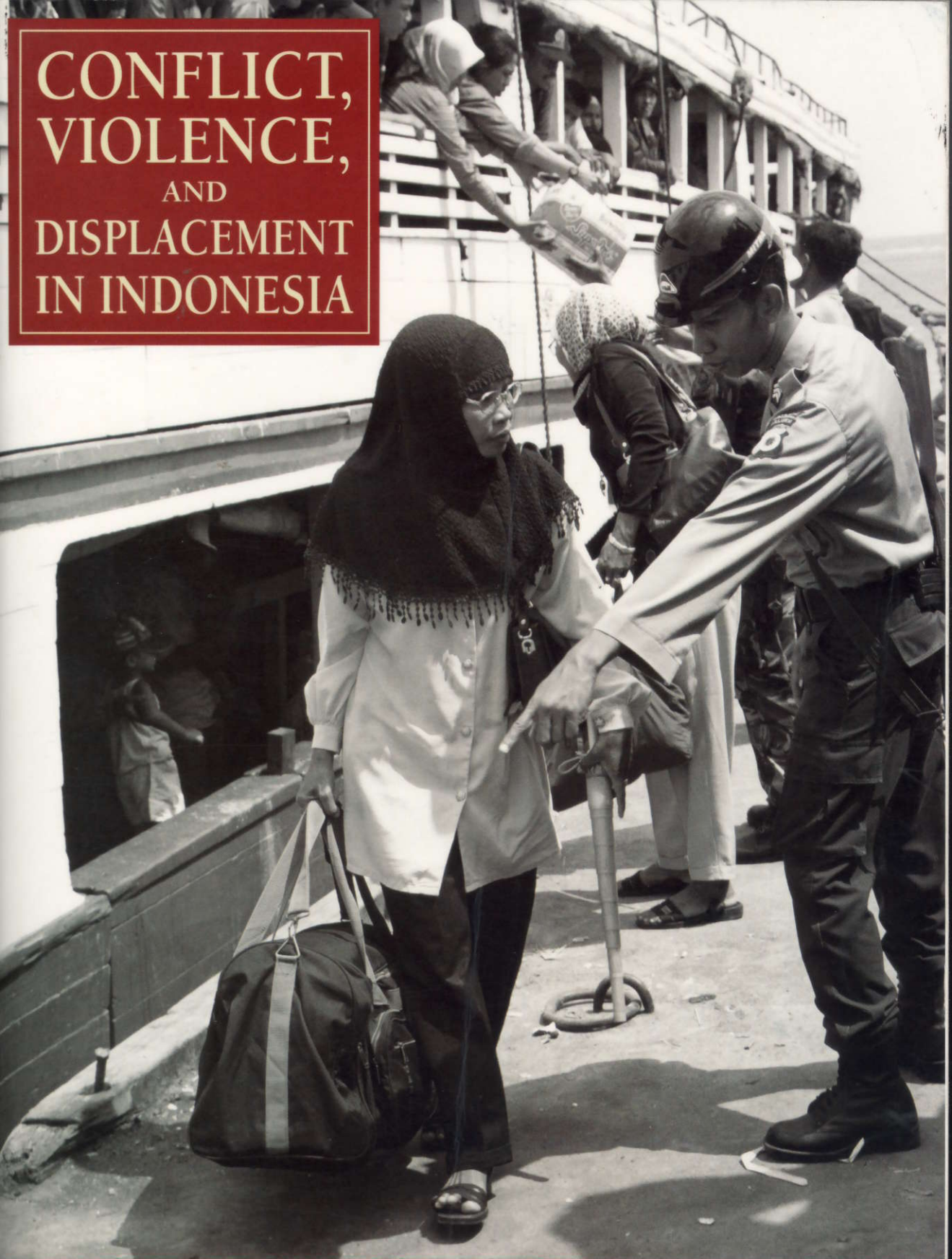


CONFLICT,
VIOLENCE,
AND
DISPLACEMENT
IN INDONESIA



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SPONTANEITY, CONSPIRACY, AND RUMOR: THE POLITICS OF FRAMING VIOLENCE IN CENTRAL KALIMANTAN

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Anti-Madurese riots in Kalimantan in 1996–1997, 1999, and 2001 were marked by displacements, killings, and brutality on a scale not seen in Kalimantan since the military-orchestrated 1967 anti-Chinese violence.¹ In Central Kalimantan alone, in the space of several weeks in 2001, over 150,000 Madurese were forced out of the province and at least 500 were killed. Though very little discussion has focused on the precise chain of events leading up to and continuing through the massacres, much discussion in the press and in scholarly writings on these events has dwelled on the various motivations thought to have driven Dayak and Malays to vent their anger on the Madurese. These motivations range from background causes, such as ecological and economic change, the history of disempowerment suffered by native groups during the New Order regime, and resentment of the relative success of migrant groups, including the Madurese, to proximate and triggering causes, such as rivalry between youths and gangs from the different ethnic groups, failures in the response of the security apparatus, and politicization of ethnicity² and government instability in Jakarta.

