

The Depoliticization of Ecology: Discourse Analysis of Land Conflict in Punclut, North Bandung Region

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Abstract

This study discusses the narrative and discourse in the conflict over land use in Punclut, Pagerwangi, North Bandung Region. The water catchment area of the North Bandung area has been managed by the local community for several decades before coming into conflict with the property company PT DAM which obtained a building permit from the government. Departing from Garet Hardin's Tragedy of the Commons, this research tries to explore the causes of natural degradation in Punclut through a discourse on natural resource control by two warring parties: local residents and the government. A qualitative approach with the discourse analysis method is used to answer research questions by using data from interviews, mass media, journal articles, and official documents. The findings of this study are that Hardin's solution to the destruction of natural resources cannot answer the conditions in Punclut, where there is a local community that have sociocultural rules and rationality to manage natural resources with ecological awareness. This community offers an alternative political discourse in terms of environmental management, namely "depoliticization of ecology" and participatory conservation. However, the discourse of the government and companies related to welfare and economic progress always dominates the discourse in the decision-making process.

Keywords: Discourse, Land management, Communal property, Government, Depoliticization, Political ecology

INTRODUCTION

The conflict over land use in the North Bandung Region (KBU) has led to the revival of the local people's struggle for natural resource management. The area in Punclut, Pagerwangi Village, Lembang District, West Bandung Regency, was an ex-Erfpacht land (land inherited from the Dutch colonial

government, which was returned to the state). According to data obtained through an interview, Abah Atang (65)-a community leader, environmental activist, and farmer in Punclut--admitted that local cultivators had managed the land since the beginning of Indonesia's independence. Meanwhile, according to another local cultivator, Harda Putri, the locals has had the right to cultivate the land, covering an area of 11.7 hectares, since 1988. Indonesia's National Land

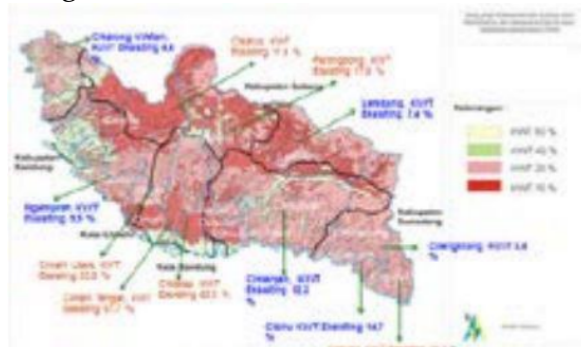
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Agency never passed building rights certificate (SHGB) no. 10/HGB/BPN/2004 on the land (Antarajabar, 2016).

In 2002, a property company named PT DAM Utama Sakti Prima attempted to convert the area into the construction of an elite housing complex. The seizure of land is carried out by manipulation. The company brought in thugs to force residents and community leaders to sign a letter of approval for the transfer of land ownership. They also forced the community to vacate and dismantle the land and tree planting sites without compensation (Ramadhan, 2021).

Based on Regional Regulation Number 3 of 2006 concerning Amendments to the Regional Regulation of Bandung City Number 2 of 2003, Punclut is classified as a protected area (green area). However, on the spatial map plan created by the government, the green area was changed to yellow which represents low-density housings (Sagita, 2016). The change can be seen in the following image:



Source: Sagita (2016)

Land conversion in KBU has broad implications for environmental disasters because the land is a water

catchment area that can absorb rainwater and a container for filling an aquifer that is useful as a water source (Walhi, 2020). This diversion of KBU spatial planning, which tends to be uncontrolled, ultimately disrupts the function of reserves and water conservation because KBU is the sub-watersheds of Cikapundung, Cimahi, Citarik Hulu, Cigugur, Cibereum, Citepus and several other tributaries that empty into the Citarum River (Adharani & Nurzaman, 2017). According to Walhi records, ecological disasters have been occurred in KBU and its subordinate areas, such as droughts and flash floods in 2018 and 2019 (Walhi, 2020), landslides in 2015 due to construction on sloping roads (Fadhlurrahman, 2017), and flooding in Panorama Lembang (Jabarekspres, 2020).

