

CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS AND CLASS CONFLICT IN CAPTURE FISHERY IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses about class structure, and then followed by discussion on class consciousness and class conflict in capture fisheries in Indonesia, taking fishers in Balikpapan, East Kalimantan as the case. Data were collected from January to September 2006 intermittently, mainly through interviews with fishers, government officials, and NGO activists. This research is a qualitative research. In terms of class structure, there are four classes of fishers found in Balikpapan, East Kalimantan, namely: labour fishers, small scale fishers, intermediate or medium fishers, and large scale or capitalist fishers. It is argued that class consciousness of the labour fishers has not developed yet. Therefore, labour fisher is only a class in itself, not as a class for itself. There are six factors that contribute to the underdeveloped of the class consciousness of the labour fishers. In terms of class conflict, there is a significant deviation from the pattern of class conflict described by Marx. In capture fishery, intense and violent conflict more often take place not between the capitalist or owner of the means of production and labour. Instead, it often happens between the small and intermediate with the capitalist fishers. In such a conflict, there is a strong alliance between the owner of the means of production and the labour in both camps or small and intermediate, and capitalist classes. In other word, small and intermediate fishers and their labours unite, on the other hand, capitalists and their labours also unite in this conflict. © 2013 Journal of Rural Indonesia[JoRI] IPB. All rights reserved.

Keywords: class structure, class relation, common problem, Balikpapan

Introduction

Indonesia is known as an archipelagic state because it comprises of more than 17,500 islands. In line with that, Indonesia is also said as a maritime state because around 75% of its territory is sea. As an archipelagic or maritime state, capture

fishery plays an important role in Indonesia. In terms of number of fishers, there were 2,935,289 fishers in 2004 (DKP, 2006).

There are two main reasons why class conflict among fishers in capture fishery in Indonesia is important and interesting to be studied. First, social conflicts among fishers

in Indonesia have taken place since quite long time ago. Also, the conflicts have taken place in many parts of the country and often violent. Many fishers have died and a lot of fishing vessels destroyed in the conflicts (see Hidayat, 2006; Yamin and Dhe, 2004; Shaliza, 2004; Kusnadi, 2002; Bailey, 1988; Betke, 1988, etc). More over, since capture fishery resources tend to decrease over time, it may be that frequency of social conflict among fishers will increase in the future. As MacNeillet *al* said: “*Conflict based on climate change, environmental disruption, and water and other resource scarcities could well become endemic in the world of the future*” (MacNeillet *al.*, 1991:20). More over, level of violence of the social conflicts among fishers might also getting worse in the future. This is in line with Homer-Dixon (1999:4) prediction that: “*...in coming decades the world will probably see a steady increase in the incidence of violent conflict that is caused, at least in part, by environmental scarcity*”.

Second, class analysis has almost never been used in the study of social conflicts among fishers in capture fishery in Indonesia. Actually, the use of class analysis in Indonesia in general is still very limited (Farid, 2006). Meanwhile, if we refer to the concept of class as developed by scholars such as Erik Olin Wright (1987), Clement (1986), Fairley (1990), for example, many conflicts among fishers in capture fishery in Indonesia can be categorized as class conflict. For example, conflicts between trawlers and “traditional fishers” prior to 1980, conflict between fishers in Bengkalis (Riau) as well as conflict between purse seiners and traditional fishers in Kota Baru (South Kalimantan) were class conflicts. On the

other hand, the absent of class conflict between owner of means of production and labor in capture fishery is also interesting to be analyzed.

Based on the description above, it is very important and interesting to study class consciousness and class conflict among fishers in capture fishery in Indonesia. This is the main topic of this study.

Methods

This research is basically a qualitative research. Data were collected from January to September 2006 intermittently, mainly through interviews with fishers, government officials, police, and NGO activists. Secondary data were also gathered from several sources such as newspapers and written documents.

Data were analyzed qualitatively by reducing and interpreting them, and then organizing them into topics and themes and present them in a written document. Marshall and Rossman (1989) called this method as inductive and logical analyses. Data analysis was carried out since early stage of the research until report writing was completed. Using Neuman category, the method of data analysis is a successive approximation (Neuman, 1997).

