Construction of Ethno-Religious Identity in Nusa Tenggara Timur Local Politics

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Abstract
This article described the discourse on ethno-religious identity in electoral politics in Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT) from the perspective of post-structuralism. The discursiveness of identity is important to understand because it helps with how ethno-religious identity is constructed to become hegemonic in electoral politics. Using the Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, this study found three articulations constructing ethno-religious identity in electoral politics to become hegemonic, namely first, historical articulation of enemy and ally; secondly, institutionalization of representation of ethno-religious identity in candidate pairs; and third, the daily socio-political practices of political actors. Reflectively, even though the three articulations have different working logics, they are ultimately absorbed in the "nodal point" namely the hegemony of ethno-religious identity in electoral politics. The purpose of this study is to raise citizens' critical awareness that the hegemony of ethno-religious identity in electoral politics is not something that is taken for granted, but is a social construction. By gaining the awareness, the citizens are expected to not be trapped in the essentialism of identity in electoral politics. This study contributes to the discourse study of the hegemony of ethno-religious identity in electoral politics.

Keywords: Discourse, Electoral, Ethno-religious, Hegemony, Laclau-Mouffe, Politics

INTRODUCTION

The studies of religious and ethnic identities in post-reform electoral politics have been done before. After the reformation, religion and ethnicity seemed to have a place through the ratification of the Autonomy Law. Since then, the phrases such as '*Putra Daerah* (local people)', '*Pribumi* (Indigenous)', '*Pendatang* (migrant)' emerged and became the dominant narrative of the rise of politics of identity in Indonesia (Nordhot & Klinken, 2007); Mujani, 2018). There are several studies on the rise

of post-reform identity i.e., Mujani, et.al. (2010), Aspinall, et.al. (2011), Buchari (2014), Sjaf (2014), and regarding the phenomena in NTT, the issue of politics of identity in electoral politics can also be found in Deodatus (2016), Bataona & Bajari (2017), and Syairani (2017) which represent the discussions related to the issue of politics of identity in the electoral politics in NTT.

However, the study of identity in politics tends to place the reality of religious and ethnic identity in electoral politics as an ontological/essentialism entity and ignores the epistemological aspect of the phenomenon. This means that the studies conducted so far had explained a lot about what reality is and

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how identity is used/managed in electoral politics, but rarely questioned how the reality of identity is constructed in electoral politics.

For this rationale, this study tried to describe the phenomenon of identity in electoral politics from the construction and formation of knowledge. Thus, it explained not only the essentialist/ontological reality regarding contestation or competition of politics of identity in ethno-religion in electoral politics, but also how the process of political construction and formation of religious and ethnic identity is formed into a hegemonic discourse in electoral politics. In other words, if the previous studies revolve around the question of "what exists to know", then this study shifts to an attempt to ask "why and how that exists" (Marsh & Stoker, 2017).

To realize the aim, a phenomenon regarding identity in electoral politics in the province of NTT (East Nusa Tenggara) was studied to find out why and how ethno-religious identity in electoral politics is constructed to become hegemonic. Ethno-religious identity is a social identity group consisting of ethnic groups whose members are united by the same religious background. In every democracy contest in NTT, ethnicity is often fused into a religious identity. The Flores ethnicity is identified (though not completely) with Catholicism, while the Timorese ethnicity is identified with Protestantism. Catholicism is well-known as the Flores religion and Protestantism is known as the Timorese religion. Furthermore, the phenomenon of the dynamics of political contestation in NTT as a research locus with strong identity characteristics is often referred to as the acronym "Catholic-Flores versus Protestant-Timor".

The purpose of this research is to enrich the repertoire of critical thinking towards identity studies in electoral politics from the perspective of post-structuralism of Laclau-Mouffe (1985). It is expected to foster critical awareness of citizens that the construction of hegemony of ethno-religious identity in electoral politics is not taken for granted, but is a constructed phenomenon by the articulations that surround the discourse of identity in electoral politics itself. It all depends on the discourse that influences it (Remling, 2017). The goal is to transform citizens' awareness, so that they are not trapped in the essentialism of identity in electoral politics.

Discourse and Hegemony Theory

Hegemony is defined as a process in which signifiers can construct their demands to be universal. Hegemony is the cessation of conflict because the boundaries between discourses are dismissed (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2010, p. 109). The emergence of hegemony is a consequence of the articulation of markers of certain groups dominating the articulation of markers of other groups. Thus, the process of articulation into hegemony takes place in articulation practices that work to modify floating signifiers, so that they are sedimented into a solid nodal point.

