

# A FRIGHTENING PUBLIC SPACE: THE SOCIAL PHENOMENON OF MOTORCYCLE GANGS ON THE HIGHWAYS OF MAKASSAR CITY 2014

Sebuah Ruang Publik yang Menakutkan: Fenomena Sosial Geng Motor di Jalan Raya Kota Makassar 2014

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## Abstract

Crime in urban areas is a social phenomenon that is sometimes very disturbing to society, so that it is sometimes imagined as a terrible space of horror for many people. A reality like this has happened on the highway of Makassar, a city in Indonesia located in the province of South Sulawesi. This criminal practice was carried out by a group of motorbike riders at night. This research examines several factors that cause crime and possible solutions, so that it does not have a negative impact on public peace and damage the city's image. This research method is descriptive using qualitative data. The results of the research show that the emergence of the phenomenon of motorized crime committed by teenagers is partly triggered by a lack of control from both parents and city security guards. As a result, criminal practices occur which cause road users to become victims.

## INTRODUCTION

Cities and social problems in general are inseparable with their development, and cities in Indonesia including Makassar are no exception. One of the crucial problems that has become a common concern in the capital city of South Sulawesi province (Aswi & Sukarna, 2022) is the emergence of a group of criminals riding motorcycles, especially in 2014. The people of Makassar named them as motorcycle gangs, a title that is actually too special. The brutal actions and aggressive behavior of the motorcyclists at night became a very real social phenomenon that disturbed the peace of life in the city (Sharkey, 2018) of Makassar. It is proven that many people who have nighttime activities, whether as workers in shopping centers, roadside vendors, peddlers, or other types of activities, are often afraid and worried about the reoccurrence of these motorized criminals (Sukor, Tarigan, & Fujii, 2017).

The emergence of various concerns or unrest in the city due to the actions of motorized criminals is quite reasonable because of their actions that know no mercy, such as: robbing other people's goods or vehicles, robbing mini markets, committing murder and so on. In general, members of motorized groups who like to commit crimes consist of young people in their teens. Their phenomenal action on the highway is riding a motorcycle at high speed, tends to be brutal, and is also accompanied by the sound of motorcycle exhaust which has a loud voice. This is where we find it difficult sociologically to categorize their actions as a type of ordinary juvenile delinquency, because their actions violate social norms and disturb public peace. This phenomenon has clearly harmed the public space (A. Ahmadin, 2024b), namely the city highway, which is ideally traveled by motorists safely and comfortably. On the other hand, the actions of this group of motorized criminals not only disturb and threaten the safety of others, namely road users, but also personally damage and harm themselves.

An interesting question related to this urban social phenomenon (A. Ahmadin, 2024a) is whether it only occurs in Makassar? It turns out that some research results show that in several cities in Indonesia similar things are also found. A study on aggressive behavior among motorcycle gang

members in Medan city, North Sumatra province, explained that there was a difference in the level of aggressive behavior between adolescents with Batak ethnicity, which was higher than that of Javanese ethnicity (Hasmayni, 2016). The results of another study on the social construction of motorcycle gang members in Bandung city, West Java province, showed that this criminal behavior was associated with the process and dynamics of self-meaning formation (Hadisiwi & Suminar, 2013). In a different perspective, a 2015 study in Palu city, Central Sulawesi province, using criminological analysis, labeled the actions of motorcycle gangs as a form of juvenile delinquency (Jufri, 2016). Another research on juvenile delinquency in the motorcycle gang community in East Jakarta is associated with negative behavior and deviations from social norms. The phenomenon is shown in various behaviors, such as: wild racing, drug use, gambling, brawls between motorcycle gangs, destruction of public facilities, and free sex practices (Matondang, 2011).

