

# Protecting the Marginal

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# Protecting the Marginal: Innovative Policy for Indonesia's Isolated Indigenous Communities

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This study depicts the objective conditions of Indonesia's isolated communities, who live in precarity, poverty, and desolation. Their interests as indigenous people are ignored as their community is perceived as a security threat. At the same time, globalisation has incorporated them into the 'global village', subjecting them to the systems, policies, and influences of other countries. This has threatened the security and sovereignty of the state, as the blurring of geographic, social, and cultural boundaries has undermined nationalism. This study seeks to map the structural positioning of traditional communities and their potential to promote change through innovative policy. Humanist and welfare-oriented policies will transform indigenous communities from objects of development into beneficiaries. This article recommends the implementation of innovative people-oriented policies that position indigenous communities as policy subjects. In this manner, development will not only serve to improve communities' economic welfare but also to recognise the dignity and rights of indigenous communities.

**Key words:** *Marginal People, Indigenous Communities, Local Development, Growth Centre, Affirmative Action, State Policy.*

## Introduction

Indigenous peoples have drawn global attention since their position and rights were discussed by the United Nations during a series of meetings in 1982. Lengthy debates ultimately produced the International Law on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (ILO Convention 169). This convention was produced in response to threats to the well-being of indigenous peoples around the world, with the convention becoming "an important standard for the treatment of indigenous peoples that will undoubtedly be a significant tool towards eliminating human



rights violations against the planet's 370 million indigenous people and assisting them in combating discrimination and marginalisation" (United Nations, 2007). There is an increased desire to protect indigenous peoples from the threat of discrimination and marginalisation. This includes those indigenous communities spread throughout Indonesia's 34 provinces. According to surveys, Indonesia is home to 229,479 indigenous households spread through 182 communities in 158 villages, 139 districts, and 82 regencies (Abdullah, 2015).

Globalisation has affected these indigenous peoples in ways that are detrimental to their sense of nationalism (Womack, 2016; King et al., 2017). These communities, most of which are located along their countries' borders with neighbouring states, are easily swayed by outside influences, and as such the sovereignty of their own nation is undermined. As indigenous peoples are part of what Kurt (1995) identifies as the "Global Village", the ideologies, politics, economies, societies, cultures, and security of their homelands are subject to various obstacles, challenges, and threats.

At the same time, the decentralisation policy implemented by Indonesia in January 2001 has left its indigenous peoples "isolated", even though they have a right to democracy, public participation, equality, and justice (Polyando, 2019). Pursuant to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, "... they have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic, social and cultural institutions, while retaining their right to participate fully, if they so choose, in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the State" (United Nations, 2007). Similarly, the 1945 Constitution emphasises that "the protection, advancement, upholding and fulfilment of human rights are the responsibility of the state, especially the government" (Article 28-I, Paragraph 4).

The dynamic interactions of indigenous communities' legal autonomy and nations' need to preserve unity have drawn little scholarly interest (Malasevic, 2006; Prasojo, 2013). This article seeks to examine the possibility of simultaneously promoting security and prosperity (maslaha), of accommodating indigenous communities' interests as well as states' need to secure their sovereignty. Many studies of security issues have ignored public prosperity (Heo and Eger, 2005; Opwis, 2005) and prosperity studies have rarely understood security as an inexorable part of welfare (Singer, 2001). This article argues that security and prosperity are not the end goals of change, but rather perspectives that can help fulfil structural and cultural needs.

### Literature Review

Tonnies argues that the transition from mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity can potentially result in national disintegration. Citizens' emotional bond with each other and with their structure has been weakened, and even eroded, by an organic solidarity wherein citizens



are bound by economic and political instruments (Ritzer & Goodman, 2008). The State plays a central role in forming strong links between citizens, creating what Anderson (2001) identifies as an "imagined community" wherein solidarity and unity is created between individuals and groups who have never met. Nationalism provides a theoretical umbrella for explaining conflict, disintegration, and nationhood. All of these concepts are necessary for understanding the discourses regarding and treatment of indigenous peoples.

