

THE 1886 CIOMAS PEASANT COLLECTIVE ACTION: POLITICAL IMPACT TOWARDS THE DUTCH INDIES GOVERNMENT

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ABSTRACT

Ciomas in this study is an area located in the slope of Gunung Salak, Bogor regency (Buitenzorg) (Besluit. No. 7 year 1882). During the administration of Governor General Herman Willem Daendels, the northern part of this area had been sold to a private party, with the status of the land as private. The extent of the area was about 9.000 bau or approximately 7.220 ha (1 bau = 0,8 ha). As the consequence of the status, the government's authority over the land in Ciomas became limited compared to the authority over the government's land. On the other hand, the authority of the private land (landeigenar) owner of Ciomas—who was called the landlord (landheer), over the local inhabitant was 'almost' unlimited. According to the regulation of the private land, the land owner has special rights, which was usually held by the government. In the colonial archive, the land owner was called "landlord" by the people and the government. It is different from the concept of landlord in the time Western Europe feudalism. However, in certain terms, there are similarities, including the special rights. This can be understood, regarding that Netherland who gave birth to VOC, was a feudal country.

Key Words: *peasant movement, Dutch Indies Government, holy war.*

Introduction

According to available data, there was no information on who was the first to buy the land in Ciomas. Those data only mention that until November 1867, the land owner of Ciomas private land was P.W.N. Merkus and F.H.C. van Motman. It was the second one who sold the land to J.W.E. Sturler for f1.500.000 (one and a half million guildens). (Von Zboray, 1911)

Regarding that the extent of the area was 'only' 7.220 ha, the Ciomas private land was not special. There are lands that are vaster than Ciomas private land, such as: Bolang private land (23.900 ha), Citrap/Cibinong (25.772 ha), and Jasinga (23.065 ha), and Ciampea (40.500 ha) (Von Zboray, 1911). But regarding to the historical value, especially the events occurred in the early 1886, it is special.

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During the year, two collective actions occurred, with act of violence towards the landlord. The first one occurred in February under the lead of Apan Ba Sa'amah, and the second occurred in May under the lead of Mohammad Idris. The issues that developed before and during those actions were about the high tax rate (especially *cukê*) and the severe forced labor (especially *kompénian*). While the ideology considered by the landlord as 'the fuel' for the farmers rebellion, was the Islamic fanaticism (Imam Mahdi and the holy war/*sabilillah*).

Previous Works and Studies

The Ciomas events in 1886 have been studied by several researchers/writers, namely R.H. Cools, Sartono Kartodirdjo, J. Rogier Nieuwenhuys and the writer himself. R.H. Cools was the first to study Ciomas in his graduate research paper at Leiden University in 1964. His study was nearly lack of discussions about the process which motivated the collective actions. Most of its focus was about the polemic in the Dutch Parliament after the issue of Governor General's decree No. 1, dated 21 August 1886, which sentenced two Ciomas private land administrators and two Ciomas locals as the people responsible for the events (Von Zboray, 1911). In Cools' view, the main factor that motivated the collective actions, which he regarded as a riot in Ciomas, was the authoritarian Governor General Otto van Rees. His lust for authority had made him personifying the title governor general to himself. Thus, every criticism, advice, particularly 'attacks' to the governor general's policy was regarded as attacks to himself. (Cools, R.H, 1964: 47-48).

In contrast with Cools, Sartono Kartodirdjo did not see the connection between the attitude of Governor General Otto van Rees and the farmers' collective action, which he regarded as the rebellion of Ciomas farmers. In his view, the factor causing the farmers' rebellion in Ciomas private land was quite obvious, which is the excessive exploitation of the farmers/local inhabitants done by landlord, especially the tax demands from crops and labors. Based on these characteristics, he categorized the Ciomas events as an anti-extortion movement. Then, based on the leadership and organization patterns that developed during the rebellion, he concluded that the rebellion was a form of holy war, *sabilillah*. (Cools, R.H, 1964)

The third researcher is J. Rogier Nieuwenhuys who wrote his research in 1973 in a form of graduate research paper at Amsterdam University, Netherland. Based on his study, he concluded that before the rebellion in 19-20 May 1886, there was an existing conflict between the locals and the landlord. The conflict was intensified by the religious fanaticism, which he accused as the main fuel of the rebellion. In other words, the rebellion was not caused by tax demands as mentioned by Sartono Kartodirdjo, but rather by the religious fanaticism (Islam) (Nieuwenhuys, 1973).