The criminal behavior of motorcycle gangs in other countries has been the topic of many studies, such as the deviant behavior of American-based motorcycle clubs called secret and dangerous motorcycle clubs. The results of the study, which used LexisNexis newspaper searches, showed that members of the top four motorcycle gangs were involved in various criminal acts with organized crime models such as drug and weapons trafficking (Barker & Human, 2009). Another unique phenomenon related to motorcycle gangs was also revealed in a study that questioned the actions of female gangs among the thousands of groups it surveyed and according to it, these gangs originally originated from the Five Point district in Manhattan. It was also explained that out of the 1,313 groups surveyed, there were at least six female gangs that carried out actions such as applying makeup, wearing branded jeans, and other types of clothing. Regarding the number of female gangs, this study uses the term "about half a dozen" (Hopper & Moore, 2020). A study in the Netherlands showed that motorcycle gangs were punished more often than the average motorcyclist. These convictions are not for minor offenses, but for serious crimes and tend to be violent (Blokland, Van Hout, Van der Leest, & Soudijn, 2019).

The various research results prove that the social phenomenon of motorcycle gangs is not a single issue in urban narratives, but instead is a multiple reality that has a number of similarities in terms of motives, actions, and consequences. The interesting thing about the study of motorcycle gang actions in Makassar city, in this paper will be connected with life style theory to analyze the causes of the trapped motorcycle gang in the exhibition dramaturgy stage. In addition, this study is also oriented towards the discussion of the phenomenon of damage to the image of the city's public space and personal self-image for the perpetrators of motorcycle gang crimes.

## METHOD

This type of research is descriptive qualitative, from the aspect of data and analysis (M. Ahmadin, 2022). The type of data used is in the form of direct observation of the condition of the Makassar city highway, especially at night, namely in 2014. In addition, data obtained from the results of interviews with 10 road users were also used with the aim of knowing how worried or perhaps fearful of the possibility of crossing paths with motorcycle gangs on the highway at night. The technique of determining informants was carried out randomly (Wildemuth, 2016) with the consideration that all road users have the same opportunity to provide information. Meanwhile, interviews were also conducted with 3 people who had the experience of crossing paths or had seen motorcycle gangs in action. Some other data were used and obtained from several writings related to the emergence of the social phenomenon of motorcycle gangs in 2014. The technique of presenting the research results is carried out in a descriptive form that dialogues between data and theory which then results in analysis to arrive at conclusions.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

One of the most disturbing and frightening phenomena in public life in the city of Makassar, especially in 2014, is the emergence of crimes committed by groups of motorized youths. The actors of these crimes, which often appear and always ask for victims including innocent parties, are then familiarly called motorcycle gangs (Lauchs, Bain, & Bell, 2015). Such is the popularity of this term that its presence has added another item to our knowledge about the types of crimes (Ioannou,

Canter, Youngs, & Synnott, 2015) committed in Makassar. If previously the target of people's vigilance and caution was only on the perpetrators of crimes called thieves, pickpockets, and snatchers, then the public is again familiarized with a new mode of crime called motorcycle gangs. In fact, the crimes committed by these relatively young people are even more dangerous than other types of crimes. In some cases, they not only disturb road users but also disturb some public places such as coffee shops (Ahmadin, 2014).

These urban social phenomena (Cheshmehzangi, 2015) in the form of crime lead (Sampson & Raudenbush, 2001) us to want to find out or at least find comparisons about similar things in other places. At least it can be used as material to identify the existence and characteristics of each in an effort to find the root causes and solutions. Japan, for example, is interesting as a comparison regarding the phenomenon of motorcycle gangs (Lauchs, 2020) that once had gait and had drained the attention of many parties on it.

### **Narrative History of Motorcycle Gangs**

In Japan, a motorcycle gang called Bozoku was popular in the 1980s (Narumi, 2010). The name of this gang is quite unique, Bozoku, which means "Reckless Tribe" (Armstrong, 2012). The members of this group were a combination of young motorcycle hobbyists who modified their vehicles by combining Japanese motorcycles (Tomida et al., 2005) with parts from American Chopper (Mazzarella, 2008) and British Cafe Racer (Cole, 2020). One of the most notable features of their vehicles is the connection exhaust that makes a big noise when driving or convoying on the highway. In addition, this group likes to drive without wearing a helmet and break through traffic lights at will. The distinguishing element between one motorcycle gang and another is the modification model and sticker (logo) of the group (Ahmadin, 2014).