Floating signifiers are meanings that the articulation of different discourses strives for in order to invest meaning in their own way. While the nodal point is a node to determine the significance of important meanings or is commonly called a sign of agreement.

In addition, to achieve a hegemonic position, a discourse must be encouraged by hegemonic intervention which is a practice of continuous articulation in order to establish a single meaning and negate other meanings. It means that hegemonic intervention takes place by assigning certain meanings and at the same time emptying other meanings, or removing excess meanings that subvert it. This intervention is needed so that the existing meanings are always intertwined in a logic of equivalenc, since hegemony will only occur if the articulation practice that determines a nodal point is in a chain equivalence, and if the existing meanings are still confined in different interests (logic of difference), then hegemony is difficult to realize.

METHODS

This study used Strategy Discourse Analysis (Andersen, 2003, pp. ix-xvi). The term Discourse Analysis Strategy is a further consequence of the use of Laclau-Mouffe's discourse theory which stands firmly against the term "method". The use of the term "method" allegedly implies an ontological /essentialism dimension. Thus, the use of "method" as a tool will only trap a study in reductionist attitude, a social phenomenon that is universal and ignores human creativity. The discourse analysis strategy is also an attempt by scholars to overcome the methodological deficit in applying Laclau-Mouffe's thinking in research (Glynos J. , Howarth, Love, & Flitcroft, 2021; Glynos & Howarth, 2008; Jorgensen & Phillips, 2010; Remling, 2017)

The data of this study come from texts and talks. Data in the form of texts were obtained through the collection and coding of three media texts in NTT, namely Pos Kupang (PK), Timor Express (Timex), and Viktory News (VN) in January-June 2018, six months prior to the governor election. The data collected were news, opinions, photos, advertisements, et cetera. In addition to the texts, other data from books and magazines were also obtained.

Meanwhile, talks were obtained through online and onsite in-depth interviews with religious leaders, political actors, organizers (General Election Commission & Election Supervisory Agency), NGOs, and citizens as voters. In addition, the researcher as insider also conducted participant observations in identifying daily expressions (concepts/jargon) that surrounded the discourse of ethno-religious identity in electoral politics in NTT.

All data in the form of texts and talks were collected and analyzed by combining the stages of the discursive analysis strategy by Walton and Boon (2014, pp. 360-367). The stages were collecting data, identifying articulation in field of discursivity, determining subjects, determining discourse, assigning subjects (figure, organization, and movement), and explain how ethno-religious identity was constructed into hegemony in electoral politics.

FINDINGS

This study found three articulations supporting the formation of ethno-religious identity hegemony in electoral politics. These three

articulations cover historical, institutional, and social practice dimensions.

Enemy-Ally Narrative

The construction of discourse on ethno-religious identity in electoral politics cannot be separated from the influence of the colonial legacy. Ormeling (1956), Pelzer (1957), and Hagerdal (2006) wrote that the arrival of Europeans, especially the Portuguese (1511) and the Dutch (1613), in an effort to control or fight over the sandalwood trading area on the island of Timor as the main commodity, became the key to understanding the dynamics of the contemporary politics in NTT. The rivalry between the two colonies that occurred in Europe as hereditary enemies in the effort for imperial prestige in Europe had expanded and impacted on the colonies in Timor (Sowash, 1948; Hagerdal, 2006).

The same thought was also expressed by the Vical General for the Archdiocese of Kupang, Duka (2020) explaining that "colonial legacy tends to leave the narrative of competition rather than mutual cooperation. This then gave birth to a line of demarcation from one another, which eventually created a colonially patterned demographic structure, for example, the Flores area, which became the Portuguese base with a Catholic majority, and the Timor which became the Dutch base with a Protestant majority " (Interview, January 20, 2020).

Furthermore, Kolimon (2020) also explained that the dynamics of the rivalry of colonial powers have influenced Protestant and Catholic relations to this day. These characteristics and attitudes of hostility are often not recognized, but are latent. It is undeniable that there is a thinking in the Protestant majority region that "this is our territory, we are in power and those who lead must be our people" and vice versa in the Catholic majority region (Interview, January 11, 2020). In addition, Makarim acknowledged that the arrival of the Dutch and Portuguese colonials had a contemporary political effect at this time. However, there were other variables that also influenced the construction of ethno-religious identity in politics, namely the political influence of the New Order. The privilege of Islam at the national level was imitated and seemed to be justified to say that the same thing should have taken place in the regional level (Interview, 22 January 2020).