### ***Nation and Nationalism***

As shown by Abdulgani (1995: xv), nationalism emerged in Indonesia as a reaction to European colonialism and politics of domination, economic exploitation, and cultural penetration. Nationalism thus consists of three aspects: political, namely opposition to foreign nations and the replacement of colonial governance with democratic governance; socio-economic, namely the cessation of foreign economic exploitation and the creation of a society free of destitution and suffering; and cultural, namely creating a dynamic national culture that adapts to the changing times. Similarly, Bahar (1995: 166) states that nations can only be created and maintained through nationalism, which teaches that diverse peoples can be united if they are dedicated to establishing a shared future that does not discriminate against peoples of different races, religions or ethnicities.

Political spaces that embrace cultural pluralism and promote sovereignty are necessary for creating nationalism. Expanding political spaces to promote public participation not only facilitates the democratisation process, but also enables local/regional voices to be heard. Such a system enables not only *political sharing*, but also contextual cultural politics that can be adapted to different places and times while still guaranteeing indigenous peoples' involvement in the political process. A more participative government system will promote a healthier political culture (Abdullah & Kutaneegara, 2005: 76). In protecting indigenous peoples, four components are crucial: justice, economics, culture, and social matters (Kupraningrum et al., 2020).

As such, nationalism creates a "sense of life" that is fundamental for nationhood and nationalism (Dhakidae, 2001: xxxvii). According to Anderson's theory of "imagined community", nations are formed through three elements: nationality, nationness, and nationalism. Nations are created historically and granted new significance over time, thereby drawing emotional responses (Anderson, 2001: 6). Under this framework, indigenous peoples may be understood as sovereign political communities that occupy a strategic position in nationalist discourses. The careful definition, treatment, and administration of such communities are necessary to prevent the disintegration of the nation-state.



### ***Social Disintegration***

National integrity is threatened when cultural egocentrism and social prejudice create division amongst the constituent members of society (Abdullah et al., 2019). These may be categorised as latent conflicts, which in certain situations and conditions can trigger social disorganisation and disintegration (Suminar, 2003: 8). Abdurrahman (2003: 100) emphasises that the state has a central role in maintaining national integrity, which is undermined by practices of marginalisation, subjugation, exploitation, and human rights violations (political, economic, or social-cultural), all of which are exacerbated by a tendency to position indigenous communities as peripheral.

Disintegration often occurs when central governments exploit resources for their own purposes while promoting unequal development (Sailan, 2003: 21–22). O'Brien, Schrag, and Martin identify four factors that contribute to disintegration: (1) a lack of shared goals; (2) social norms and values that do not facilitate citizens ability to achieve their individual and collective goals; (3) a lack of sanctions and consequences; (4) individual actions that violate collective norms and values (Suminar, 2003: 2–3). Disintegration threatens the unity that is necessary to maintain the nation.

According to Weiner, the concept of integration covers more than those issues that can stave off social and political fragmentation. Implicitly, it consists of a range of factors (Sjamsuddin, 1996: 5). Political integration is created by bridging the gap between the elites and masses, the influencers and the influenced, the governing and the governed. Territorial integration, meanwhile, is created by ensuring that all territories are united into a singular national entity (Sjamsuddin, 1996: 6). It is therefore necessary to shift residents' affiliations to a higher level, to ensure that they share a sense of sovereignty. Kinship bonds, regional alliances, and ethnic identities cannot provide a foundation for loyalty to the nation-state; individual members and groups must take the opportunity to dedicate themselves towards the nation itself (Amal & Armawi, 1996: xi). Where regional and national loyalties differ, conflict occurs.

### ***Conflict and Conflict Theory***

Conflict, as argued by Coser, occurs when communities struggle to achieve shared goals and do not bear fruit. To improve their own chance, communities seek to "neutralise" their opponents by harming and even eradicating them (cf. Bamba, 2003: 137; Fanani, 2013). Conflict is a negative and destructive experience, one that can lead to violence, destruction, and death. Owing to their physical, social, and marginalisation (and resultant precarity), indigenous communities' desires and beliefs differ. Where these differences threaten national integrity, they are dangerous and thus require state mediation (Von Der Mehden, 1987;





Suminar, 2003). However, where the state itself practices dominance and hegemony, the threat of disintegration is ever-present.

