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CROSCUTTING ISSUES IN THE KALIMANTAN CONFLICTS

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Following an increasing number of violent ethnic and religious incidents in the 1990s, the early conflicts in West Kalimantan provided templates for more deadly, organized violence in Kalimantan and beyond. The conflict that began in the closing days of 1996 in Sanggau Ledo (West Kalimantan) between Dayaks and Madurese was triggered by what would normally have been an insignificant altercation between youths at an outdoor music concert. It could escalate and spiral out of control in part because it provided an opportunity for redressing ethnic-based grievances against a state that was perceived as weak and experiencing a crisis of succession. A weak minority group, the Madurese, was an ideal target, symbolizing the state's disregard for the prerogatives of the Dayaks, a disregard expressed since the 1950s and particularly by the New Order regime from the late 1960s on. The Sanggau Ledo and Sambas conflicts also demonstrated the effectiveness of ethnic war and ethnic cleansing for augmenting the political bargaining power of local ethnic elites in an environment of decreasing state control and with pressure building for increasing regional autonomy and ethnic representation.

With hindsight, of course, it is easy to regard the Kalimantan conflicts as entirely preventable. Early detection of mounting tensions

should have tripped a multi-pronged response, including mediation efforts, security sector preparedness, and civil society mobilization for peace. That the conflicts were not prevented, and in a real sense could set the stage for even more deadly conflicts, reflects the disarray in which Indonesia found itself near the fall of the New Order regime and the early Reformasi period. Indonesia was entirely unprepared for the dangers commonly experienced by countries emerging from an authoritarian system and undergoing a process of democratization (Snyder 2000).

Though many different interpretations have been made of the origins and events of the Kalimantan communal conflicts and the motivations behind the actors involved, a number of key cross-cutting issues can be identified, along with similarities and differences. These concern the structural backgrounds to the conflicts, the proximate causes, the trigger incidents and escalation stages, evidence of planning, and the results of the conflicts.¹ In this chapter, these issues will be examined, and illustrated with reference to some of the results of our fieldwork.

In the causal analysis of mass violence, it is useful to distinguish between background causes, which may be structural or proximate, and trigger causes. Although various types of causes usually contribute to an outbreak of violence, to correctly gauge the importance of each we need to look at them separately. In the end, some causes might be found to be more significant than others, either in terms of their precedence, their force or their causal direction. That multiple causes interact to cause ethnic conflicts is something that most researchers can agree upon. There is less agreement on the particular cause or causes that take precedence over others. Many researchers, including ourselves, feel that the most important fundamental causes of conflict concern access to valued resources and power (power of course often opening up access to additional

¹ Sources on the violence in Kalimantan include: Achwan et al. 2005; Andasputra and Djuweng 1997; Bertrand 2004:45-58; Casson 2001; Davidson and Kammen 2002; Davidson 2003; Dove 1997; Fakhri 2001; Heidhues 2001; Human Rights Watch 1997; Klinken 2000, 2002, 2005; LMMDD-KT 2001; Peluso and Harwell 2001; *Pembantaian* n.d.; Petebang and Sutrisno 2000; Smith, C.Q. 2005; Bouvier and Smith 2006.

valued resources). Ethnicity and religion can, however, represent powerful tools to mobilize fighters by accentuating perceived ethnic differences.² Religion could not be used very effectively in Kalimantan to confront the Muslim Madurese because many Dayaks (particularly in Central Kalimantan) were Muslim themselves. Ethnicity thus became the principal avenue of mobilization, a particularly powerful one because it ran alongside a perceived route that the central government used to exploit Kalimantan's resources.

Structural backgrounds

The structural backgrounds to all of the Kalimantan conflicts share a number of similarities. All Dayak groups involved were victims of decades of political and economic marginalization by a central government that disregarded demands for political representation and for native ownership of local resources. Large swathes of what they considered their traditional forests farmed for generations through swidden farming were transformed into production forests or agro-industrial estates run by business partners of the regime. This was facilitated by evolutions in the national legal framework, from the 1960 Basic Agrarian Law to the 1967 Basic Forestry Law and the 1979 Village Government Law. The laws gave priority to state institutions over traditional *adat* structures and provided for state or private ownership of forests, effectively preventing Dayaks from accessing lands they controlled under *adat* law. Like the Dayaks, Malays in the Sambas district of West Kalimantan also found they were unable to control their region due to central government-aided intervention into local agriculture. At the same time, Dayaks and Malays felt increasing competition for available jobs and economic niches in the informal, illegal, market and transport sectors, and began to link both their political marginalization and their growing economic woes with the arrivals of migrants. As the migrants often accompanied the construction of roads, the exploitation of mines or the removal of forest, as workers or security guards, they became

² Ethnicity is also a key issue that crops up in frameworks and models for the study of conflict (Smith and Bouvier 2006:v).

identified by locals as one and the same with the impersonal state with whom they had longstanding grievances.