Both colonies then built and consolidated power by involving local people (Franca, 2000, pp. 31-65; Hagerdal, 2012; Fox, 1987). This consolidation strategy effort by each colony towards local people resulted in a narrative of enemies amid the Portuguese, Dutch, and local people (Pradjoko, 2015)

The Portuguese consolidated allied power with a strategy of marrying the local people or often called matrimonial alliances (Hagerdal, 2006). This effort was carried out by the Portuguese as one of the acculturation strategies with local people in establishing alliances, so that they could be accepted and at the same time became a way of religious mission in the region. The strategy of consolidating alliances through marriage became the main strategy of the Portuguese to create engagement with local people as what was done in other colonial territories,

such as Africa and other Asian regions (Newitt, 2005).

The effect of acculturating matrimonial alliances strategies can still be found today, where the name of a person, clan, or place is even identical to the name of people who come from Portugal, such as Da Costa, Da Silva, et cetera, as well as the names of places or even many words borrowed directly from the influence of the Portuguese language (Franca, 2000)

The matrimonial alliance strategy became an entry point for the formation of the Portuguese and allies with local people (Larantiques) as well as being the root of conflict with the Dutch and allies. The Portuguese and Larantiques built an antagonistic narrative against the Dutch and allies. The Dutch was considered an enemy because it had subducted the stronghold in Solor, the Portuguese-Larantiques' economic area, and the missionary mission of the Catholic leaders of the Dominican Order (Pradjoko, 2015, p. 244).

To strengthen its existence in the Timor colony and ward off threats from the Portuguese and allies, the Dutch then consolidated the local people by first cooperating with five regions around the Dutch fort in the southwest of the Timor island to become five loyal allies. The five loyal allies were Helong, Amabi, Taebenu, Amarasi, and Amfoang (Hagerdal, 2012; Fox, 1987).

In these five areas, the Dutch built the the protagonist image as five loyal allies. The five allies identified their relationship with the Dutch as "Father and Mother Company" (Hagerdal, 2012, p. 201). The relationship image of parents and children bound their pledge of allegiance to fully serve the Dutch and be hostile to other parties, especially the Portuguese. In addition, the Dutch also consolidated other local kingdoms to gain support. The Rote, Sabu, Solor, and Alor tribes were new allies to support the Dutch in Timor.

The Dutch's efforts to establish alliances with the local people to fight against the Portuguese as their enemies can be traced through an 'agreement' between the Dutch and the local people, one of which stated that the Dutch required that local people not be allowed to trade with the Portuguese. Portugal is narrated as hereditary enemy of the Dutch. Violation would result in sanctions (Hagerdal, 2012, pp. 216-244; Fox, 1987).

The Dutch also gave privileges to the allies as an effort to gain their loyalty. The Dutch raised the local aristocratic elite as middle power, had the opportunity to receive education, provided the opportunity to manage natural resources, had access to church (Protestant), were recruited to become lower-middle administrative employees, and gave them privileges by placing them in 'tax free teritory'.

At this point, it can be seen how the enemy-ally relationship between the Portuguese and Dutch colonies and their respective local powers were formed. These two colonies have always been in a situation of relentless tension and feud. The historical meaning of Portuguese versus Dutch as 'hereditary enemy' continued in these colonies, not only reaffirming the rivalry between the two colonial nations, but also giving birth to and influencing enemy-ally relationship among the local people. The colonial

presence not only formed settlement patterns based on religious identity, but also embedded narratives of relationship. The people living in the Portuguese territory were constructed as protagonists and had filiations through marriage and emotional-spiritual bonds to the Portuguese because they had brought Catholicism and modern education in the "parents and children" relationship.