The fourth researcher is the writer himself who carried out an initial study since 1980 about the farmers' collective action in Ciomas private land. The research has become the material for his graduate (S1) research paper, which was defended in 1982. In that research paper, he was in line with Sartono Kartodirdjo on the cause of the rebellion, with additional opinion, which is the role of Buitenzorg Assistant Head of Residency O.A. Burnabij Lautier who gave influence to the inclining hatred towards the Ciomas landlord.

Other than the four researchers, there are no researchers/authors who made any serious study about the events at Ciomas yet. There are several authors who mentioned the events in their work, namely Elsbeth Locher-Scholten, Gerard Termorshuizen, and Nina Lubis. However, these authors only mentioned events at Ciomas as a material for revealing other problems.

Based on that fact, and added by the limited academic study about private land, the writer attempts to continue the research initiated in the early 1980s. The main purpose of this study is particularly to find out (1) was it true that the farmers' struggle was caused by the high tax rate and the heavy load of forced labor, and (2) was it true that the Ciomas farmers' struggle is categorized as holy war (*jihad fi sabilillah*)?

Main Issue

The rebellion of Ciomas farmers in 1886, which was followed by a commotion in the Dutch Parliament, is really an interesting matter to be reviewed. Moreover, this polemic was ended by the dismissal of Otto van Rees from his position as the Governor General of Dutch Indies, while van Rees had a remarkable achievement. His vision about the advancement and prosperity of the local inhabitants was prominent, especially since he took hold of the position as Head of Residency in Surabaya (1860-1864).

As the Head of Residency of Surabaya for example, van Rees proposed the elimination of tax and *pancen* labor that had been heavy burdens for the local inhabitants. Then during his service as a member of the Indies Board (*Raad van Indië*), he initiated an investigation on the negative effects of *Preangerstelsel* (*Priangan* System), which caused the elimination of the system. After that, he and Sprenger van Eyk designed a savings program and new financial system to increase the income for the Dutch Indies. For his efforts, he was considered as the manifestation of the free colonial. His achievements for over 20 years made him worthy of a position as high as Van den Bosch's. (Nieuwenhuys, 1973).

Many social historians and moral economist often mentioned that usually farmers act passively towards changes and became passive spectators of political struggles. This passive attitude is one of the causes of their low level of prosperity, under the subsistent line. There are several factors causing them to be passive, namely: (1) farmers generally work alone at their farm and do not interact with

other farmers, and (2) their work shoves them into routine activities every year, which does not enable them to plan their future life (Wolf, 1979: 264-267). Therefore, if they suddenly rise and participate in a rebellion or revolutionary collective actions, there would be certain causes, which exacerbate or threaten their subsistent life.

Eric R. Wolf stated three major crises which became the particular reasons: (1) demographic crisis, which is the rapid increase of population, resulting difficulties in finding adequate source of income in the agricultural sector; (2) ecological crisis, as the continuance of demographic crisis, which added by the capitalist capital flow which often stir trouble in the rural life, devastates traditional institutions and creates new ecological system; (3) authority crisis, which is the result of the fusion of demographic and ecological problems (Wolf, 1979). Capitalism change lands, labors, and properties into commodities, and this is only a brief formula to liquidate social institutions and inhibiting cultures (Wolf, 1979)..