In fact, long before the 1950s, there was a motorcycle gang called Kaminari Zoku (Lightning Tribe) in Japan (Narumi, 2010). The group, which came from lower-middle-class families, often showed their actions by carrying a number of iron battering rams and Molotov cocktails to confront their opponents or enemies. However, their golden age only lasted until the 2000s, because since 2004 the Japanese government revised the road rules that gave the police the right to arrest members of these motorcycle gangs (Ahmadin, 2014).

In Indonesia, the phenomenon of motorcycle gangs was present in the 1980s (Anggraini, Uksan, Kusuma, & Widodo, 2023), which is said to be due to the difficulty of finding automotive events by making it a place to channel hobbies. However, this group of bikers, who were said to be simply channeling their passion, ended up committing acts that disturbed the community. So what is the process of the birth of the motorcycle group in Makassar?.

#### *Motorcycle Gang Crimes in Makassar*

It is very difficult to determine the emergence of this group without adequate data support, except to simply reveal its actions that harm and disturb many parties. In the midst of the public's longing for security and the desire to be free from the nuisance of motorized crime, the problem actually settles among the reasons for the difficulty of the security forces to eradicate it. Ironically, the security forces even consider the phenomenon of motorized crime as an act of "juvenile delinquency".

Observing the "cold attitude" of the security forces (Biddle, 2017) has the potential to create the impression in the community that the police are ignoring this case by simplifying the problem. Even though this mode of crime (Laaksonen & Heiskanen, 2014), which is considered juvenile delinquency (Thompson & Bynum, 2016), has claimed lives. The real important thing in this issue is to identify the meta-principles behind the crimes they commit, rather than considering them as ordinary crimes. We believe that they come from good families who have been trained to have commendable attitudes and personalities.

### **Behind Motorcycle Gang Crimes**

The problem is only that there is an increase in impersonal traits in their social life, thus triggering them to commit deviant acts which Durkheim called social deviation (Diaconescu, 2017). The interesting question is what are the major forces that reside in the minds of our teenagers and

trigger criminal acts? (Olásolo, 2005) This is among others what Philip Zimbardo reviewed in “The Time Paradox” (Boyd & Zimbardo, 2012), that every human decision and action including the results are determined by the major forces in his mind.

In addition, labeling this crime as the work of a motorcycle gang seems inappropriate. The reason for this is because being called a motorcycle gang can be a source of pride and make it seem as if they are acting on a ritualized theatrical stage. They will always commit various crimes as if they are on stage and watched by many people. This phenomenon of action is what David Chaney, in the book “Life Style”, describes as humans trapped in the dramaturgy of the exhibition (Chaney, 2023).

Finally, the collective consciousness must be awakened and agree that the phenomenon of motorized crime is the shared responsibility of all levels of society. Should we just ignore it and consider it as juvenile delinquency and agree with the term Makassar as an unsafe city? It is important for the authorities to answer this question and community support is needed. Don't call them motorcycle gangs, because they are criminals who happen to ride motorcycles to terrorize and cause trouble.

## CONCLUSION

A frightening public space is a representative depiction of the situation on the Makassar city highway due to the emergence of social phenomena in the form of crimes committed by motorcycle gangs. The brutal actions and crimes of motorcycle gangs in Makassar are in fact not a single issue, because at almost the same time similar crimes were also found in several cities in Indonesia, such as: Jakarta, Bandung, Medan, Palu, and other cities. The trigger for this crime is related to the trend of juvenile delinquency and a lifestyle that is far from the ideal standard of social norms. Along with this, there is an increase in impersonality due to promiscuity among teenagers, triggering a series of criminal acts and behaviors. This condition is exacerbated by the loss of parental control of each teenager, so they feel free to act as they wish. In addition, the motorcycle gang label attached to their existence makes these free-living teenagers feel like they are on stage being watched by many people as well as being a source of pride. Finally, it must be realized that the criminal acts of motorcycle gangs not only harm and damage the image of the city that has been built over a long period of time, but also damage themselves both their image and their future.

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