Findings

Class Structure

Before describing class structure of the fishers in Balikpapan, I will explain briefly the basis of social class itself. Following Wright (1987), classes here are determined by ownership of assets in the means of production, including “amount” or “size” of the assets owned. The “amount” or “size” of assets is reflected among others in the number of labour employed. Based on this

criterion, there are four classes of fishers in Balikpapan, namely:

1. Labour (owned no means of production)
2. Small-scale or petty bourgeoisie (employ 0-3 labours)
3. Intermediate-scale or small-capitalist (employ 4 – 10 labours)
4. Large-scale or capitalist (employ more than 10 labours)

It is interesting to note that in practical, fishers social class tends to be related to type of fishing technology. This is in line with Clement observation, as he says that “Each category can be identified and operationalized in terms of specific type of fishing” (Clement, 1986). Holm, Hersoug, and Arne (2000) also found similar phenomenon in Norwegian fishery. They stated that “The class issue in Norwegian fisheries has largely revolved around the question of technology”.

In the case of Balikpapan fishers, fishers using “modified mini trawl” (*dogol*), lift net (*rengge*), fix net (*bagantancap*), and snail trap (*perangkapsiput*) are belong to the small-scale or petty bourgeoisie class. Fishers using fish net with fish aggregating device (FAD) called *rumpon* (the *pejala* fishers) falls under category intermediate-scale or small-capitalist class, while fishers using floating net (called *baganperahu*) as well as mini purse seine (*gae*) are large-scale or capitalist class.

There is another important social class in fishing community, namely the merchant class. This class consists of people who have financial capital that they use to buy fish from fishers and/or finance daily operation of fishing activity. They may even finance fishers to buy fishing boat and fishing gears as well.

Class Consciousness

Class consciousness plays very important role in class formation or in transforming class in itself to become class for itself. Coser stated that: “...*potentiality is transformed into actuality, Klasse an sich (class in itself) into Klassefuersich (class for itself), only when individuals occupying similar positions become involved in common struggles; a network of communication develops, and then thereby become conscious of their common fate*” (Coser, 1977:48-49). Moreover, Stavenhagen explained the relationship between class consciousness and class formation as follows: “*Class consciousness is the link that allows the transformation of a class ‘in itself’, a grouping with objective, ‘latent’ interests, into a class ‘for itself’, or a power group which tends to organize itself for political conflict or struggle and whose interests at some point become ‘manifest’*” (Stavenhagen, 1975:30).

In Balikpapan, class consciousness of the labor class fisher has not developed yet. This is reflected from the fact that labor class has never organized themselves into a “power group”. They never conduct a “class struggle” to pursue their own interests. Some other evident will be presented in the discussion section below.

Fisher classes that have more developed class consciousness are the small-scale or petty bourgeoisie and the intermediate or small-capitalist classes. These two classes have been very active in class struggles to defend their interest. The petty bourgeoisie class, especially fishers that use “modified mini trawl” (*dogol*) fishing gear, for example, have actively involved in conflict with mining enterprises as well as transportation ships that threaten their livelihood by “spoiling” their fishing ground and destroying their fishing boat

and fishing gear. Meanwhile, the intermediate or small-capitalist class (the *pejalafishers*) also very active organized themselves in fighting against a mining enterprise and big-scale fishers from Java. They mobilize fishers to protest and fight against their opponents.

Class Conflict

The most recent and violent class conflict among fishers in Balikpapan territory is the conflict between local fishers and fishers from Pati, Central Java. This conflict took place on 16 January 2006. In this conflict, one of the fishing vessel from Pati, namely KM MutiaraSakti, was burnt down by local fishers in Balikpapan. KM MutiaraSakti was a big fishing vessel (121 gross tonnage, powered by Nissan 280 Horse Power, 30 labors plus one skipper). Fortunately, there was no casualty in this incident, except one of the labor was strike by a local fisher near his right eye. But it was not a serious injure.