Conflict threatens national stability and creates local–central tension (Eller, 1999). Such conflict may stem from interpersonal, interorganisational, or interinstitutional disputes, and as such the personal, organisational, and institutional aspects of conflict must be considered in tracing its roots. Horowitz (2001) argues in *The Deadly Ethnic Riot* that ethnic riots offer the most significant example of how various elements combine to create conflict. Drawing from examples around the world, he identifies several types of conflict that require their own resolutional approaches: interactional conflict, which occurs as a result of negative emotions, negative actions, misperceptions, miscommunication, and stereotyping; data conflict, which occurs as a result of a lack of accurate information in decision-making processes; interest conflict, which occurs as a result of competition for limited resources; structural conflict, which occurs as a result of forces outside the involved parties; and value conflict, which occurs as a result of incompatible belief systems.

The three concepts discussed above—nationalism, disintegration, and conflict—have yet to give specific attention to marginalised groups such as the isolated indigenous communities that populate Indonesia's borders and outermost islands. Likewise, such a paradigm has yet to be applied to national development, despite its necessity for understanding local issues and providing strategic and contextual solutions to local problems.

### **Method and Approach**

This study takes indigenous peoples, who have continued to be deprived of their rights despite being afforded legal protections, as its research object. Many of them live in geographic isolation and having limited access to the infrastructure means they need access to government projects. They are trapped in a cycle of poverty, one that is exacerbated by their limited access to education, healthcare, and cultural activities (Polyando, 2019).

This article limits its discussion to those indigenous communities that are recognised by Law No. 111 of 1999 as "isolated indigenous communities". Consequently, the phrase "indigenous peoples in isolated areas" refers to communities that fall under the purview of this law. Where indigenous communities are isolated by geographic and socio-political factors, this can threaten national sovereignty. As such, this article employs a "national security" perspective in mapping the problems faced by indigenous communities (read: *hifih al-mujtama'* safeguard the value of society, eg. prosperity and social entity) and offering solutions to these problems, as such a perspective enables it to understand how human wellbeing (human maslaha) and security can be assured (Bandoro, 2005; Kasdi, 2019; Bedoui, 2012).



Drawing on an extensive review of the literature, this study examines how the marginalisation of isolated communities threatens national integrity. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected from various sources, as were relevant statistical data. An integrative holistic approach was used to understand the horizontal and vertical dimensions of the spatial, sectoral, and institutional issues plaguing indigenous communities as well as the expected conditions.

An emic perspective has been used to understand these issues and complement the existing literature, which tends to employ an etic perspective and rely on objective measures. This study recognises indigenous communities' subjectivity, and as such seeks to understand their views regarding their marginalisation and their visions of the future. Indigenous communities are thus positioned not solely as sites of data collection, but also as sources of perspectives and norms (i.e. social practices and customary law) through which "the good life" can be defined.

### **Results: The Objective Conditions of Isolated Indigenous Communities**

National security and resilience are necessary to ensure that all elements of society stand united and to prevent disintegration and fragmentation. This is particularly problematic in isolated regions that are often ignored by government policies, which are becoming increasingly disconnected. To address such national security issues it is necessary to promote nationalism and to strengthen early warning, detection, prevention, and response measures. A failure to do so will only lay fertile ground for separatism, social conflict, primordialism, and narrow-minded ethno-nationalism. Four objective conditions are currently being experienced by the Indonesian state, people, and society.

#### ***Geographic Isolation and Disintegration***

Distance from centres of development and limited access to transportation characterise isolated peoples, who often populate highlands, mountains, swamplands, and border regions, as well as Indonesia's outermost islands. Some such communities lack any form of public transportation, and as such travel is near impossible. A lack of communication technology further limits communities' ability to connect with the outside world, further exacerbating their isolation and restricting their ability to participate in national and international discourses. Over time, these communities' geographic isolation results in them becoming ideologically, politically, economically, and socio-cultural isolated. These communities do not enjoy the same level of access to state resources, nor are they subject to the same level of state regulation. Consequently, community members do not receive equal support from the state. Public facilities, representative of State presence and involved in what Giddens (1991)



terms "the production of locality", are not available in such isolated regions. This poses a serious threat to national unity, particularly as it is reproduced by various stakeholders.

