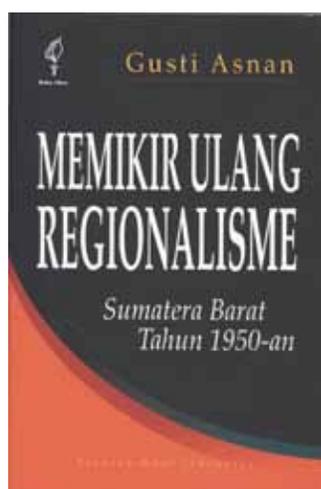


These matters are of more than abstract interest. Group conflicts, especially when defined by religious differences, is a significant issue in human history. In our time, it is arguably among the most significant of human issues. How does such religiously defined conflict originate? How does it grow? How can it be brought to an end? In our attempt to answer such questions, the history of the Javanese people may have much to teach us (p. 264).

Gusti Asnan, *Memikir ulang regionalisme Sumatera Barat tahun 1950-an*. Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia and KITLV Jakarta, 2007, xxvi + 264 pp. ISBN 978-979-461-640-6. Price: IDR 63,000 (soft cover).



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The study of the social-political history of West Sumatra in the 1950s has not received much attention of researchers. Events that took place during that period are often neglected, and if interest is demonstrated, it is usually incorporated in broader studies as in Audrey Kahin's book (2005), and Mestika Zed's study. More focused studies on the dynamics of politics and democracy in the region have not been conducted. Although the Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia (Pemerintah Revolusioner Republik Indonesia, PRRI) is often discussed, its historical roots in the 1950s have not been studied in-depth.

In this book, Gusti Asnan presents something different in terms of his use of sources, theory, as well as scope. He studied new archival sources and mass media documents which before him were probably regarded as of less importance but which he considers as valuable sources.

Although he does not verbally use major sociological and political theories, Gusti analyses several social elite groups, studies the change in local social-political structures, and changes at the national level. He has attempted to relate social-political symptoms present among the grassroots, such as at the *nagari* (village) level, with state political conditions in Java. As the core of the Minangkabau, the *nagari* community apparently actively responded to political processes taking place at the national level. The *nagari* community and its reaction to these developments are the base for the emergence of various

events, in this case the PRRI. The courage the elite displayed in declaring its political stand cannot be separated from the support they received from the people in the villages.

The book consists of four chapters which discuss the problems in West Sumatra from 1950 until 1958. Apart from West Sumatra, Gusti also discusses Riau and Jambi (Central Sumatra).

THE LOCAL COMMUNITY AND THE PARADIGM OF THE NATIONAL ELITE

The dynamics of local Minangkabau society, famous for its leadership called *tali tigo sapilin* (religious dignitaries/cleric, headmen, and intellectuals) has been extensively and interestingly discussed. Since the national movement, these three components have always propelled West Sumatra's history forward. Gusti adheres to the divisions made by previous historians in their division of the Minangkabau clergy into two categories: "the young modern clerics" and "the old conservative clerics" based on their Islamic attitudes and characteristics. Having different ideologies, both are convinced that they are right, and they always strive to move the world towards perfectness. Constantly correcting each other, this attitude results in a dynamic community where ideological plurality results in a progressive culture that stimulates progress.

In spite of the sharp paradigm of difference, Minangkabau clerics love their community. They often pay attention to problems that emerge in the community. In the 1950s, for example, together they highlighted the moral degradation of the Minangkabau youth. On 21-23 April 1951, a conference of West Sumatran preachers and clerics was held which declared the necessity to educate Minangkabau youth and for this reason, the Central Sumatra Islamic Institute was established. The Urang Ampek Jinnih Congress on 6 January 1952 was held in response to the division of the West Sumatran political elite which caused common concern (pp. 23-24).

The differences between the local elite diminished when the region (Central Sumatra) felt that the central government neglected it. At the Clerics Congress on 14-17 March 1957, it was announced that the West Sumatran clerics supported the action of the Chairman of the Dewan Banteng to take over the government of Central Sumatra, an action that caused great concern to the Central Government.

The 'headmen' (*penghulu*), another pillar in Minangkabau leadership also demonstrated their dynamics. Their opinion of the Minangkabau was also divided. One group considered the necessity of ensuring that Minangkabau tradition remained based on originality to add colour to the nation's life, whereas another group tended towards the importance of the revitalization of Minangkabau tradition and to accept other ethnic groups in traditional life. In the 1950s, the headmen, under the Majelis Tinggi Kerapatan Adat Alam Minangkabau (MTKAAM) held a meeting with Minangkabau intellectuals, including those who lived outside and within their village, and they also invited persons of the calibre of M. Hatta and M. Natsir. They formulated several points; the importance of building an auditorium (*balairung*),

identifying nieces and nephews, to revive *gotong royong*, to pay attention to the welfare of nieces and nephews, and to brighten up activities at the mosque (p. 28). Whereas the other group, considered as the modernists, conducted courses on tradition and appointed a leading Minangkabau figure from Jakarta as the head of the *adat*. This was part of an effort to draw local politics into central politics in order to strengthen the dynamics at the local level.

The difference in their group ideology does not diminish their similarity of views and their shared concern towards the Minangkabau. They were both against the negation of the *nagari* as the social-political unit at the core of the Minangkabau which, according to Gusti, was to counter the fact that Minangkabau tradition was being suppressed by the political policies of the Central Government which had a disregard for deeply rooted traditional laws.