According to Sagita (2016), the disputed case in Punclut contains several irregularities in government regulations. In 1982, the Governor of West Java banned all development permits in KBU, which the West Java Provincial Government later strengthened through the KBU status quo decree. However, the Minister of Agrarian Affairs/Head of BPN unilaterally cancelled the regulation in 1997, so PT DAM Utama Sakti received a development permit from the government. At the same time, Bandung City Regulation Number 2 of 2004 concerning the RTRW of Bandung City, which classifies Punclut as a protected area and capture area, was changed to Bandung City Regulation Number 3 of 2006, which classifies Punclut as a yellow area. The various

irregularities in using Punclut's land have finally sparked suspicion from residents and environmental activists. They see indications of collusion between the government and companies so that there is impartiality in the interests of citizens and environmental sustainability. Since 2007, environmental activists, advocate associations and NGOs have filed a lawsuit to the Administrative Court (Sagita, 2016).

This conflict raises important questions about who has the right and can be trusted to manage natural resources without destroying them. Hardin (1968), in his article *The Tragedy of The Commons*, reveals a classic environmental management problem: natural resources held in common are subject to degradation without limitation. The contradiction between limited natural resources and unlimited human wants will impact the tragedy of the destruction of ecology due to overexploitation. Therefore, Hardin proposed two solutions to avoid the "tragedy": the commons *a.* could be managed by the private sector or the state. However, subsequent research by Feeny et al. (1990) revealed that Hardin's prediction regarding this tragedy emerged from his incomplete models. He associated common property with open access and overlooked the other property regimes. According Feeny et al. (1990), property regimes consist of four types: open access, private property, communal property, and state property. While open access does not have clear regulations regarding access and use of natural resources, we need to consider

the existence of communal properties where local communities manage the environment with binding rules. Evidence from various countries demonstrates the ability of local communities to participate in sustainable environmental management systems, such as how fishing groups in the coastal areas of Japan and New Jersey can manage the sea with their local wisdom.

In another study by Frank Fisher (2000), local communities are endowed with sociocultural rationality so that they can solve problems regarding natural resources. These local users have the ability to understand and respond to risks, and to solve problems independently. Fisher concluded that there is no reason to doubt their rationality if they have given enough time to explore environmental issues around them. Local people are much more capable of solving complex problems than is generally assumed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Participatory Conservation

'Participation' is defined as the inclusion of interest groups to influence a policy. Based on Hobbey's typology (1996), participation has seven models: (1) manipulative participation (residents seem to be given a voice in the representative council, but they do not hold any power) (2) passive participation (citizens only get information about what has been decided in the council) (3) consultation participation (policymakers consult with citizens before making policies) (4) participation based on material incentives (citizens mobilize resources

such as labor) (5) active participation (external agents who make and implement policies, while citizens are only appointed to help) (6) interactive participation (citizens and other institutions carry out analysis, planning, development jointly, and all have control over local decisions on existing resources) (7) self-mobilization (citizens make decisions independently, but only interact with external agents for technical advice on resource management) (Bixler et al., 2015).

Participation in nature conservation has been under the spotlight after some people criticized the centralized conservation model's hegemony. Some studies mention the failure of this centralized model in protecting nature. Meanwhile, evidence shows that local actors can manage the environment collectively and fight forces that destroy nature, such as the case of the tree movement in India and the movement against environmental exploitation in Borneo (Bixler et al., 2015).

Discourse

Discourse is a combination of ideas and concepts that are produced, grown, and repeated in society in a certain way. The main assumption of discourse is that the truths that develop within an entity are not singular, and the meanings of these truths can be found in language. Language is seen as a medium that shows one's views and ideas, not just a neutral medium. Thus, discourse analysis emphasizes the importance of language studies to reveal the truth and how communication exchanges ideas. Regarding discourse

analysis on environmental issues, it is necessary to use a language interpretation process to solve the problem. With this analysis, we can see how the actors have their own ideas in defining societal issues. Some actors practice their hegemony and power by imposing their discourse on others (Hajer & Versteeg, 2005).

Based on the findings in previous studies and the theory above, this study aims to discuss the conflict over land use in Punclut and the political views on environmental management. This study will use discourse analysis to uncover the battle of political ideas between the locals and government/companies in defining nature. This article is divided into five parts: introduction, methodology, discussion, and conclusion.