Eric J. Hobsbawm stated nearly the same opinion. He stated that new laws and capitalist relations have caused a chaos that never happened before in the economic revolution of farmers. Then the social revolutionaries rise and go with the flow (Hobsbawm, 1978: 80).

In the historiography of Indonesia, the concept of rebellion often viewed from the colonial point of view (Dutch-centric). From this point of view, in the modern Indonesian history work, the concept or rebellion should be changed into the concept of struggle, because struggle is considered more Indonesia-centric point of view (although in the early 2000s many considered this Indonesia-centric approach as a failure). However, the latest development shows the rise of another concept that has a more neutral meaning, as conveyed by Charles Tilly, which is collective action. Tilly generally divides collective action into two kinds: non-violent collective action and violent collective action. The main cause of collective action, especially violent collective action, is unjust exploitation. In his latest research, Tilly divides violent collective action into seven categories: violent ritual, coordinated destructions, opportunity, brawls, individual aggression, scattered attack, and broken negotiations (Hobsbawm, 1978: 80).

Rebellion or struggle is basically one form of violent collective actions (collective violence) which is offensive and open. Based on discovered data, the writer views Tilly's theory suitable to reveal the events in Ciomas in 1886.

Based on collected data, it is revealed that far before the collective action in 1886, injustice and violations of human rights had happened, especially unjust tax exploitation slavery. Farmers' complaints in local courts always failed, while complaints to the same institutions outside the land were always hampered by the landlord's minions. Though, there are also complaints that manage to get to the court in Bogor, such as in 1874 from Engok and Mari'ah.

If observed closely, the demands from the farmers are generally not pleonastic. From several complaints that reached the Assistant Head of Residency

Burnabij Lautier in 1885, it is revealed that the farmers were not actually refusing the tax or labor, as long as it does not contravene with the agreed contract. The fact is that the landlord 'broke' the deal, for example, by manipulating the law (with the help of local authorities). Therefore, the violations done by the landlord were difficult to prove in court. This is the condition that causes the restlessness and frustration among the people of Ciomas, especially the farmers.

For the farmers in Ciomas who tried to survive (or to be prosperous), there were only two choices: leave Ciomas, or change the existing structure. Apparently, some of them chose to leave their homeland, flee to the borders of Ciampea, Bogor. The others, especially the ones with the ability and will, chose to change the structure, which means to defy every regulation set by the landlord and his minions. By quoting Popkin, the struggle of Ciomas farmers was a rational choice to defend themselves against the pressure from the landlord, while making efforts to restore old structures which they believe had and could bring them prosperity (Popkin, 1979: 5-6).

Collective Action and Its Political Impact

Before the violent actions happened, the elements of open resistance in the farmers as a reflection of dissatisfaction and grudge towards the Ciomas landlord's policy and action had already showed, although it was only individual. The struggle was not only done by the farmers, but also the workers. Many young males were absent from work and flee. And the foremen, who had the authority to handle the workers in the landlord's farms or warehouses, also refuse to obey the landlord.

But, like common authoritarian, those signs did not caught his attention for it is blocked by the desire to earn maximum targeted profit. The landlord was only startled when a riot and robbery occurred in Ciomas on 11 July 1885. Therefore, the landlord sent a letter to the governor general to ask for protection and to restore the tranquility in Ciomas (De Sturler, 1886: 126). The request was repeated in 29 July, 9 August, and 22 August 1885 (De Sturler, 1886: 138, 149, 150). In the last letter, the landlord requested that the government take action to restore the 'unbearable' situation, without waiting for the investigation of the court.

As aforementioned above, before the collective action, in the private land of Ciomas had developed an issue concerning the high tax rate and injustice done by the landlord. Many collective actors stated that their participation in the rebellion was caused by the confiscation of their belongings, especially their rice fields by the landlord. Based on their (common) experience, solving the problem in a peaceful way was impossible, thus the only rational choice to take back their rights was by acting collectively, violently if necessary (De Sturler, 1886: 145-146).