In the Catholic region, there was an articulation of antagonism that the Dutch and allies were enemies. In some records, the Dutch was considered as "infidels" who had subducted the Portuguese territory. Meanwhile, the Dutch had a close relationship with five regions by giving West Timor territory to be managed. The rivalry of the two colonies, the Portuguese and the Dutch, then gave birth to the division of territories along with the narratives of antagonists and protagonists. This rivalry affected the relationship not only between the Portuguese and the Dutch, but also between the local people of NTT today, including in terms of political dynamics (Sowash, 1948, pp. 226-235; Hagerdal, 2006, p. 40)

Due to this tension, the Portuguese and the Dutch held meetings and agreements in 1854, 1859, and 1916 to regulate the pattern of relationships and activities between the Dutch and the Portuguese in NTT. These agreements resulted in the division of the territories into two regions, namely the Portuguese territory and the Dutch territory (Daus, 1989). The legacy of this division is still evident today. Demographics of the population such as the districts on the mainland of Flores, Southwest Sumba

Regency, Belu Regency, North Central Timor Regency, and Malacca Regency became Portuguese territory, so it is not surprising that most of the people there are Catholic. While the Dutch territory included Kupang City, Kupang Regency, South Central Timor Regency, Rote Ndao Regency, Sabu Raijua Regency, Alor Regency, East Sumba Regency, West Sumba Regency, Central Sumba Regency, mostly inhabited by Protestant (Bataona & Bajari, 2017; Sayrani, 2017; Deodatus, 2016; Klinken, 2007)

Representational Narrative to Maintain Harmony and Balance

The second articulation embedded in the discourse of ethno-religious identity in electoral politics is the narrative of identity representation in electoral politics. The strong influence of the relationship between enemies and allies left behind during the colonial period continues. The relationship between these identities then influences the political formation of NTT, where ethno-religious identity is informally institutionalized into settlement politics in NTT politics. Settlement politics means how ethnic-religious identities are represented in the formulation of the formation of candidate pairs in every NTT electoral political contestation event.

There are several reasons behind the institutionalization of the practice of informal representation of identity in electoral politics, namely: first, to maintain harmony and second, to maintain balance. The narrative of maintaining balance is built on historical situations at the beginning of independence, during the expansion of the Sunda Kecil region divided into 3

provinces, namely Bali, West Nusa Tenggara (NTB), and East Nusa Tenggara (NTT). Each of them was divided based on the similarity of religious identity such as Bali with Hinduism, NTB with Islam, and NTT with Christianity. However, the unification of the NTT region based on religious identity presented some invisible tensions. Christianity in NTT is not as simple as it seems. NTT has two major Christian religions, namely Protestant Christianity and Catholic Christianity, which have fundamental differences in their theological dimensions and historical experience.

Klinken (2020) explained that at the beginning of the formation of the NTT region, there was a fairly strong debate about where the provincial capital would be, whether in Kupang (Timor) which became the center of the residency of Timor or Ende (Flores) which had a more developed economy. Furthermore, Klinken explained that actually behind the debate and struggle over the area, there was a contestation of religious sentiments between Protestants who wanted Kupang as the capital city because the area was inhabited by the majority of Protestants and Catholics who wanted Ende as the capital city because the area was inhabited by the majority of Catholics.

The same thing also appears in other literatures regarding the early history of the formation of NTT before the provincial capital was inaugurated on December 20, 1958. Regarding the issue of the provincial capital, there were pros and cons amid several political elites. The Flores politicians who joined PARKAT wanted Ende as the capital city because President Soekarno managed to dig up the foundations of the country in Ende. Other politicians who joined PARKINDO insisted on choosing Kupang as the provincial capital because it was more strategic and had economic value through transportation. Finally, by an agreement between the two parties, Kupang is chosen as the provincial capital of NTT until now.

These differences and struggles then pushed NTT political actors to seek common ground for identity representation. Thus, even though Kupang was finally chosen as the provincial capital, the identity must be expressed by the two dominant identities through informal representa-tion of ethno-religious identity.

Second, the representation process cannot be separated from the fact that the demographics of the NTT population are patterned into two regions. In the south is a Protestant majority and in the north is a Catholic majority. Statistically (2018), the Catholics population is 51 percent, more than Protestants (34 percent) and Islam (9 percent). However, the majority of the Protestant population occupies the capital city area, in contrast to the Catholic population living outside the capital city area, thus affecting access to information and impact on the power management. Numerically, Catholics are more than Protestans, but in the dimension of power, Protestants are stronger because they tend to be closer and have qualitatively greater access to power.