RESEARCH METHODS

Our analysis of the narrative that fills the discourse space found that there are dominant and subdominant discourses. The dominant came from the government and private sector, while the subdominant came from the locals. The narratives were categorized by how it is used as a rule of the game or a system in environmental management, specifically in Punclut's case. This research uses a qualitative method to uncover a cultivator's perspective in seeing nature and describing an event from social reality. The data was obtained through an observational study and interview. Furthermore, the researchers used written sources accessed through scientific articles, journals, and various online news. This type of literature study makes it easier

for the authors to draw on several theories and cases in the field by comparing multiple articles and other sources. The data collection and analysis results are carried out through several stages, such as categorizing the data, selecting and reducing the data, interpreting the data, and finally drawing conclusions. Additionally, this study uses a Foucauldian discourse analysis adopted from Vingoe (2008).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Land Legality

Before 1980, the Erfpacht Verponding rights on 154.7 hectares of Punclut were owned by Frederik Conrad Hendrik Neervoort. In 1953, he relinquished the right so that its legal status became "state land" (Azzahra & Jamilah, 2021). "State land" is an area where the Basic Agrarian Law does not grant individual rights so that the state directly controls the land and regulates its use to create benefits for the welfare of society (Harsono, 2008). In 1982, the Governor of West Java, Aang Kunaefi, issued a decree prohibiting any development in the Punclut area because of its function as a water catchment area. Over the following decades, Punclut's land was neglected and became common property where access to the use of resources was considered free, open, and without regulation. Finally, the locals used it as agricultural land with farm plots arranged by themselves. The land (outside the forest area) is planted with cassava, vegetables, avocado, guava, oranges, strawberries, and others to support daily needs, trade, or keep the soil fertile. Paguyuban Padumukan

Punclut also regularly holds tree planting events together. Under the concept of communal property, Punclut's land is managed by a community of interdependent cultivators who exclude outsiders from using the resources. Within their community, the right to use resources is not exclusive as in the private property regime. It is based on the traditional rules and rationality passed down from generation to generation.

However, as Feeny et al. (1990) revealed, communal property regimes could fail to protect the use of natural resources by outsiders when confronted by larger political powers. As what happened from the subsequent development in 2004, the Office of the National Land Agency issued a building rights certificate (SHGB) no. 10/HGB/BPN/2004 for PT DAM Utama Sakti Prima. This certificate was made based on the Decree of the Minister of Agrarian Affairs of the Head of the National Land Agency No. 19 -VIII-1997, which cancelled property rights certificates to 943 Punclut residents on 84.21 hectares of land (Fokusjabar, 2016). The informant of this research, Abah Atang (65), is one of the land cultivators, community leaders, and activists who is actively fighting for residents' rights and protecting the Punclut area from developer intervention. In 2002, Abah Atang's parents bequeathed several hectares of land to him and were involved in the fight against PT DAM Utama Sakti Primadi when the company arrived in Punclut. They witnessed how the company tried to buy land at a very low price, Rp.5,000 per meter. The cultivators were confronted with

coercion and threatened by thugs to sign a letter of approval for the company's land ownership (Ramadhan, 2021). One of the Punclut farmers admitted that in 2014 the company arrived with heavy equipment to level the trees that had just been reforested the year before. Corn and peanut plantations covering an area of 200 square meters were also levelled with earth fill. This action could cause landslides and threaten 200 houses of Cipicung Hilir residents under the plantation area (Republika, 2014). Furthermore, in 2020 the National Land Agency (BPN) set land boundaries without coordination with the locals (Bangbara, 2020).

Abah Atang and other cultivators have made several attempts to sue this case to the government. Some of them sent a letter to the DPRD Bandung in 2012 containing a protest against PT DAM's actions for seizing land permits without involving residents. In the same year, the Punclut Concerned Community Forum also sent a letter to the Governor of West Java regarding the company's illegal actions, with copies sent to a number of state and independent institutions. However, only one institution responded to the letter, Komnas HAM, but no follow-up action was taken. At the commemoration of National Farmers Day in 2020, farmers and other civilians carried out a protest and held a large banner titled "Land for the People, not for Corporates. Stop the Transfer of Land Functions in the North Bandung Area (KBU)" (Jabarekspres, 2020).

Individually, Abah Atang carried out a small campaign. He recorded a video containing a narrative that the

developments in KBU have led to floods and landslides. The video is distributed publicly. However, an employee of PT DAM reported Abah Atang to the police for defamation under the ITE Law. In 2019 Abah Atang was examined by the police, and a year later, he was officially convicted as a suspect.

On the other hand, local governments have their own reasons for granting permits to the developer. As stated by the Mayor of Bandung Dada Rosada, he intended to "regulate" Punclut so that it did not become a place of illegal construction. The government said they did not have a sufficient budget to organize the land, so it had to be converted to the private sector. If this policy were not implemented, Punclut would become increasingly chaotic (Murti, 2005). In addition, Dada said his decision to allow development projects to PT DAM was to bring welfare to the people of Punclut by prioritizing them to become the company's workers (Humans Pemkot Bandung, 2016). In the next period of the city administration, under the rule of Ridwan Kamil, various citizen protests related to the development were dismissed because the previous mayor had issued the development permit (Tempo, 2016).