Fishers from Pati, Central Java, are considered as “big” or “modern fishers” since they used modern technology such as big fishing boat (more than 100 gross tonnage), engine with more than 200 horse power, advance lighting system to attract fishes (above and under water lights), big purse seine, etc. Number of workers (labors) worked in one fishing boat are around 30 persons.

On the other hand, local fishers (they called themselves as “traditional fishers”), smaller and less advance compare to the fishers from Pati. For example, fishing boat using lift net and fish aggregating device called *rumpon* (the *pejala* fishers) only around 7 to 10 gross tonnage, powered by engine of 30 horse power, and employ around 7 to 10 labors. Even the more modern and bigger local fishing vessel

called *baganperahu* (employ around 9-11 labors), is still smaller compare to the fishing vessel from Pati.

Discussion

Class Structure and Class Relation

In Marx views, class antagonism in bourgeois society is simplified where society is more divided into two camps, namely capitalist and proletariat. As stated in the Communist Manifesto, “*Our epoch, the epoch of bourgeoisie, possesses...this distinctive feature: It has simplified the class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other-bourgeoisie and proletariat*” (Marx and Engels, 1948/1991:9). In fisher community in Balikpapan, this tendency is not the case. On the contrary, fishers class developed into a more complicated structure. However, this is not due to the development of a “service class” (Hamilton and Hirszowicz, 1987) or a “professional-manager class” (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich quoted by Hamilton and Hirszowicz, 1987; and Wacquant, 1991), but by the emergence of what Fairley (1990) called as “the new bourgeoisie” among fishers in Newfoundland, Canada. In early stages, the “owner class” fishers in Balikpapan consisted of one class only, namely small-scale fishers class. Now, as described before, the “owner class” has evolved become three categories, namely small-scale (petty bourgeoisie), intermediate-scale (small capitalist), and large-scale (capitalist) classes.

Class relation between labor and owner of the means of production in capture fishery is unique. On the one hand, they have a “patron-client” relationship,

where the owner of the means of production help his clients such as lending and giving money, financing wedding party, paying travel costs to go home, paying medical costs, etc. Since uncertainty of income in capture fishery is very high, most of labor fishers have debts to their patron, and as long as the debt has not been paid yet, the labor has to work with the patron. Thus, the relationship between labor and owner is very strong.

On the other hand, the relationship is also dominative and even exploitative.

According to Wright, "Exploitation... implies more than just economic oppression; it includes both economic oppression and the appropriation of the fruits of the labour of one class by another" (Wright, 1987: 74). Another important element to the concept of exploitation, according to him, is "the welfare of exploiting class depends upon the work of the exploited class" (Wright, 1987: 75). Thus, the relationship between labor and owner can be visualized as in Figure 1.

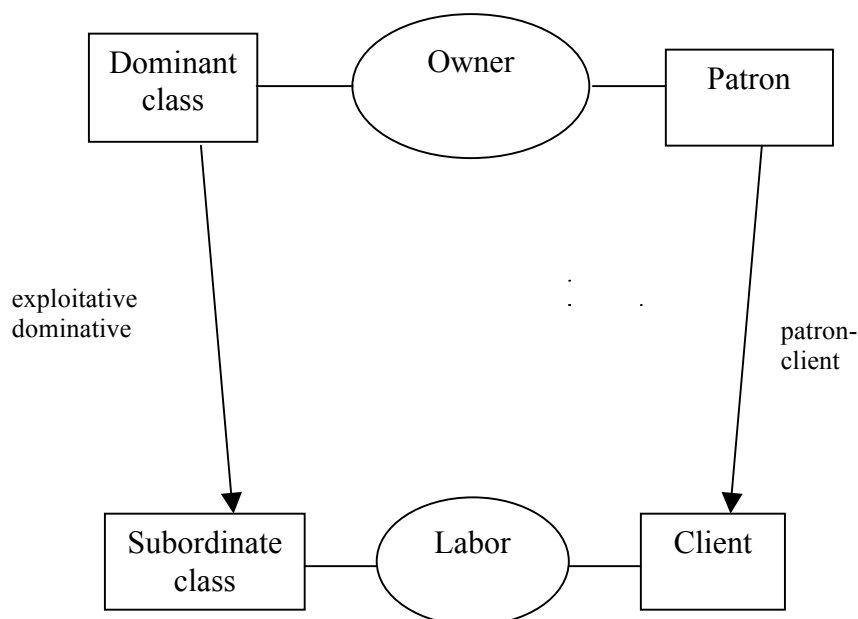


Figure 1. Relationship between labor and owner of means of production in capture fishery