In response to this marginalization, ethnonationalist movements arose, first among the Dayaks and later among the Malays. Like other such “sons of the soil” movements in Southeast Asia (Weiner 1978), they were based on a belief that the political and economic control of their region was being seized by outsiders, and that migrants were representatives and key beneficiaries of this process.³ These grievances were framed as threats to livelihoods and could even be framed as threats to the very existence of the group. Ethnic leaders could argue that the gravest perceived threats—as in Central Kalimantan in 2001 (Bouvier and Smith 2006)—called for preemption. In hindsight, where ethnic groups benefited from the violent conflict, it is difficult to tell if actions were taken in response to perceived threats, or as opportunities to be seized in order to redress past wrongs. When ethnonationalism was longstanding (as among the Dayaks) its institutions and ideologies could contribute to the structural background of conflicts. When it developed in response to specific threats (as among the Malays) it became a proximate cause of a widening conflict.

³ The case is often made that interethnic conflicts in Indonesia’s outer islands are the result of the government’s decades-long transmigration program to move impoverished populations from the inner islands of Java, Madura and Bali to the outer islands, notably Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi and Irian Jaya (now Papua). In such explanations, Transmigration, and the spontaneous movements that often accompanied the official programs, virtually ensured that ethnic strife would follow burgeoning ethnic competition and the relaxation of New Order controls on ethnic-based claims. While such explanations must be investigated in each case, they cannot provide a general explanatory model for the simple reason that in the majority of migration-caused interactions, a reasonable degree of ethnic harmony has been achieved. In many cases, this is due to occupational complementarities, or native perceptions that the influx of migrants has spurred positive development in the form of schools, roads, markets and health clinics. Inadequate planning, lack of concerted planning, or the use of migrants to displace or manipulate local populations, could however provide a recipe for conflict. Thus, while migration *per se* cannot be assumed to be the cause of violent conflict, “mal-migration” might be.

Some observers use the Kalimantan conflicts as examples of a more general, or globally-valid, theoretical construct. Thus, Klare could declare that

...it is not racial animosity between the Penan and Malays or Dayaks and Madurese that is primarily responsible for the bloodshed, but rather the relentless pursuit of resource wealth by powerful government factions (Klare, 2001:208).

Similarly, Barber (1997) identifies elite predation of increasingly scarce resources as lying at the root of conflicts in forested areas such as Kalimantan. Klare's and his research are readily incorporated into the resource and scarcity paradigm usually identified with Thomas F. Homer-Dixon and his colleagues (Homer-Dixon 1999, 2002).

In opposition to the resource and security theorists, others find explanatory value in ideology or historical memory—and its apparent power to lead people away from their rational economic and political interests in the present—and offer arguments that can compete with explanations based on cost-benefit analysis or rational choice theory (e.g., Peluso and Harwell 2001).

Immediately following the Kalimantan riots, most commentaries identified cultural differences and antagonisms as lying at the root of the conflict. To some extent, culturalist arguments are present in all analyses and are still current in many journalistic accounts of the conflict. Many Indonesian and foreign observers were convinced that the violent reputation of the Madurese could explain their involvement in the conflicts and their ultimate responsibility for them. Yet, cross cultural studies of ethnic violence have found otherwise, that “group reputations for violent behavior rarely derive from a proclivity to collective violence, and in those cases where they do the reputation is historical rather than contemporary. Groups with such reputations are, after all, the targets, not the initiators, of collective violence” (Horowitz 2001:154). Though historical evidence of violence by Madurese in the Majapahit or colonial armies certainly exists—as no doubt for many other groups—traditional Madurese revenge-taking (*carok*) is almost always an individual undertaking (Smith 1997, 2000). Thus, the ascription of Madurese as violent may have another aim, insofar as the “combativeness of the target group is

very much on the minds of the attackers and can move them to action” (Horowitz 2001:155). One Central Kalimantan Dayak even admitted as much when he told one of the authors that the Madurese were chosen for attack because, unlike other groups, they would respond to violence with violence.

