers resulted in the creation of a resistance movement against the rich and the state. The weapons carried out by the poor peasants were in ways that were typical of the weak, such as pretending to obey, vandalizing bit by bit, being dishonest, burning slander, and sabotage (Scott, 1993). The Scottian approach to resistance by farmers always uses demands that focus on subsistence demands. But basically, farmers are rational beings; therefore, the resistance carried out by farmers aims at actions that produce farmer values. Popkins' book (1979) rejects the notion that resistance by peasants is a defensive measure to defend traditional institutions and norms of reciprocity from capital and feudal threats.

The resistance carried out by farmers from the Popkins perspective that collectivity in resistance and norms is the result of a bargaining process between individuals in resistance because individuals get selective incentives. The selective incentives obtained

by farmers in the resistance process are not short-term benefits but long-term benefits. In this approach, the farmer's rational attitude is caused by the motivation to obtain the greatest possible profit. Thus, farmers are rational individuals who try to maximize profits. This is evident in the logic of collective action and decision-making processes by farmers (Rusmanto, 2012). Furthermore, Popkin stated that farmers are rational people who also want to be rich, given more free access to the market. Therefore, the commercialization of agriculture will improve the standard of living of many people.

Theory of Access to Natural Resources

Free access is a concept used in the analysis of natural resources and property. Access is defined as the ability to benefit from anything, including material objects, people, institutions, and symbols. From this, it appears that access is more focused on understanding capabilities. If expanded, then access becomes the right to benefit from an object. To understand the difference, one must distinguish between ability and right. Ability is closely related to power, which is defined in two ways, namely ability refers to the actor's capacity to influence the practices or ideas of others and as something inherent that arises from people, whether intentionally or not arising from the effects of a social relationship (Peluso, 2020).

The structure and relations of an access mechanism must be understood by observing that the ability to obtain benefits is mediated by various existing barriers, certain political, economic, and cultural frameworks. Technology has an influence on the ability of a person or group of people to reach natural resources. Some resources cannot be utilized without the use of technological equipment, and when technological capabilities increase, it is possible for a person or group to benefit from utilizing these resources.

Capital also plays an important role. This is because it determines who can or cannot access natural resources. Besides that, it is also able to control and regulate the access of a person or group of people. Capital influences the occurrence of exploration, production, land conversion, labor mobilization, and various processes that affect changes in the physical environment (Peluso, 2020).

Market access also affects the ability to benefit from natural resources. Access to labor and employment opportunities also affects who benefits from natural resources. This is because workers are profit machines who control capital tied to technology and commodity markets. Not only that, access to knowledge also has an influence, including belief, ideological control, and discourse on daily life practices. Some types of natural resources cannot only be accessed through economic and moral means to obtain subsistence rights, but also through social, political, and ritual purposes. Access as a discourse is the most profound term.

Access to natural resources is shaped by the way power is capable of producing categories and knowledge. The status as an expert then brings their authority to manipulate the beliefs of other parties to follow their way of thinking in terms of categorizing access to natural resources and their utilization. Access to authority becomes an important point in

the power network that allows residents to benefit from an item or resource. Then, access to social identity greatly influences the distribution of benefits from goods or resources. This access is often mediated by social identity, including age, gender, ethnicity, religion, status, profession, and so on (Peluso, 2020).

METHOD

This research employs a case study design, which involves intensive research on a single case or a small number of cases to derive insights from observations (Gerring, 2017). The use of a case study design allows researchers to thoroughly investigate and obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the conflicts between farmers and PTPN II. The researchers conducted structured, in-depth interviews with 30 farmers who are members of the Simalingkar United Farmers Union. After data collection, the next stage is data processing to support analytical techniques, followed by data analysis. The collected data is processed and analyzed to draw conclusions. The interview data is transcribed to facilitate the collection and classification of information by the researchers

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Roots of Land Dispute Conflict Problems

Outlining the plantation policy in Simalingkar Village must start from the establishment of PTPN 2 in the village. In the 1970s, after the violent purge of the PKI, Indonesia began to improve and regulate its development and economy. President Soeharto's Pelita and Repelita were development programs that aimed to increase development from an agricultural and plantation perspective. Areas with agricultural potential and suitable for plantations continued to be developed. The land given to the government by the Karo ethnic group living in the Simalingkar A area was used by the government to develop an oil palm plantation. PTPN2, as a plantation manager with a 25-year HGU, was established as a result. The plantation policies at the time turned the provisional area into an oil palm plantation area and a settlement for plantation workers. The Karo farmers who feel they have land rights live a little far from the Simalingkar A area. In line with government policies related to plantation operations, PTPN 2's strategic policy is to carry out all the mandates and objectives of the government to increase plantation yields.