It is also important to note that most of small-scale and intermediate-scale fishers in Balikpapan have a "special relation" with financial providers (called *punggawa*) or the merchant class. The fishers (owner of means of production) have some amount of debts to the merchant (owner of financial capital). As an illustration, 65.3% out of 98 respondents (owner fishers) said that they have a "special relation" (*keterikatan*) with merchant.

This phenomenon has a very important consequence for these owner fishers. Their relation with the merchant class is basically the same as the relation between owner and labor as described earlier. It has the patron-client as well as the exploitative dominative dimensions (Figure 2). In this relation, fishers (owners) have a very weak position against the financial capital owners. The same phenomenon also found by Barbara Neis among fishers in Newfoundland,

Canada (Neis, 1981). Furthermore, this study confirms Clement's finding that:

"Most fishers have experienced the real subordination of labour but not the formal subordination. Those who continue to own (nominally) or rent boats have possession but not real economic ownership, and crews have neither possession nor real economic ownership, yet neither group has been formally subordinated to capital in the sense of

becoming wage labour employees"
(Clement, 1986 :195-196).

Based on this finding, it is very important to separate between ownership of means of production and ownership of financial capital in capture fishery. In this case, the most important determinant of class exploitation is not ownership of means of production as emphasized by Marx, but ownership of financial capital.

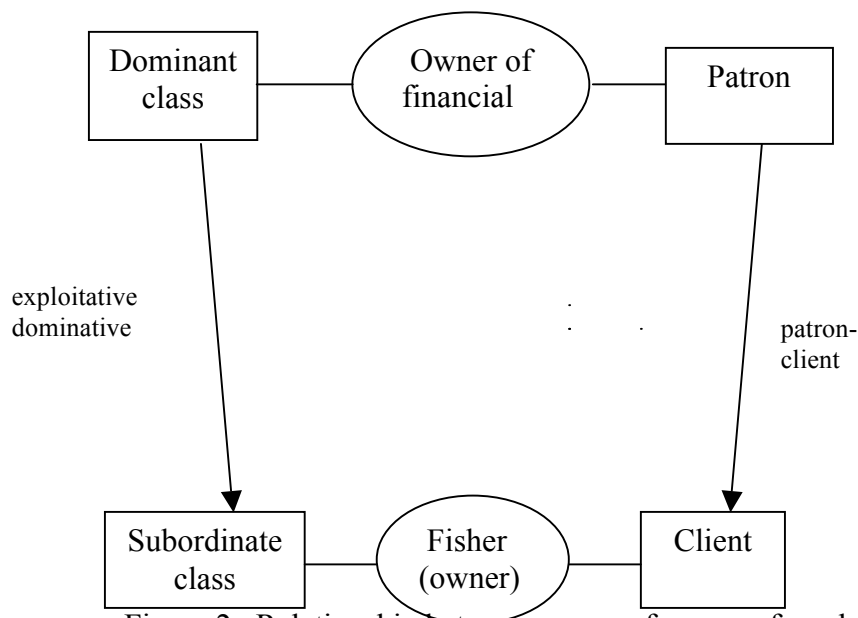


Figure 2. Relationship between owner of means of production and owner of financial capital in capture fishery

Class Consciousness

As explain before, class consciousness of the labor class fishers in Balikpapan has not developed yet. There are at least six factors that contribute to the undeveloped of class consciousness of labor fishers in Balikpapan, namely:

1. Fragmentation.

As we know, fishers work in each fishing boat separately. This condition creates a sense of unity and social cohesion among fishers in each fishing boat, including the owner. More over, actually, fishers in each boat involve in a kind of

“latent competition” with each other in seizing fish in the sea. Furthermore, as Muszynski (1986:99) said, fishers were also divided by gear (such as *pedogol*, *pejala*, etc). Similarly, competition among fishers of different fishing gears is often more severe.