Dominant and Subdominant Discourses

In the narrative and conflict process above, it is found that there are differences in meaning and ideas between the government and Abah Atang on several discourse themes. The themes that emerged in the discussion room were (1) views on nature, (2) State Land, (3) property regimes, (4) development goals in Punclut, and (5)

proposed solutions.

First, Abah Atang defines nature as an object he cherishes. He sees nature as an inseparable part of himself because it provides food and water to live. The next generation will feel the benefits. Abah Atang's experience has proven how efforts to protect nature can ultimately save the "stomach." By planting trees, the flow of spring water in Nyalindung increases. Therefore, Abah Atang considers "one tree equals one life." For every tree cut down, he feels a part of himself is missing.

Meanwhile, the government's view of nature and environmental sustainability has always been closely related to economics and exploration, according to Khan (2010), about the discourse on government policies related to the forestry business. The narrative always uses an economic perspective that forests need to be used for development. The term "sustainability" appears textually but without elaborating the meaning and plans for its realization. It does not respond to the gap between the fulfillment of business interests and the scarcity of natural resources. Rahmadian (2020) states that the government policy to pass permits to corporations is a consequence of the modernization discourse built since the New Order, which has impacted the meaning of

natural resources as commodities.

Second, State Land is perceived differently by Abah Atang and the government. For Abah Atang, State Land is an area controlled by the people. Regarding state land management, the government (bureaucrats and officials) is only tasked with facilitating the people to use natural resources safely and without interference. However, the government's decision to unilaterally grants management permits to companies shows that they consider themselves has the right to regulate State Land.

Third, with the different perceptions of land management rights, the two parties also have different views about the property regime in Punclut land. Dada Rosada considers Punclut as state property, so the government is responsible and authorized to regulate it. However, because the government did not have a sufficient budget to manage the land, it was neglected and became "wild" and "unruly" (Murti, 2005). This view shows that the government considers Punclut as an open-access area because the access to natural resources is free and without rules and clear property rights. Therefore, the government handed over the management rights to PT DAM to change the property regime to private.

Table 1: Discourses that appears in the case

Topic	Government (Dominant Discourse)	Abah Atang (Subdominant Discourse)
Perspective over Nature	Nature is a recourse that needs to be explored so that it is economically valuable.	Nature is an inseparable part of humans that must be protected. The destruction of nature will have an impact on the next generation.
State Land	State land is owned and must be managed by the state.	State land belongs to and must be managed by the locals.
Development Goals	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In order to carry out development, it is necessary to make arrangements. 2. Promote economic development by creating jobs. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Property development in Punclut is destructive to nature 2. Economic benefits are only obtained by companies and a few citizens. 3. Infrastructure can facilitate community mobilization but is often destructive and made without a disaster analysis.
Property Regime	State Property should be turned into Open Access. The land that is wild and messy must be converted into private property.	Communal Property, because the land has been managed by a community of cultivators with sociocultural rules.
Solution	The state hands over the permit to the private sector to manage Punclut.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The state must protect nature with participatory conservation 2. The function of the government is only to give permits to the locals to manage nature. 3. The environment is not to be politicized.

Source: Research result

On the other hand, Abah Atang sees the property regime in Punclut as communal property because locals actively work on the land with their own rules. There are rules for land clearing between cultivators and allocation of use rights in Punclut. Cultivators are not allowed to grow plants outside their plots. In addition, if there are problems such as the destruction of crops belonging to the tenants or land grabbing by residents, they will resolve the problem amicably. Local communities' regulations and management of land are not formally written. Feeny et al. (1990) stated that in the communal property regime, the local ability to plan, allocate, and utilize natural resources is based on traditional knowledge passed down from generation to generation. Abah Atang's acknowledgment regarding the people's ability to manage land indicates that

they are not helpless and ignorant regarding natural resource management. Locals can protect their land so it will not become "wild" and "chaotic," let alone over-exploited.