This belief was later spread to other farmers who had the same experience or were sympathetic, directly or discretely through secret meetings. The landlord reported that a few months before the collective action, red flags were seen in certain places which the landlord believed it was a sign for secret meeting among the rioters. If the village police (*veld politie*) came to those places, the flags quickly disappeared and reappeared in another place. As stated by Bert Klandermans who quoted Gamson, the collective belief is an important factor which enables the participation in collective actions (De Sturler, 1886: 7). The collective belief grows in meetings, along with the growth of common goal.

The collective action was handled by the government relatively fast. Nevertheless, the political impact could not be handled instantly. The event triggered a conflict between the government and the landlord of Ciomas, especially after Governor General Otto van Rees issued the Decree No.1, dated 21 August 1886. The content of the decree was to banish two Dutch which were the administrators of Ciomas private land, A.L. de Sturler and E.P.C. Sol.

Resistance by the family of the landlord against the governor general's decree was basically a form of protest against government's actions which was considered unfair. The landlord felt that Governor General Otto van Rees had taken the rights of the landlord by manipulating the law. In the effort, the landlord gained support from Dutch industrialists and collected public opinion by speaking to every people he knew, and using mass media which is very effective in constructing public opinion. This eventually became the collective power in struggling against the governor general.

The landlord brought the Ciomas matter, which was a local matter, to the Parliament in Den Haag, thus this matter became a national issue which was able to divide the politicians in the Dutch Parliament into two opposing sides. The majority, on one side, considered that the Governor General of Dutch Indies Otto van Rees was correct, while the other side considered the act as a violation against 1854's *Regeerings Reglement*. The 'division' did not only happen between the members of the Parliament, but also between the Minister of Colony Spenger van Eyk and his colleague, Otto van Rees. At the beginning, van Eyk supported van Rees. But later on, particularly as the 1888 Parliament election came near, van Eyk changed sides. He turned to support the demands of the minority who was sponsored by the Catholic Party and the Antirevolutionary Party; demanded that decree No.1, 21 August 1886 to be cancelled. This fact was questioned by van Rees, "...why the Dutch people did not sympathize the people who are responsible to the government, instead they chose the people who are responsible for the suffering of local inhabitants?"

The Ciomas landlord finally 'won' the conflict, after the Catholic Party who made coalition with the Antirevolutionary Party won the election. The new Minister of Colony, Keuchenius (from the Antirevolutionary Party) proposed a request to the King, to cancel the No.1 decree 21 August 1886. The request was fulfilled, not long before Otto van Rees resigned from his position.

The Ciomas farmers' collective action, known as the "Ciomas Matter" (*Tjiomas-Zaak*), which was the cause of the prolonged political polemic, was left without any solution. Whereas the impact of the matter did not stop as Otto van Rees resigned. This event triggered the intensification of demands to erase private land institutions.

Conclusion

At the end of this writing, it can be concluded that violent collective actions conducted by the farmers of Ciomas was caused by injustice, or violations against human rights. Based on its organization, characteristics, and damage, this collective action can be said as a 'holy war' or '*jihad fisabilillah*'. In Ciomas there were no *pesantren* as in Cicurug or Banten, which could be a place to foster the mentality an Islamic spirit. Nonetheless, Islamic tradition, particularly derived from Pakuan Pajajaran kingdom still exist, even until the 1980s. The collective action did not rise because of Islamic fanaticism as accused by the landlord (as also concluded by Sartono Kartodirdjo). Instead, it was caused by broken negotiations between the landlord on one side, and the farmers on the other side.

Although the collective action failed and ended without resolution, the political impacts was immense and beyond the private land itself, even the Afdeling of Bogor. Since the Ciomas event, the public demanded the elimination of private land institutions. The minister of colony finally approved the Dutch Indies request to reclaim private lands, which was later regulated by the decree of the King (*Koninklijk Besluit*) 1n 1912, written in *Staatsblad* 1912 No. 480 and No.481. Since then the government started to reclaim the private lands.

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