Sebatik Island, East Kalimantan—along the Indonesia–Malaysia border—offers an informative example. Administratively, this small island is "divided" in two, with the southern half being governed by Indonesia and the northern half being governed by Malaysia. The Malaysian half of the island has experienced explosive growth and enjoys a mature economy; conversely, the southern half of the island remains destitute. Current policies have yet to recognise this issue, let alone address it.

Another example is Sangihe, an island along Indonesia's maritime border with the Philippines that has yet to receive necessary attention from the government and the rest of the nation. Islanders have a dual identity; many speak Tagalog as well as Indonesian, and television broadcasts come from both countries. Likewise, the people of Sangihe have benefited from Philippine policies that help them meet their everyday needs. One member of the North Sulawesi Parliament's Commission I, Ben Alotia, even urged residents to fly Philippine flags to express their disappointment with the Indonesian government and its lack of concern for indigenous peoples.

This case illustrates how a failure to develop outer islands and other isolated regions can endanger national integrity. When indigenous peoples are allowed to live in squalor, without state support, they close themselves off and reject outside influences. When social forms that denigrate indigenous persons are continuously reproduced, conflict occurs and national sovereignty is threatened. State–citizen relationships are tense, and the threat of disintegration is tangible.

### ***Mobility and Spatial Disorientation***

Indigenous peoples may be divided into three demographic categories. First, nomad peoples are those that live simply, in small groups, using limited technology and impermanent residences. They rarely communicate with outsiders, dealing predominantly with other members of their communities. Second, seminomadic peoples are those that live simply, in small groups, using basic technology; having some contact with the outside world and have begun practicing agriculture and horticulture. Third, settled peoples are those who have established permanent communities and practice agriculture. These peoples have regular contact with outside world, through which they have obtained new technologies.

Nomadic peoples, owing to their perpetual migration and dependence on natural resources, have particular difficulty establishing a fixed and organised social structure. As such, they are fragmented, living in smaller groups. This can be seen, for example, among the Anak Dalam





of Jambi, who have experienced "continued exclusivism". Approximately 776 Anak Dalam families are spread around Tebo Regency, primarily in Iilir, Central Iilir, and Rimbo Iilir districts. Their nomadic lifestyle has hindered efforts to promote regional development and limited their understanding of the concepts of "Indonesian territory" and "being Indonesian", while their poverty and lack of communication with the outside world has eroded their nationalism. Such peoples tend to care little for outside cultures, including the idea of outside governance. Conflict occurs when tradition and government policies clash, being unable to reach any shared understanding. This lays fertile ground for vertical and horizontal conflict, which can be exploited by outside parties who desire the disintegration of the nation.

Such nomadism can be particularly dangerous when it hinders indigenous peoples' ability to conceptualise the nation as a geographic and demographic entity. As they wander in search of better lives and facilities, they may cross international borders and enter foreign countries such as Malaysia. Such mobility is not only detrimental to Indonesia's international image and diplomacy efforts, but limits indigenous peoples to low-paying agricultural work that offers them limited protection and renders them prone to exploitation and deception. National policy has yet to address this issue, and as such international border crossers continue to create tension between Indonesia and its neighbours.

#### ***Welfare and Reliance on Natural Resources***

Indigenous peoples may live nomadically, regularly migrating in search of a better climate and soil, or practice a subsistence economy that revolves around hunting, pastures, and fishing. They are thus significantly dependent on the availability of natural resources, which—along with their lack of technology and their limited knowledge—has deleteriously affected their quality of life. They live naturally, using traditional approaches to resource management that cannot improve productivity. At the same time, their traditional lands are encroached by outsiders who use advanced technology to exploit the land and the resources it contains, profiting even as they harm the environment upon which indigenous peoples rely.

Indigenous peoples' precarity can be seen, for example, in the experiences of the Dayaks of Badau, Kapuas Hulu, West Kalimantan, along the Indonesia–Malaysia border. These isolated indigenous peoples have been trapped in a cycle of illegal logging practices that has proven detrimental to their own welfare, felling trees in Indonesian territory and selling the wood to brokers in Malaysian territory. In this, they do not fear the Indonesian authorities, instead feeling a greater loyalty to the foreign brokers who pay them than to the government; indeed, they are willing to protect these brokers from the forestry officials who hunt them.