These two situations encourage the actors to propose an informal institutionalization process to represent the existing dominant identity. There is an unwritten agreement that every NTT

leader must represent a Catholic-Flores and Protestant-Timor identity. Furthermore, the narrative argument used to strengthen the practice is to "maintain harmony and balance in a plural society". The same thing was also implicitly conveyed by the former Governor of NTT in the 1993-1998 era, Musakabe stating that the process of representing ethno-religious identity in electoral politics was an effort to maintain the harmony and balance of ethno-religious identity groups. "...NTT Province or known as Flobamora is an archipelagic province with a diverse population composition in terms of ethnicity, race, religion, and class. That is why it is important to balance the composition of ethnic and religious groups in the local government bureaucratic structure, apart from of course considering the professional factor. For example, at the provincial level, if the governor comes from Flores and is Catholic, then the vice governor is from Timor and Protestant and or vice versa…"

Institutionally, the division is then regulated informally, even though there is no formal legal agreement, and it is only a kind of unwritten agreement or informal institutionalization. The representation of identity based on ethno-religious identity is regulated in an unwritten manner by placing the dominant identity representation of each pair of candidates. This situation encourages the creation of a process of political institutionalization with a consideration of ethno-religious identity. Informally, in the political journey of NTT, two dominant forces are represented, contradicted, and then harmonized in the leadership representation.

The practice of informal institutionalization as part of efforts to maintain harmony and balance in every practice of electoral politics ignores a hidden curriculum which intentionally or unintentionally has created rivalry and prejudice between identities. It is as if they continue to bring back the collective memory of the colonial rivalry to the people in NTT with different identities. This practice of informal institutionalization is then capitalized pragmatically as an electoral instrument by candidate pairs in daily socio-political practices such as when regional leader election takes place which gives birth to latent grassroots tensions.

Daily socio-political practices

Daily socio-political practices that link symbols, attributes, and idioms of religious and ethnic identity in electoral politics are counter-productive. On the other hand, political actors and voters are individuals who cannot be alienated from their primordial identity — the primary identity that always inspires and becomes a source of motivational values that drive the "ethos of democracy". The use of symbols, attributes, and idioms of religion and ethnicity in electoral political safaris is something natural. The use of religious and ethnic symbols/idioms/attributes is a form of civilized practice. These daily social practices are activities that are commonly carried out in the daily life in NTT, interpreted as a form of appreciation for the cultural values of each traditional area.

However, at the same time, the use of symbols, attributes, and idioms also is potentially trapped only in the instrumentalization of the electoral dimension. These symbols, attributes, and idioms are capitalized as tools to achieve pragmatic political goals, so that they can threaten the harmony of the life. In addition, Nugroho (1997) explained the irony of ethnicity, religion, race, and inter-group plurality in Indonesia. Whereas this plurality is recognized as a pillar of nationality through the slogan "Bhineka Tunggal Ika", in daily political practice there is discrepancy, where this plurality is narrated as a pejorative entity of a source of conflict.

Based on coding and text analysis, as shown in table 1, the daily socio-political practices using religious and ethnic sentiments were carried out by almost all candidate pairs in the 2018 gubernatorial election. These social practices were, consciously or not, constructed by candidate pairs to produce sentimental behaviors of the voters toward ethno-religious identity in electoral-politics contestation.

Daily socio-political practices that touch religious and ethnic symbolic sentiments, namely meeting with religious leaders, using religious idioms such as "all is on God's plan", "we are God's messengers", We are like the Prophet Jeremiah who came to save the people of NTT", and the practice of traditional articulation, such as traditional inauguration of candidate pair, customary declaration, use of traditional clothing/ attributes/ accessories, et cetera.

Table 1.

Social Practices on Religious and Ethnic Issues in the 2018 Gubernatorial Election

No	Candidate Pairs	Religions	Ethnicities
1	Ir. Esthon L. Foenay, M.Si & Drs Christian Rotok	• -	• POT Support
2	Marianus Sae, S.AP & Ir. Emelia J. Nomleni	• God's plan and messengers • Meet Seminary Residents in St. Mikael	• Customary Attributes
3	DR. Benny K Harman, & Drs. Benny A. Litelnony, M.Si.	• Meet the Bishop • Campaign in Church Pulpit	• Customary Declaration • Wear Traditional Clothing
4	Viktor B. Laiskodat & Josef A Nae Soi	• God's Messengers • Like Jeremiah	• Meet traditional leaders • Crowned as king

Sources: Pos Kupang, Viktory News, and Timor Ekspress Newpapers, 2018

The daily social practices give a distinct impression when carried out during the campaign period as an attempt to construct identity in electoral politics. Political impression is unavoidable. All these practices are certainly carried out in order to give an emotional effect on sentimental identity which then has an impact on the practice of voters' behaviors based on emotional

sentiment of identity. The representation of identity in the "body" of the candidate pair is important to emphasize the existence of the voters' identity. This is done considering that religious and ethnic identities are the easiest and most economical electoral commodities to attract sympathy for electoral benefits.