The national political paradigm, which was perceived to marginalize local values forced the headmen and the intellectuals to unite their views. An important momentum was a meeting convened by the Panitia Alam Minangkabau in Bukittinggi, which was also attended by Bung Hatta. This meeting announced (to declare its support) for Ahmad Husein who had taken over the Government.

The next local political dynamics Gusti highlights were the congress of tradition and the congress of students, involving various regions, which, in general, criticized the Central Government who neglected local values and local development. The message was that the local community felt marginalized.

THE PARADIGM ABOUT THE PRRI AND REGIONAL UPEHEVAL

This study is important as it provides a revision of the views regarding the PRRI which had always been seen from the Central Government's point of view. All the actions of the PRRI were caused by the Central Government's negligence and its inability to listen to the region. The regional rebellion cannot solely be regarded as an ethnic phenomenon to which the region had always been exposed. The PRRI is at the root of the process that regarded the region as "second class", a marginalization process of the paradigmatic style of central-marginal development. The Central Government hardly paid attention to this tendency, which had been a long-time struggle from Sabang to Merauke. Similar events took place in similar forms with different actors, such as GAM (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka) in Aceh, Riau Merdeka in Riau, Permesta in Sulawesi, the Papua rebellions etcetera, which can historically be comprehended from the developmental point of view and because of the Central Government's arrogance.

In the 1950s, marginalization was strongly felt in various regions. Central Sumatra felt that Javanization was implemented through moving Javanese transmigrants to Sumatera. In Central Sumatra, the people of Riau and Jambi had long been envious of the Minangkabau, who dominated the development in Central Sumatra. In other words, successive Central Governments neglected the marginalized sectors.

The voice of regional autonomy in Central Sumatra (specifically Minangkabau) had commenced to be heard since 1946 by including the *nagari* in the administration as the component that regulated the lowest level of government. This had become even more pronounced after the issuance of Law nr. 22, 1948. In response to this new regulation, regional governments established a decentralization committee. This committee, through routine debates and discussions, concluded that the "region" was the lowest level of government. Whatever the decision, controversial or not, there were strong demands for autonomy, which continued until the 1950s.

The demand for "autonomy", strong in Minangkabau for so long, was in opposition with President Soekarno's political paradigm who believed in guided democracy. This, in its turn, was very much in opposition with the democratic style of the Minangkabau people "*duduak samo randah tagak samo tinggi, rajo alim disambah rajo zalim disanggah*".

Another issue was related to the disappointment within the army due to reorganization and rationalization. This resulted in many soldiers being forced to leave their unit and to live in uncertainty. Many ex-freedom fighters and widows, left behind by their husbands who went to war, were neglected. Convinced that the army had been instrumental during the revolution, they perceived that through this policy they were "discarded when no longer useful". Protests to the Army Commander, Col. A.H. Nasution, on this matter fell on deaf ears. Thus, in the 1950s, a soldier's fate was worse than that of a politician as thousands of soldiers were turned into civilians and the number of army weapons in the area were decreased. This disappointment became more apparent when issues of human rights violations were directed at the army. Hence began the strong solidarity between ex-soldiers culminating in a reunion first held on 17-18 March 1951, followed by the Meeting of Central Sumatra's Ex-freedom Fighters, on 8 July 1951. These ex-soldiers were also united in developing the community, including the establishment of the Sriwijaya Foundation Institute of Law.

The Central Government's power, which was less favourable towards the regional government, was also felt by regional politicians who cultivated the feeling that they were sharing the same fate as the army and the civilians. They finally fought together for their region and opposed this unfortunate policy. Thus, in 1956, the army and the politicians in Central Sumatra agreed to nominate Ahmad Husein as Governor of Central Sumatra. This nomination was related to the issue that Ruslan was appointed as a member of the constitutional assembly and to the "outsider" issue, which had festered since the 1950s.

The issue of Ahmad Husein's nomination as Governor increased the dynamics of local politics and led to the Reuni Eks Divisi Banteng on 21-24 November 1956, which ended in the recommendation for a radical improvement of regional leadership, the settlement of the disputes among the army's leaders, demands for more autonomy, and the annulment of the centralized bureaucracy that was responsible for stagnation and corruption (p. 172). This reunion, which subsequently gave birth to the Dewan Banteng,

also succeeded in embracing the local elites and subsequently the national elites to support the movement to put pressure on the Central Government.

The most radical movement of the Dewan Banteng led by Ahmad Husein was to take over the regional government. The core of this movement was to “give a chance to local people to take up important positions in the government” (p. 176). Although this act was unconstitutional, society supported it, probably because of their deeply-rooted disappointment with the Central Government and out of fear that the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) would spread its influence in Central Sumatra. The ultimate political manoeuvre of Dewan Banteng was its announcement of the PRRI on 15 January 1958, after the Central Government had disregarded its ultimatum. This threatening and dictating demand resulted in a civil war in Central Sumatra, which caused the death of thousands of civilians. The PRRI was the anticlimax of the involvement of the Minangkabau people who, during the national movement, were very strong in their propaganda for Indonesianness.

This review concludes that this book not only adds to the richness of our historical literature, but also opens up new horizons against political and development policy makers. Gusti has clearly related the inability of the government in processing development, and the reality of marginality with regional upheaval. Therefore, this analysis is also a warning to the attitude of centralized development.

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Rarely is the work of an expert on ancient Indonesian history to be found in the bookshops and therefore Agus Aris Munandar's work entitled *Ibukota*