However, towards the 2000s, PTPN 2 was hit by internal issues of corruption and production costs that were not in proportion to sales. Some of the areas that became PTPN 2's operational areas began to be neglected, starting from Batang Kuis, Marelan, Marendal, Tembung, and Simalingkar A. This issue became more pronounced when the HGU began to expire and was not extended. Nevertheless, this was good news for farmers who felt that the land belonged to their families. Since the 2000s, many farmers who, in terms of retirement, are "sharecroppers" began to occupy land.

In the 2000s, Karo farmers began planting crops on land that was previously used for plantations. Farmers felt that they owned the land and no longer needed to ask PTPN for

permission. Since then, farmers have been cultivating agricultural land which was run by their ancestors in the 1950s. However, conditions changed when PTPN II, through its subsidiaries PT NDB and PT PND, together with Perumnas, decided to build an independent city of 30,000 housing units in the Bekala area. Farmers became restless, fearing that their land would be taken from them again. As a result, in 2017, bulldozers flattened agricultural lands, and security forces and thugs took action against farmers who got in the way.

According to PTPN II's version, they still have the right to the land because the HGU was extended with number 171 PTPN II, which is valid from 2009-2034. Based on this, PTPN II felt entitled to the land previously planted with oil palm. The issuance of HGU No. 171, covering an area of 854.26 Ha, was sued at the Medan Administrative Court. However, the case received a cassation decision at the Supreme Court of the Republic of Indonesia No. 5K/TUN/2020, which essentially upheld the legal decisions of the Medan Administrative Court and the TUN High Court stating that lawsuits could not be accepted for the unilateral claims of the farmers.

In this case, PTPN II provides appropriate compensation costs in stages to the community who are willing to leave the land and hand it back to PTPN II in accordance with the results of the agreement with the Muspida and the DPRD of North Sumatra. However, the farmers consider that the compensation given is not worth their losses, especially for those who have a land area of more than 2 hectares. These farmers are demanding compensation.

Peasant Resistance

Land is of high value to farmers as it serves as their livelihood. For farmers, land also holds religious-cosmic and ideological significance. Despite this, farmers do not receive welfare and inconsistent policy movements in agriculture have led to dissatisfaction and protests within the community. Initially, these protests were sporadic but gradually became a unified movement.

Farmers in Simalingkar A Village have also faced eviction from their land without proper compensation. This has led to the emergence of a collective awareness regarding the importance of land as the main source of livelihood for peasants. This shared destiny has prompted the formation of the Simalingkar A Bersatu Farmers Union (SPSB), consisting of farmers who are currently involved in land conflicts with PTPN II.

The SPSB, with the support of legal institutions and other organizations, is tasked with carrying out various actions and advocacy for the private sector and the government. In order for the peasant movement to achieve its goals and aspirations, specific strategies and tactics must be developed. This process starts with the movement's coordination meetings, held every Saturday at two in the afternoon. In the process of struggle, there are at least 3 strategies carried out by farmers, including:

1. Demonstrations

In November 25, 2019, hundreds of farmers from the Simalingkar A Bersatu Farmers Union (SPSB) in Pancur Batu District, along with the North Sumatra Farmers Gate, demonstrated at the Deli Serdang Regent's Office in Lubuk Pakam. They arrived in a number of cold diesel trucks, with an escort from Polres and Satpol PP Deli Serdang personnel. Aris Wiyono and Santri Surbakti, who were in charge of the action, asked the Deli Regency Government not to remain silent on the problem of the land they have been occupying, which has been controlled by PTPN II. The farmers claimed that they had been on the land since 1951. During the demonstration, the farmers presented three demands, which were:

- a) The local government must be present in resolving conflicts between PTPN II and farmers.
- b) DPRD must make a recommendation to the Regent to give land to farmers.
- c) The National Land Agency (BPN) must immediately stop the conflict and create a settlement scheme.