DISCUSSION

### Hegemony Construction of Ethno-religious Identity

The findings of this study describe the articulations surrounding the discourse of ethno-religious identity in electoral politics. The articulation of colonial legacy results in colonial rivalry and hostile relations between the Portuguese and the Dutch and their respective local allies. The process of identity representation as a form of informal institutionalization carried out by the political elites and daily socio-political practices displayed during the local election campaign are moments to support and strengthen the construction of ethno-religious identity in electoral politics to become hegemonic. Electoral politics in NTT is always associated with the discourse of ethno-religious identity.

There are three logics operating to construct the hegemony of ethno-religious identity in electoral politics. Developing the concept of Laclau-Mouffe (1985), this study found out the principle of forming an ethno-religious identity hegemony in three different sets of various relations which mutually support the formation of identity hegemony in politics (Figure 1). These links are the chain of equivalence, chain of difference, and chain of coulomb. The narratives construct a chain of equivalence on the left, chain of difference on the right, and chain of coulomb on the bottom.

Chain of equivalence links historical narratives with informal institutionalization practices. The history of the enemy-ally as a colonial legacy resulting in segregation between the two identities is then informally institutionalized, expressed in political representations. There is a kind of unwritten agreement requiring that each pair of candidates must represent a pair of Catholic-Flores and Protestant-Timor identities, or vice versa. The political representation is carried out with a consideration to maintain balance and harmony which emerges in response to historical rivalry with the aspects of informal institutionalization. Narrative *"Dalam Tuhan Ktong Basodara"* (In God we are brothers) is a chain of equivalence narrative activated in line with efforts to present political practices with a negotiable representative composition, where each pair of candidates in electoral politics always displays a configuration of representa-tion of the identity of Catholic-Flores and Protestant-Timor to maintain balance and harmony in diversity.

Figure V.1.
Hegemony Construction of Ethno-Religious Identity in Electoral Politics
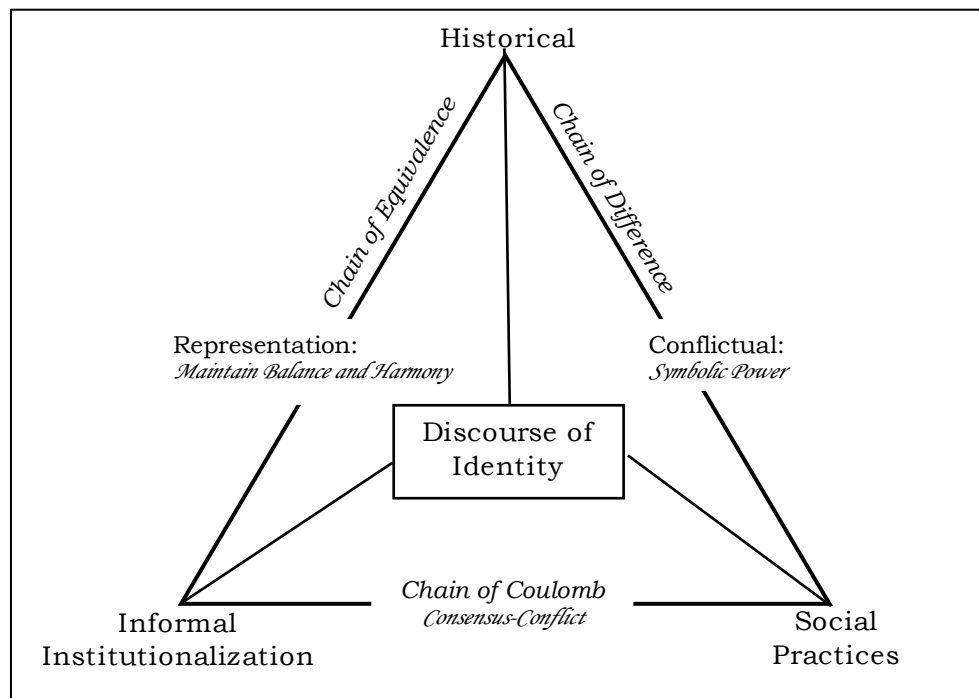
Source: Various sources