When I asked, “If fishing is analogized with football, who do you consider as friends in one team?”, 68.7% out of 99 labor fishers said that “all fishers in one boat, including the owner”. On the other hand, to the question “who do you consider as your opponent team”, 11% out of 100

labors said “all fishers from other boat, and 76% said that “only big/modern fishers”.

2. Class permeability.

Class permeability refers to the level of openness of a class boundary (Wright and Cho, 1992:85). Class permeability of labor fishers in Balikpapan is very high. For example, 79% out of 100 labor fishers said that they work together with the owner of the means of production in the boat. In the boat, they work, eat, drink, sometimes sleep together. As one fisher said, they are like one family in the boat.

More over, some labors also stay in the house of their boat/gear owner. Many others also have families as owner of means of production (for example, 68% out of 100 labors said they have family as owner of means of production and 50.5% out of 95 labors said that they have family relationship with the owner whom they work with now). Some labors have also experienced themselves as an owner, and 97% out of 100 labors said that they hope they can own boat and gear in the future. This very important, as Macdonald and Connelly said, “...*the experience of owning a boat, or the aspiration to become a boat owner coloured their consciousness while they were in a working class position*” (Macdonald and Connelly, 1989:71).

3. Dependence.

Labor fishers depend heavily on their “patron” (owner of the means of production). With their socio-cultural background, it seems difficult for them to find out alternative jobs out site fishery. More over, the also often get “help” from their patron in difficult times, such as providing money, food, etc. Labor fishers thought that “without that person (his patron), I wouldn’t eat”, said a senior labor fisher.

As an illustration, 51.5% out of 99 labors said that they feel they have a “moral debt” to their patron, and 21.5% said that they still have some debts (money) to their patron. Not surprising if 34.4% out of 90 labors said that there is no need to have a separate labor fishers organization as means to struggle, and 84.7% out of 85 labors said that it is enough to have fishers organization as a whole, consisting of owner and labor fishers.

4. Lack or absent of leader.

As Marx noted, a leader (“spoke person”) plays an important role in developing collective ideology and class consciousness. Unfortunately, there is no one that can be considered as a leader among labor fishers in Balikpapan. They tend to become followers of their patron. Instead, leadership much better developed among boat/gear owners.

5. Lack of common problem or enemy.

Common problem or common enemy is very crucial in rising class consciousness and class struggle. So far, there is no phenomenon that can be considered as common problem or common enemy by labor fishers in Balikpapan. As mentioned above, they don’t consider that owner of the means of production as their enemy, for example. On the contrary, they consider them as their “helper” or “saviour”. In terms of income sharing system, for example, they thought that the system is “all right”, nothing wrong. It is already practiced from generation to generation, it is their tradition.

Out of 100 labors, 20% said that the sharing system is “very fair” and 76% said “fair”; only 4% said “less fair”. On the other hand, when asked “do you feel any injustice/unfairness in working as labor fishers”, 89% out of 100 labors said “no”.

Also, to the question “are those patrons often seeking their own benefit at the expense of labors”, 89.7% out of 97 labors said “no”.

Problems that often arise among labors are common problem for fishers as a whole (owners and labors). For example, problem related to fishing ground, fuel price, etc. These problems unite fishers as a whole, or at least unite fishers of same fishing gears.

6. *Payment system.*

Payment system to labor fishers in Balikpapan is not given in the form of fix salary. The system is called *bagihasil* (literally “result’s share”). The share system is vary among different fishing gears. In some cases, the share is given to boat’s motor (engine), fishing boat, fishing gear, and the workers (including the owner). The amount of share varies each trip, depending on the amount of fish that they get each fishing trip. When they catch a lot, every body will get more share and vice versa. Thus, the payment system creates a sense of togetherness among all of them, including the owner.