Fourth, the development goals in Punclut are viewed from two different sides. The city government, especially during the Dada Rosada era, emphasized the economic value of entrepreneurs and the welfare of the people through development. This assumption can be seen from his statement that granting the permit to PT DAM will make the people of Punclut "more prosperous." However, this welfare perspective was dismissed by Abah Atang. He saw that prosperity and economic benefits were only obtained by businessmen and a few citizens. The people employed were also used to become a "bulwark" for the company to confront communities who are against

the development projects.

Furthermore, Abah Atang emphasized the inherent problem behind the development of Punclut: the destruction of nature, which will ultimately harm humans. He admits that people must accept infrastructure built to help the citizens' life, such as facilitating workplace access. However, if the infrastructure damages the environment, it is unacceptable.

Fifth, the dominant discourse proposed that giving permits to the private sector is the only solution to manage the environment. The decision is economically acceptable for them. At the same time, the locals were not given a chance to participate in the decision-making process.

Depoliticisation of Ecology Discourse

The different definitions of development goals in Punclut ultimately give rise to different ideal solutions. While the state allows the management to be controlled by the private sector, Abah Atang sees that the government should not interfere in managing the environment. He uses the term depoliticization of the ecology ("The environment must not be politicized"). This view arises from his definition of "politics," which is "all talk and no action." According to him, the actions of government officials who smoothed out permits to developers were an unethical political game, insensitive to the ecological impact, and full of empty rhetoric and broken promises. This reality made him lose faith in the government. Instead of entrusting the land to the state, he expected a system of participatory conservation where

government grants an official management permit to the locals as the Bandung City Government promised in 2009. The government should only be present to disallow intervention from outsiders. This view is based on Hobbey's (1996) typology of self-mobilization participation: citizens make decisions independently regarding natural resource management and only interact with external agents for technical advice.

The idea of depoliticization is a form of disappointment from the society to the government because of governance failure. Abah Atang's aspiration is indeed a political matter. He has been trying to change the situation and overcome the damage to his land. He also tried to simultaneously fight the private sector and government to push participatory conservation.

What Abah Atang did shows that power sticks with small actors or "the weapons of the weak," as what James C. Scott said in 1985. Power will always exist in every political object or subject entity, even the weakest ones. This is the inevitability of power. However, there will always be an imbalance of power relations which depend on the resources the actors have to win the discourse. That is why we claim his discourse is the subdominant one. What he and his community believed was somehow regarded as a conventional and unsophisticated method. It is not profitable at all for the private sector and corrupt government.

On the other hand, Hardin's assumptions to avoid environmental degradation are not helpful in this situation. Hardin overrides the value of

local knowledge and beliefs from society. In an agrarian country such as Indonesia, local knowledge and beliefs have long been used to guide the environment. This is used as a set of belief systems. Thus, when the new management system ignores the people and their belief system, they will fight against the intruder even if they have to face a big company or a government with coercion power. Therefore, Hardin's environmental management theory is unacceptable, whether giving it to the private sector or the state.

We need to develop environmental management that promotes democracy and participation as its core of governance. We also have to conceive that local value systems and local knowledge in our local communities are somehow more effective in preventing or overcoming environmental degradation. We can avoid environmental conflict by applying their local knowledge while providing sustainable development for the private sector to contribute to environmental conservation. The government should be the leader of all in this environmental governance because they act as a facilitator between society and the private sector. Moreover, the government must also ensure that democracy and participatory values are implemented.

CONCLUSION

Conflict over land use in Punclut, Pagerwangi Village, North Bandung Region creates ecological problems in the Bandung basin water catchment. The resulting damage raises the question of who can be trusted to

manage natural resources sustainably. This conflict involved two parties, residents represented by Abah Atang and the company PT DAM, which received building rights permits from the government. This study rejects the Tragedy of the Commons analysis by Garret Hardin that there are only two solutions to prevent natural degradation: giving management rights to the government or private companies. This study found that there are other property regimes, namely local communities, who have hereditary knowledge to manage Punclut land with ecological awareness to prevent over-exploitation. This local community has a political discourse regarding natural resource management, contrary to the discourse of government and companies. This study found differences in meaning and ideas on several discourse themes. The themes that emerged in the discussion room were (1) views on nature, (2) state land, (3) property regimes, (4) development goals in Punclut, and (5) proposed solutions. The local community offers an environmental management system that excludes the intervention of political officials due to their negative definitions of politics. When the government controls the land, management rights are easily obtained by private corporations who cannot carry out sustainable development in the presence of evidence such as natural disasters around Punclut. However, in the policy-making process, it is evident that the discourse of the government and companies is prioritized, with the emergence of various regulations that

ignore the ecological issue.

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