Records indicate that some three million tons of fish, worth approximately Rp 30 trillion, are illegally taken from Indonesian waters by foreign ships; in 2006, this was equal to



approximately half of Indonesia's exports (Damanik, 2007). Illegal logging is no less detrimental to the Indonesian economy, amounting to Rp 83 billion per day or Rp 30.3 trillion per annum. According to Ali Masykur, a member of Indonesia's Financial Services Authority, illegal logging has destroyed nearly three quarters of Indonesia's forests; every year, Indonesia loses 41,000 square kilometres of forest—an area the size of Switzerland.

The limited availability of public facilities and technologies has caused poverty in indigenous communities. Many indigenous peoples live in squalor, lacking access to education, health, and housing facilities. Owing to their reliance on hunting, gathering, and fishing, they are vulnerable to seasonal disease and famine, and their attempts to cross international borders not only undermines their potential nationalism but also the dignity of the Indonesian nation. This is a particularly serious problem in border regions and outer islands, where indigenous peoples interact directly with foreigners and foreign governments.

The rampant poverty and limited education that characterises isolated indigenous peoples offers a fertile ground for social unrest, a fact exacerbated by the discrimination they face and the gap between them and other Indonesians. In Badau, Kapuas Hulu, West Kalimantan; in Sebatik, East Kalimantan; and in Sangihe, Sulawesi, poor indigenous peoples have perceived foreign lands as providing them with better opportunities than available at home.

#### ***Floating Masses: Socio-Political Precarity***

Indigenous peoples occupy weak administrative and organisational positions, as they are not unified or consolidated through shared leadership. Fragmentation and a lack of education has left them objects of outside actors and political interests. Despite their sizable population—approximately one million Indonesians are classified as isolated indigenous peoples—they do not significantly influence national politics. This is problematic, as—pursuant to Indonesia's 1945 Constitution and its national philosophy, Pancasila—they must be afforded equal political rights.

Owing to their continued marginalisation in national politics and public policy, isolated indigenous peoples have become floating masses that exist in a state of socio-political precarity. Nowhere is this illustrated better than in the ethnic conflict in Papua, where various policy approaches have met with resistance. Such resistance has frequently been used by the Free Papua Organization (OPM) to advance its separatist agenda and politicise Papuans. This has proven detrimental to social harmony, and ultimately posed a threat to national unity. Even after the passage of Government Regulation No. 77 of 2007, which prohibits the display of the Morning Star flag in Papua, this flag has still been flown by OPM members, who have used the poverty and precarity of indigenous Papuans to promote their separatist agenda. A



similar phenomenon has occurred in Maluku, where the self-proclaimed Republic of South Maluku has sought to mobilise indigenous Moluccans and disrupt the peace.

Without a sense of nationalism, ethnic and religious conflict spread rapidly, increasing and intensifying over time. Such conflict has significant implications for national security, as it can disturb economic stability and hinder development efforts. The ethnic conflict in Papua is a classic example of how security threats can emerge from regular and sustained conflict. This is exacerbated by the exploitation of natural resources, including those on land and at sea, which weakens indigenous peoples' ability to contribute to society and protect national territory. Many indigenous peoples are influenced by foreign interests, and ultimately choose to cross international borders in search of a better life.

Likewise, it is not uncommon for terrorists to hide in isolated regions, where they remain undetected by security forces. The Indonesian government and people must open their eyes to this threat, particularly since terrorists and their weapons have been found in isolated parts of Aceh, Banten, Sukabumi, and Johor.

Owing to their lengthy physical isolation, indigenous peoples have focused on maintaining their internal solidarity and unity. Lacking the ability to communicate and connect with outside actors, they have established their own particular identities upon which they have relied for survival (Abdullah & Sari, 2014). This is a serious threat to the integration of indigenous communities into a broader system of shared ideas and values.