Class Conflict

1. *Pattern of class conflict*

This study shows that class conflict among fishers in capture fishery exhibit a unique pattern. In this case, and actually in most cases in Indonesian capture fishery, class conflict does not happen between the owner of the means of production and the labor classes, but between “big/modern” fishers and smaller-scale/”traditional” fishers classes. The determinant of these classes is not the relation to the means of production, but the scale of the means of production (fishing boat and technology). Thus, if Marx undermined the role of size or scale of enterprise in determining social class, in line with Wright (1987) this study

shows that in capture fishery, size or scale of enterprise (means of production) plays a very important role in class formation and class conflict.

Moreover, it is also interesting to note the importance of “production unit” or “fishing unit” and/or type of fishing gear in class conflict in capture fishery. On the one hand, fishing unit and/or fishing gear of the *same scale and/or type* unite the two classes that in Marx’s view are always in conflict one another or “*stood in constant oposition to one another, carried on an unerrupted, now hidden, now open fight,...*”(Marx and Engels, 1948/1991: 9), namely owner of the means of production and labor. On the other hand, fishing unit and/or fishing gear of *different scale and/or type* divide each of the two classes that in Marx’s view supposed to be unite, namely the owner of the means of production class and the labor class. Thus, in this class conflict, the “big fisher” class consists of the owners of the means of production and the labors of the “big-scale” fishing unit. In other word, the owner class and the labor class unite and become one class, labelled as the “big fisher” class. On the other hand, their opponent, the “small fisher” or “traditional fisher” class also consists of owner and labor classes of the smaller-scale fishing unit. In other word, they also unite and become one class called the “small fisher” or “traditional fisher” class. This class conflict patter can be shown as in Figure 3.

It is interesting to note that in this class conflict, labor class is “not counted” or considered as an autonomous or independent class. They are attached to the class of the owner of the means of production where they work. Thus, they are part of the “big fisher” class as well as “small fisher” class and in conflict one

another. Therefore, in analyzing class consciousness, class formation and class conflict, scale of fishing unit and type of fishing gear are very important to be taken into account. This phenomenon is related

to the characteristics of the “production process” of the capture fishery which is also related to the characteristic of its resource, namely common poll resource.

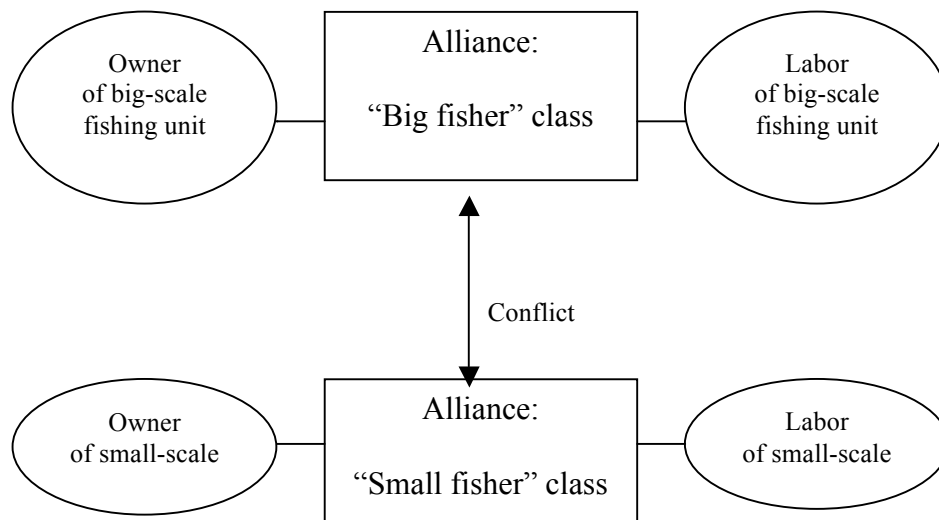


Figure 3. Pattern of class conflict among fishers in capture fishery

2. Main issue and level of violence

What is the main issue that provoke class conflict between “traditional fishers” in Balikpapan and “modern fishers” from Central Java? In this case, it is not exploitation, but domination is the main issue. Domination took place in fishing activity where the “big-modern fishers” from Java dominate the local “traditional fishers” in Balikpapan. As a result, the traditional fishers’ catch decreased significantly which means that their livelihood was threatened seriously.