On the right, there is a series of chains of difference, namely the line of relations that connects historical aspects and social practices resulting in conflictual relations. The narratives of historical rivalry are articulated differently as a form of symbolic power to emphasize differences and capitalize them to gain electoral benefits. The articulation of the chain of difference can then be traced in the daily expression such as *"bae sonde bae, bisa ko sonde, ktong pili ktong pung orang"* (good or bad, capable or not, we choose our people). This expression is intended to explain the position of voters in any democracy contestation. The expression *"ktong pili ktong pung orang"* (we choose our people) is interpreted as an expression that explains voters' preferences based on identity similarities, especially ethno-religious identities while at the same time emphasizing differences (rivalry) toward other ethno-religious identities.

Meanwhile, the below part is a line that connects informal institutionalization and daily socio-political practices. This relation shows a consensual-conflictual relation (chain of coulomb) which is in a situation of tension of attraction as well as repulsion. Informal institutionalization to build consensus on representations based on dominant identities as part of efforts to build balance and harmony in a pluralistic society is always in a state of uncertainty in relation to daily socio-political practices in a conflictual atmosphere. In socio-political practices, people always look for identity distinctions between pairs of candidates, even though each pair of candidates has already represented the dominant identity. The consensual-conflictual

articulation can then be traced in the daily expression *"kalo ada sopir untuk apa pilih konjak"* (if there is a driver, why choose a conductor). This expression explicitly explains that voters' preferences tend to be on the identity of the candidate for governor (driver) rather than for vice governor (conductor). Thus, the distinction no longer occurs within the pairs of candidates, but between the pairs of candidates, especially the identity differences between the pairs of candidates for governor position (driver).

Even though it has relational logics, it can be understood that the three sets operate in the same discourse, namely Ethno-religious identity. These three different chains are articulated continuously to establish a single meaning of the hegemony of ethno-religious identity in the electoral politics in NTT.

The discourses constructed above are interwoven and have supported and formed a fixation on the meaning of ethno-religious identity in electoral politics. This is reflected in various hegemonic interventions which then support the hegemony of ethno-religious identity to achieve an objective position and a political position (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2010, pp. 68-70). Efforts to achieve an objective position can be observed in the narrative which emphasizes that the current state linking ethno-religious identities cannot be denied as a legacy of colonial rivalry and is considered as if it is a taken-for-granted reality that must be accepted as an objective reality. Meanwhile, in the political position, emphasizing the narrative of identity representation and daily political practices that touch

sentiments of ethno-religious identity is a *minus-malum* choice that must be made in the context of a pluralistic society in NTT.

This is the reason why ethno-religious identity is a nodal point, where the narrative of identity has hegemonized other narratives by linking three aspects (historical, institutional, and social practices) in a single connection which even though they have differences in articulation motives, but are interwoven in the same nodal point, namely the narrative of ethno-religious identity in the electoral politics in NTT.

This finding also explains that if Laclau-Mouffe interpreted identity construction as a combination of logic of equivalence and logic of difference, then this study found a logic of coulomb as an additional relation that supports hegemony of identity in electoral politics. This finding is also a further effort to develop a more concrete methodological and conceptual framework in discourse theory, previously applied by the students such as Jason Glynos and David Howarth (2008; 2021) to contra the accusation that discourse theory has no concrete methodological framework.

CONCLUSION

From the description above, it has been shown how ethno-religious identity in electoral politics is constructed into hegemony in three connections of articulation. The three articulations are the articulation of colonial legacy that resulted in enemy-ally relationship, the articulation of identity representation as part of efforts to maintain balance and harmony in a divided society, and daily socio-political practices that sharpen the distinction between ethno-religious

identities. These various articulations work in different logical sequences, but in the end, they form a nodal point in the meaning of the hegemony of ethno-religious identity in electoral politics.

This finding is evidence that ethno-religious essentialism in politics becomes a nodal point but cannot be reduced essentially. The hegemony of ethno-religious identity is constructed from various articulations and is a double-edged sword that can be a unifier but also a source of conflict. These two sides are inevitable, prioritizing one side and then setting the other aside is an act of de-democratizing electoral politics. Therefore, it is necessary to place both articulations in a balanced way. In Mouffe's perspective, it is called agonist democracy, a democracy that requires a consensus-conflictual space in electoral politics (Mouffe, 2005)

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