## **Discussion**

Globalisation has created new understandings and life practices. Various aspects of everyday life have been redefined, while broad-spectrum differentiation has shown the relativity of social practice (Abdullah, 2015; Rosa, 2019). However, such transformations have not always promoted progress; they have also caused significant problems. In today's increasingly global society, the dynamics and positioning of indigenous communities may threaten Indonesia's sovereignty and ability to realise its motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity).

In the past, synergy and togetherness were cornerstones of indigenous communities, where mutual support was evident in everyday interactions. However, this has become less common as society and the economy have transformed (Esposito, 2010; Hannerz, 1996). The cases discussed above shows how the erosion of nationalism amongst isolated indigenous communities has threatened national integrity. Furthermore, development efforts have been hampered by inadequate human resources and the government's failure to provide appropriate protections and facilities.



As the Indonesian people have become globalised, spatial and temporal boundaries have been blurred. Labour, goods, services, and capital are transported around the world, as are information, ideas, and perspectives. Lacking the ability to filter the flow of such information, the state and its inherent diversity have been threatened. According to Goldsmith (1998), the expansion of the global market has resulted in dehumanisation. All peoples, including isolated indigenous communities, have their own cognitive, evaluative, and symbolic systems and values, and these are often perceived as inferior to foreign ones (Featherstone, 1991; Ritzer, 2007). Such an understanding is harmful to national integrity and sovereignty, as it transforms how isolated indigenous peoples identify themselves and their communities. Such values often undermine those that determine local identity.

It is therefore necessary not only to curb the threat of disintegration, but to implement an affirmative action plan to promote development in isolated indigenous communities. Four principles must be considered in developing an emancipatory and human-oriented approach: (1) the unique character of indigenous communities must be recognised, so that any efforts to promote their betterment reflect their own beliefs and values. Often, development efforts fail when they do not recognise local communities' particular characters and attitudes, and are thus resisted as a form of outside intervention; (2) public participation must be guaranteed to ensure that development efforts reflect the preferences of affected communities; (3) efforts to solve indigenous communities' problems must advance their interests, rather than those of the state and the market that have exploited them and left them in a state of want; and (4) change must be realised through indigenous communities' own efforts and using local resources, as this will ensure the sustainability of development efforts (Abdullah, 2015: 13).

From the above discussion, it is evident that development efforts must be oriented towards participation, rather than mobilisation. Isolated indigenous peoples must not be the objects of development, but rather subjects of development. They must be actively involved in policy, including in the identification of problems, the formulation of programs, the management and implementation of projects, the evaluation of results, and ultimately the enjoyment of the fruits of their labours. Only then can a sense of belonging—central to the successful implementation of development policy—be created.

Humanist policy must recognise the activity and creativity of indigenous communities or safeguard the value of society. Human beings must have the ability to shape their own fates, to fulfil their needs, decide upon their own courses of action, and to use their own means. Such an approach is necessary to prevent coercion and exploitation, to cultivate autonomy, and to avoid dependency. Human and intellectual capital are necessary to implement such a policy (Narayan, 2002: 53); only then can the human dignity of isolated indigenous peoples be recognised and protected.





## Conclusion

The isolation and poverty experienced by isolated indigenous peoples can erode their affiliations with their peers and their state. Many members of such communities have travelled internationally in search of employment, as employment opportunities are lacking in their own territories. At the same time, national dynamics have threatened their integration into broader society, politics, and culture, limiting indigenous peoples' ability to participate in public policy and discourse. Despite its geographic and demographic heterogeneity, Indonesia has been plagued by tribal, religious, racial, and organisational exclusivism—all of which have exacerbated existing socio-economic gaps and further marginalised indigenous communities.

Indigenous peoples must be recognised as political communities with their own sense of nationalism. Political will and an innovative security and prosperity approach are necessary to cultivate awareness and improve the competencies, facilities, and infrastructure required for realising inclusivity and multiculturalism.

A security and prosperity approach necessitates sufficient political space for the involvement of indigenous peoples, the recognition of their rights, and the promotion of their welfare. As the geographic isolation experienced by such peoples has resulted in their marginalisation, they require tangible involvement, rather than idealist platitudes. Only by recognising indigenous peoples can the government not only show its constitutionally mandated commitment to multiculturalism, but also protect the nation from internal and external threats as well as potential horizontal and vertical conflicts.





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