However, these demands were not met, and the protest ended without any follow-up actions being taken.

2. Command Post Action

In addition to the several major actions in the resistance process of the peasants of Simalingkar A Village, another no less important strategy is the defensive strategy. The survival process is illustrated by the existence of a post in the village where each farmer takes turns guarding the post and holds a meeting every Saturday once a week. This meeting is useful for strengthening bonds and discussing developments from the existing struggles. In the process of survival, one of the capitalist farmers even allowed his land to be used as a struggle post and he lived near the post. This shows the seriousness of the capitalist peasants in demanding their rights back.

This defensive strategy is an important aspect of the struggle against the attempts to seize the land of the farmers. Through the post, the farmers can keep a watchful eye on their land and ensure that the company does not try to take it by force. The regular meetings held at the post allow the farmers to coordinate their efforts and ensure that everyone is working towards the same goal. This kind of unity is essential in the struggle against the company, which has far greater resources and power than the individual farmers. The defensive strategy also serves as a reminder that the struggle is ongoing and that the farmers are not going to give up their land without a fight.

3. Action walk to Jakarta

SPSB in 2020 organized a theatrical action by farmers, which was a walk to Jakarta. These farmers traveled on foot for approximately 1,739 km in 41 days. The militancy of the members of the Simalingkar A Bersatu Farmers Union is impressive, as they voluntarily carried out the walking action in 2020 because of their determination to fight

for their demands. In this action, farmer representatives were finally able to meet with Mr. Moeldoko and obtain a presidential decree that would determine the results of the struggle that had been carried out. However, the presidential decree has not been implemented since 2020.

The decision letter is a glimmer of hope, but it does not necessarily satisfy all parties. The capitalist class, for instance, is only allotted 2500 m² of land for farming, which is too little compared to the agricultural land he cultivates. This is different from the Small Commodity Producers (PKK) farmers who, even though they are not given as much land as they previously cultivated, have enough land to continue farming activities as before. The semi-proletarian farmers receive more land. From the agreement that was reached, farmers are still at a disadvantage. However, the farmers accept this due to the government's good ethics.

In the author's findings, there is a political force behind PTPN II that supports its existence, in this case, the state through the local government and its institutions such as the National Land Agency. What is unique is that in this case, both the government and the company pushed each other out of trouble and ignored various legal provisions. It has been two years since the farmers in Simalingkar A Village have been waiting for confirmation from this conflict resolution.

4. SPSB Efforts Through Political Lobbying

Although demonstrations are an effective means for SPSB to channel its demands, SPSB also conducts lobbying activities with various government institutions. Gabriel Almond, as explained by Ma'soed, pointed out that there are channels of institutional articulation such as legislatures, cabinets, and bureaucracy where the use of these channels is by means of lobbying tactics, such as delivering statements before parliamentary commissions, providing information to one member of parliament, and participating in hearings provided by the parliament. Institutional channels, if optimized, can be effective because they can influence certain policy makers.

In David Easton's political system scheme, SPSB is the main actor inputs or parties that make demands on the government through channels of interest articulation, and in the conflicts that occur, the author sees that there are other actors who provide support to SPSB as claimants by providing various means of help. From this discussion, it can be seen that the emergence of SPSB is in accordance with the perspective of Robert Tedd Gurr's social movement, namely relative deprivation (Sitepu, 2012). The emergence of feelings of dissatisfaction and frustration in a society causes the emergence of social movements to change the existing reality. SPSB emerged because of land grabbing and wanted to keep the land they had been working on. SPSB as a social movement has gone through one stage of the social movement from deprivation, which is the occurrence of riots where local conflicts or clashes with PTPN II occurred. However, SPSB did not reach the next stage in the social movement, which is the occurrence of a conspiracy and ending with a domestic war.

CLOSING

The struggle of the peasants in Simalingkar A is a manifestation of their interest in organizing themselves into a more structured movement to fight for their rights. Farmers realize that crying and begging for mercy is not enough to demand their rights. More concrete actions are needed, such as demonstrations, rallies, lobbying, discussions, meetings, consolidation, and even the Medan-Jakarta walking movement. Finally, the central government intervened in resolving conflicts. The central government has given more attention to agrarian conflicts by formulating agrarian reform strategies that can provide solutions to conflicts that occur.

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