Proximate backgrounds

Those who participated in this exploitation of Kalimantan’s resource base were drawn from all segments of the society, including Dayak, Banjar, Malay and other local groups. Increasing numbers of migrants from poor areas of Indonesia were attracted to Kalimantan from the mid-1980s by the prospect of participating in this “development” boom.

The migrants became increasingly visible in the shanty towns that grew up near mines and alongside the new roads. In these areas, conditions that facilitate violent expression were many: easy money alongside unemployment, alcohol, gambling, and other vices. In some areas, illegal logging and mining⁴ competed with corporate interests intent on maintaining their exclusive activity perimeter, by force if necessary. Tensions in these areas were sometimes enough to create a trigger incident sparking a wider conflict that would gain much of its steam from the background grievances mentioned in the last section.

Early ethnic conflicts created models and grievances that would later erupt in new violence. Political and economic gains by the Dayaks following Sanggau Ledo contributed to hardening the Malay response to Madurese attacks. Ethnic mobilization both preceded and followed the Sanggau Ledo incident, and laid the groundwork for future conflict. Similar to the creation of Dayak associations just prior to the Ledo incident, Malays responded to initial clashes with Madurese by forming the Sambas-based Communication Forum of

⁴ In 2003, it was estimated that 33,250 locals conducted artisanal gold mining in Central Kalimantan. A study in Kereng Pangi, a town where violence erupted in 2000, revealed alarming levels of mercury contamination among miners based on tests of blood, hair and nails as well as observations of walking gait (Anon. 2004).

Malay Youth (Forum Komunikasi Pemuda Melayu, FKPM), controlled for the most part by thugs. The arrival of Madurese internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the provincial capital Pontianak following the Sanggau Ledo and Sambas violence gave rise to grievances based on economic competition which, when channeled by Malay ethnic associations, eventually led to the burning down of a Madurese IDP camp.

It has long been supposed that conflict with an out-group leads to increased in-group cohesion (Coser 1964:87-93; Simmel 1955; Sugandi this volume). This proposition was likely operative in the Kalimantan conflicts. Conflict with the Madurese definitely led to increased cohesion among disparate Dayak and Malay groups in West Kalimantan, though it is unclear if cohesion was improved among Dayak groups in Central Kalimantan following the Sampit violence. The hope, of course, is that peace-building efforts and civil society development in the years to come can prove more useful for building cohesion within and across groups.

Trigger incidents

The initial altercations that led to widespread violence were often minor, the sorts of incidents that occur regularly throughout Indonesia but are resolved without leading to further conflict. The theft of a motorcycle, a dispute over a bus ticket, or a scuffle over a girl at a music concert are not normally the sorts of events that spark full-scale ethnic warfare. Yet, the incidents occurred against a backdrop of longstanding grievances, perceived threats, and perceptions that opportunities presented themselves to deal with both threats and grievances. The sparks from the trigger incident were falling on volatile material.

Trigger incidents are in a way the least important of the causes, but they are often the object of considerable contestation, as opposing sides argue over "who started it." Chronologies of the debut of violence are also highly contested documents. An author of a controversial chronology of the Sanggau Ledo conflict spent several months in jail for releasing his document (Human Rights Watch 1997).

Escalation of violence

It was during this escalation phase that planning was most evident. Dayak passed the “red bowl” from village to village and conducted rituals to fortify their fighters in anticipation of immanent war. Sometimes it appeared as if there must have been some pre-planning for the trigger incident itself, so soon after it was a well-organized response forthcoming (as in the Kereng Pangi incident in Central Kalimantan at the end of December, 2000).

The violence could also escalate due to the ineffective response of the security sector. Understaffed and outgunned, police and military often stood by while burnings, lootings and killings proceeded.⁵ Perpetrators, once arrested, had to be released following massive ethnic mobilization. The security forces seemed frequently unable to intervene swiftly, impartially, and with appropriate force. Their orders did not always come down the chain of command in a swift, predictable, transparent, and unambiguous way. Despite an extensive network of functionaries and security units from the neighborhood, hamlet, village on up to the provincial levels, intelligence gathering for pre-empting ethnic, religious, or terrorist attacks was wholly inadequate. Early-warning systems were not functioning, or were poorly equipped. Perpetrators could reason it was unlikely their actions would elicit a strong response, and opt for violent action. Last, but not least, police-military rivalry sometimes colored the engagement the security sector did undertake.