Domination of the “big-modern fishers” took place up to several miles from their fishing vessel. I called the distance where domination is still taken place as “domination distance”. According to the local fishers, within this “domination distance” (around 4 to 5 miles), all fishes were attracted or “soaked” by the modern fishing vessels. This is the reason why their

catch drop significantly whenever the “modern fishers” operated near their fishing ground.

Actually, the traditional fishers in Balikpapan have tried to resolve it through several ways such as giving warning and asking help from local government, but without positive result. Finally, they took their own way by chasing and burning one of the fishing vessel. Thus, as Betke said, *“Finding themselves trapped in an increasingly hopeless situation, Indonesian fishermen eventually rebelled and desperately counter-attacked the representative of a modernization that threatened their survival”* (Betke, 1988: 59).

Although the underlying or fundamental issue is domination, but for the small-scale fishers the main issue decrease of catch due to the operation of big-modern fishers from Java near or in their fishing

zone. Thus, following Coserdefinition, this was a realistic issue. However, even though it was a realistic issue, it was violent conflict because it was about their livelihood. Therefore, level of conflict violence is not only determined by realistic versus nonrealistic characteristic of the issue as Coser argued, but also whether or not it is about subordinate class livelihood. If the issue is about their livelihood (threatening their livelihood or their survival), the conflict tends to be violent.

The Important of Common Problem or Common Enemy

Based on this study, I would argue that common problems play a very crucial role in “initiating” class consciousness as well as class struggle. It was common problems fishers faced that rose consciousness among them that they were “disadvantaged”(dirugikan) by other classes. It was common problems as well which force” them to organize themselves into “class struggles” against their opponents. Moreover, class consciousness tends to reinforce class struggle and vice versa. Furthermore, class consciousness and class struggle also drive class formation and vice versa. Thus, the relation among class consciousness, class struggle, and class formation is a dialectical.

Actually, the importance of common problem or common enemy has also been emphasized by several scholars. For example, Lewis Coser (1956) said that different or even antagonistic groups can be united when they face a “common danger”. More over, Coser stated that: “...*potentiality is transformed into actuality, Klasse an sich (class in itself) into Klassefuersich (class for itself), only when individuals occupying similar positions become involved in*

common struggles; a network of communication develops, and then thereby become conscious of their common fate” (Coser, 1977:48-49).

Meanwhile, relation among class consciousness, class struggle, and class formation has also been emphasized by many scholars. For example, as quoted before, for Stavenhagen, “*Class consciousness is the link that allows the transformation of a class ‘in itself’, a grouping with objective, ‘latent’ interests, into a class ‘for itself’, or a power group which tends to organize itself for political conflict or struggle and whose interests at some point become ‘manifest’*” (Stavenhagen, 1975:30). In other words, class consciousness affects class formation. Similarly, Dahrendorf maintains that “...*the force that effects class formation is class interest. In a sense, class interests precede the formation of classes*” (Dahrendorf, 1963:14). On the other hand, in his book “*The Function of Social Conflict*”, Coser (1956) emphasized relation between “action” (class struggle) and class consciousness. He argued, “*Only through and in action can its members become conscious and aware of their class identity*”. Meanwhile, Fairley (1990) highlight relation between the class struggle and class formation. He said: “...*class formation and social development are seen as effects of the struggles of concrete actors...*”.

Based on the description above, the relation among common problem or common enemy, class consciousness, class struggle, and class formation is a dialectical. As Carchedi said, “*The dialectical method does not consider phenomena as dependent and independent variables. Rather, there are determinant*

and determined social phenomena. They all interact with, and modify, each other so that a certain instance's realization is the result of the interaction of all instances,

determinant as well as determined' (Carchedi, 1989:119). This relationship can be drawn as in Figure 4.