The explanation most often given by Dayaks, and the official position adopted by Dayak academics and spokespersons, is that the Madurese, imbued with a

¹ This article is based on fieldwork conducted on several occasions between 2002 and 2005 in Madura (both authors) and in 2002 in West and Central Kalimantan (first author). The opinions expressed are solely the authors', unless otherwise noted. The authors presented some of the information here in separate papers at the Southeast Asian Conflict Studies Network Conference 2004, in Penang, Malaysia, on January 12–15, 2004; and an earlier version of this paper appeared in a special issue of the *Asian Journal of Social Science* ("Violence in Southeast Asia") under the title "Of Spontaneity and Conspiracy Theories: Explaining Violence in Central Kalimantan" 34,3: 475–91. The authors thank the editor and anonymous reviewers for their helpful advice on improving the present text.

² Stanley J. Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), p. 22.

“culture of violence”³ and criminality, and incapable of adapting to local customs, were opposed by exasperated Dayaks, who spontaneously rose up in the face of a planned Madurese “power play” and bombing campaign in the town of Sampit, Central Kalimantan. The Madurese view, which has received little attention, is that they were forced out of Kalimantan by groups that hoped to take over the assets and employment that they had obtained by the sweat of their brow. Conspiratorial and stereotypical thinking—rightly or wrongly—has thus imbued much commentary on these events.

It is striking the extent to which various Madurese points of view have been absent from commentaries on the events in Central Kalimantan, particularly as the Madurese were the principal victims. Most reports of the violence were based entirely on interviews with Dayaks in Central Kalimantan,⁴ and it is primarily from these that the chronology of fateful events leading up to the tragedy is reconstructed. Adding the accounts of Madurese internally displaced people (IDPs) from Sampit and other areas of Central Kalimantan provides a more accurate, or at least more complete, rendition of the events.⁵ Thus, after offering a brief background introduction to the conflicts, we begin by piecing together the accounts of the events leading up to the Sampit massacres, events that to this day remain a focus of contestation. The accounts demonstrate the role of rumors in the prelude to violent confrontations.⁶ Two competing conspiracy theories, in fact, emerge from comparisons of the Dayak and Madurese accounts. We evaluate various elements of these theories and identify their weaknesses, and conclude that a conspiracy—or at least preplanning—cannot be ruled out. That there was a determined and politically effective effort by Dayak elites to frame the conflict, both before and immediately following the physical clashes, is beyond dispute. The discussion then turns to the reasons for the wide dispersion and the tacit acceptance of the Dayak account (that the violence was the result of a spontaneous and defensive uprising). In closing, we show how this acceptance had an impact on government policy because it justified

³ Dayaks, like most other Indonesians, regard Madurese society as violent and Madura Island to be racked by factionalism and frequent revenge killings.

⁴ One study was based on four to six weeks of research in each province and repeated research trips conducted to verify data in 2002 in Madura, East Java, and Central Kalimantan. See Claire Q. Smith, *The Roots of Violence and Prospects for Reconciliation: A Case Study of Ethnic Conflict in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia*, Social Development Papers, Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Paper No. 23 (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2005). As to the chronology of the violence and the underlying causes for it, the study’s conclusions appear to have been reached without input from Madurese.

⁵ A recent work using such an approach is Rochman Achwan, Hari Nugroho, and Dody Prayogo, with Suprayoga Hadi, *Overcoming Violent Conflict*, Vol. 1: *Peace and Development Analysis in West Kalimantan, Central Kalimantan, and Madura*, ed. Glenn Smith (Jakarta: Crisis Prevention and Recovery Unit; United Nations Development Programme, LabSosio and BAPPENAS, 2005). See [http://www.conflictrecovery.org/bin/Kalimantan-final\[1\].pdf](http://www.conflictrecovery.org/bin/Kalimantan-final[1].pdf); the Kalimantan page at www.conflictrecovery.org has links to or copies of some of the other documents cited in this chapter.

⁶ Rumors are frequently mentioned in writings on ethnic conflict as elements of discourse, organizing images, and triggers for violence. See Paul Brass, *Theft of an Idol: Text and Context in the Representation of Collective Violence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); Veena Das, *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots, and Survivors in South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990); Donald L. Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000); and Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002).