Under these conditions, opportunities to mobilize and the presence of “hostile myths” perpetuating a sense of threat made it easier for minor incidents to spiral into generalized violence. As Stuart Kaufman has written:

Ethnic war is possible only in the presence of hostile myths; opportunity to mobilize, and fear of group extinction, and it breaks out only if these factors create mass hostility, a within-group politics dominated by extreme nationalist symbolism, and a security dilemma between groups. If any major ingredient is missing, ethnic war cannot occur. If a group's

⁵ On the passivity of bystanders and victims to violence, see Staub 1992:151-165.

myth-symbol complex encourages cooperation with other groups rather than domination or defensiveness—if, that is, people are reasonable and moderate—mobilization for ethnic war cannot begin because extremist politics is not rewarded. (Kaufman 2001:39)

It should be emphasized that this myth-symbol complex referred to by Kaufman developed in Kalimantan as a result of years of exploitation by the center and ethnic mobilization to counter it. Though an ideological construct, it was based on material realities and cultivated by ethnic activism. Thus, escalation was seen as necessary, justified and doable. As Horowitz notes: “When rioting is seen as necessary, when it can be accomplished with impunity, and when it is widely believed to be justified, there is a strong chance it will happen” (Horowitz 2001:331).

Results of the violence

All groups suffered from the violence, losing lives, homes, and livelihoods. Long-abandoned war rituals, traditional weapons, and the practices of headhunting were revived and put into service for a cause that at times appeared aimed at ethnic annihilation. Having fled in terror, many bodies of Madurese villagers were to be later discovered in the forests having died from exposure or starvation, if not decapitation. Perpetrators declared unabashedly that ethnic cleansing was the aim, notably in Sambas in 1999 and in the Central Kalimantan riots of 2001. Native people also suffered when distribution of food, goods and services was disrupted for several months after the conflicts in Central Kalimantan, since the transportation sector had been dependent on the Madurese who fled. The economies of all areas nose-dived in the wake of the communal conflicts, outside investment flows slowed or stopped, and long periods of reconstruction followed.

It is often rightly said that ethnic violence has no winners, that it only produces suffering for all. Although many Dayak leaders expressed satisfaction at the gains made in political and economic terms as a result of the conflicts, these gains came at a high price. Perpetrators as well as victims suffered from intense trauma for years

following the events. Interviews with Dayak fighters reveal deep psychological wounds, in part due to their being forbidden from talking about their participation in any violence. Some violent actors, however, remained proud of their actions, indicating that seeds of violence have been sown in the group. Indeed, in the years following the riots, an increase in vigilante violence, the carrying of weapons, and political militia group formation was detected. Many Dayaks did not feel their security situation had been particularly enhanced following the expulsion of Madurese; quite the contrary. Clearly there was a sense that an ethnonationalist position was being promoted but was not necessarily accepted by all Dayaks.

As time went by, and perhaps as a way of deflecting criticism for not allowing Madurese to return to reclaim their property, West Kalimantan Dayaks and Malays would claim that the economic downturn was short-lived and in fact the removal of the Madurese improved security and economic conditions across the board. This appraisal appears highly suspect, and is in fact impossible to prove since we are unable to judge the economic contributions that might have been made by Madurese had they not fled their homes.

The evacuation of victims from Central Kalimantan

The violence in Kalimantan in 1996-1997, 1999, and 2001 created massive IDP displacements, up to 200,000 Madurese in all. An idea of the costs of ethnic conflict can be had by looking at the case of Central Kalimantan, where, in the space of several weeks in 2001, at least 500 were killed and well over 100,000 Madurese were forced out of the province. Most of the IDPs fled to East Java province, primarily to the island of Madura.

The responses to the violence were crafted on the basis of insufficient or one-sided understandings of the conflicts, or were clouded by vested interests. The decision to evacuate over one hundred thousand Madurese from Kalimantan was one that allowed huge sums of money to be extorted from fleeing victims. One informant interviewed in Madura stated that each family wishing to

board the truck from Sampit to the port had to pay Rp 700,000. Those who wanted to stay were told their security could not be guaranteed.