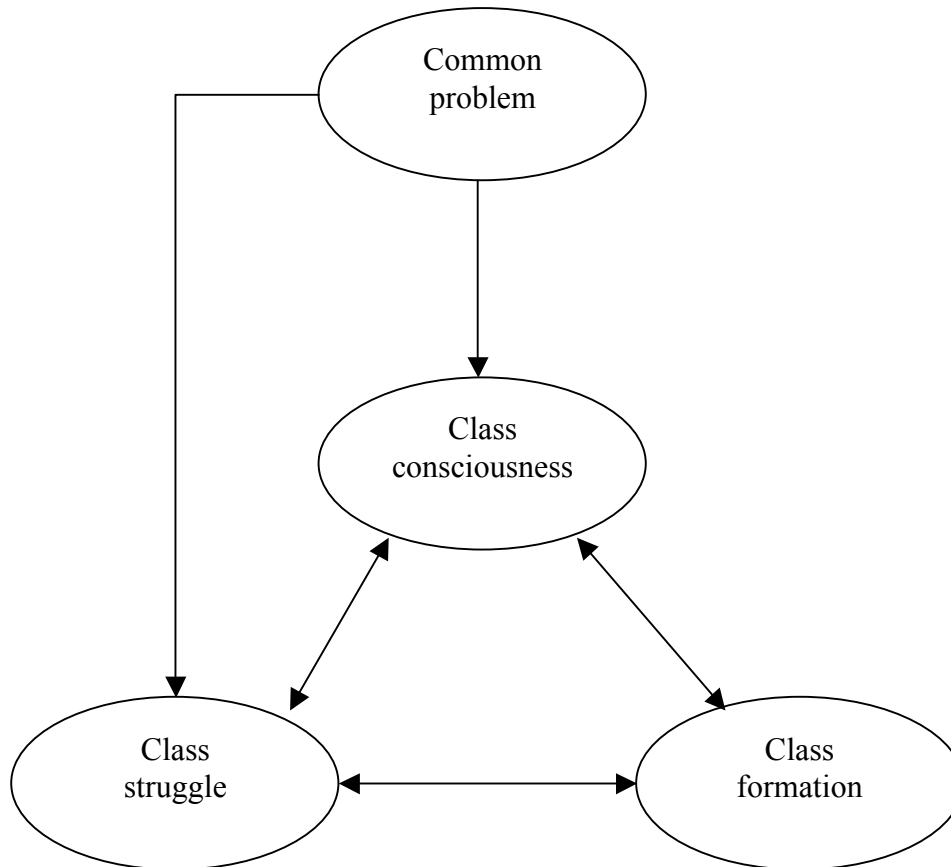


Figure 4. Relation among common problem, class consciousness, class struggle, and class formation.

Conclusion

There are several conclusions that can be drawn from the preceding description and discussion.

1. Class structure of fishers in capture fishery has not become simplified and more divided into two camps. On the contrary, it developed into a more complicated; the owner class has developed into three classes.
2. Relation between owner class and labor class contains two dimensions, namely patron-client and exploitative-dominative. These two dimensions are

also characteristic of relation between merchant class and owner class, especially small and intermediate classes.

3. Based on the conclusion number two above, labor as well as owner of the means of production in capture fishery, especially small and intermediate fishers, generally experience domination and even exploitation. Moreover, this phenomenon also shows that ownership of means of production and ownership of financial capital need to be separated in capture fishery.

4. Class consciousness of the labor class has not developed yet, and therefore labor class is only a class in itself, not yet transformed into a class for itself. There six factors that contribute to this condition, namely fragmentation, high class permeability, dependency, lack of leader, lack of common problem or enemy, and payment system.
5. Most often and violent class conflict in capture fishery is not between the owner of the means of production and labor classes, but between “big class” and “small class” fishers. In this class conflict, the “big class” fishers (owner of the means of production) and labor who work with them unite, while the “small class” fishers (owner of the means of production) and labor who work with them also unite. Fishing unit plays a very crucial role in uniting the two classes in each camp.
6. Common problem or common enemy plays a very important role in initiating class consciousness and class struggle. Meanwhile, relationship among class consciousness, class struggle, and class formation is a dialectical, that is class consciousness effect class struggle and vise versa, class consciousness also effect class formation and vise versa, and class struggle effect class formation and vise versa.

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