The decision to order the evacuation of Madurese was based on the supposition, drawn from Dayak versions of the conflict in Central Kalimantan, that the Madurese were the perpetrators and their violent culture prevented future coexistence alongside Dayaks. A media blitz effectively brought home this version of the conflict to a wide audience of Indonesians, and had an effect on decision making with regard to the evacuation and the government's acceptance of Dayak terms for reintegrating IDPs (Bouvier and Smith 2006). Although evacuation may have seemed the only solution at the time, at least to outside observers, it was to affect the surviving victims for years to come.

In the absence of any comprehensive end strategy or repatriation scheme, it soon became evident that the IDPs were in Madura for a long wait. However, integrating the IDPs in Madurese society posed a number of problems. As the towns are small and industry as yet undeveloped, most Madurese live in poor agricultural or fishing communities that are unequipped to absorb massive influxes of IDPs. Madurese villages are fairly self-sufficient units, and there is very little opportunity for paid agricultural work or off-farm work. Agriculture, house-building, and other labor-intensive tasks are generally accomplished through labor exchange, and little cash changes hands. People prefer to call on fellow villagers with whom they have ongoing exchange relations. IDPs interviewed in Madura said they had only been able to find a few days of work since their arrival one or more years earlier. Only those who were able to transfer capital out of Kalimantan, or civil servants who could assume a new posting, had any hope of beginning a life anew in Madura. Without much chance to work for a living, the vast majority of IDPs had to depend on handouts from the government, and when these were discontinued, on begging from neighbors or in the markets.

Thus, the majority of IDPs could never hope to find a future in Madura and, for the Central Kalimantan refugees, had to simply wait for government intervention to allow them to return to Kalimantan. When government hesitated to become involved, Madurese themselves negotiated and eventually accepted the stringent pre-

conditions imposed by the Dayaks for their return. Another difficulty was posed by the fact that the IDPs came from various migrant cohorts. Some migrated to Kalimantan in recent years and could reintegrate or at least count on help from their extended families in Madura; others no longer had families in Madura, having migrated as far back as the early 1900s. Some could not speak Madurese. Despite poverty and the lack of family ties, many villages, religious schools, and private families agreed to provide aid and shelter to IDPs.

It has been said that women “pay the primary price when peace is absent” (York 1998:24). Indeed, in discussions with Madurese refugee women, we noted that the “unanimous” desire—as expressed by the men, to return to Kalimantan and resume their former livelihoods—was not necessarily shared by the women. While men were eager to fulfil their responsibilities as breadwinners, their wives feared for a repeat of violence and the uncertain future for their children. Only after years of waiting in Madura and the withdrawal of government rice subsidies were most of them persuaded to return.

Madurese accepted the government returnee aid, which, like the subsistence aid, was received minus whatever was lost to corruption along the way (Achwan et al.:64-66). By 2005, about 80 per cent of the IDPs had returned to Kalimantan. Their lot, and the future of interethnic society in Kalimantan, is now an urgent research priority.

There are a number of questions that still need to be asked about the IDPs. Have they been accepted in their former villages, or have some areas been declared off limits to Madurese, as some have claimed? Have they been obliged to pay exorbitant sums, often more than their government aid package, to entice squatters to leave their homes and plantations, as many Madurese have claimed? Have they been able to choose their employment options or have some sectors of the economy been declared off limits to them, as some Madurese claim? Have they been accepted as full-fledged citizens of Kalimantan, or are they now considered second-class citizens who will be tolerated so long as they work hard and keep their heads down, as some Madurese claim? The answers to these questions will give us a more accurate idea of the actual human and material costs of the decision made (and not made) when conflict erupted and in its aftermath. For the Madurese in West Kalimantan who still cannot

return to their homes, the question that must be asked is: Have we now an example of permanent ethnic cleansing to serve as a precedent for other Indonesian regions?

Regarding the Dayaks, many questions remain as well. Has security really improved following the conflicts and the return of IDPs? Do Dayaks have better control over their traditional resources and has the sustainability of these resources improved since the conflicts (for example, has there been a decline in illegal logging and mining)? Have political gains been made by Dayaks and if so have these meant a more equitable representation of all parties and ethnic groups in the province? Has *premanism* (thuggery) declined, or has it been more fully integrated into political campaigns as in other parts of Kalimantan? How have youth participants in the violence coped with the trauma? Has the violent training they underwent been maintained in a state of readiness or has it received treatment in the form of psychological counseling or peace building activities? Has corruption been reduced in the police and judicial system, one of the major complaints voiced by Dayaks before the riots? Perhaps most critically, what responses can research offer to suggestions put forth that some “gains” by certain groups were worth the costs of violence?

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