Sagu Salempeng Tapata Dua: Conflict and Resource Management in Central Maluku

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Abstract

Communal violent has shattered the image of Maluku as a socially harmonious community where traditional institutions, such as pela and sasi, have been thought to represent or facilitate inter-group harmony and sustainable resource management. More than three years of sectarian conflict has destroyed settlements and resources, and left many displaced people. It has changed the physical and social landscape of communities in Maluku, and broken down various strategies and arrangements that once enabled practical cooperation between individuals and communities in using resources and making a living. Using experience from anthropological field research on local resource management, in this paper I focus on how the recent conflict remade communities in certain ways, how people coped with the unrest, and how unrest impacts on people's relationships and strategies in making a living and using resources. I also consider how the legacy of conflict will affect research in Maluku in the foreseeable future.

1   Introduction

In January 1999, violence broke out suddenly in the provincial capital of Maluku, Ambon, and soon spread throughout the region. It continued for at least four years. Many academics, media observers, and Malukans themselves have analysed the conflict, emphasising various internal and external factors that might

be seen as contributors to the eruption and the perpetuation of the conflict. They have viewed the issue in historical, political, social, religious, and economic, as well as cultural contexts (see e.g. (Aditjondro, 2000, Bartels, 2000, Brouwer and Soselisa, 1999, Bubandt, 2000, Chauvel, 1999, International Crisis Group, 2002, Lokollo, 1999, Pannell, 1999, Pattiselanno, 1999, Tomagola, 1999, Tomagola, 2000). The discussion suggests multiple causality and that the violence is a result of a complex network of factors at local as well as national levels. The local conditions that contributed to the conflict include tensions between locals and immigrant and between Islam and Christianity, disputes over land boundaries and resources extraction, and cumulative resentments at state intervention in everyday life. These were exacerbated by national problems, including the economic crisis that hit Indonesia from 1997 onwards, the impact of political reform, the instability of central government, the national political situation and conspiracy, and also global political movements. Local unrest must be understood in a national and even international framework, and therefore, one needs to be aware of the connection, for example, between the international resurgence of militant Islam and communal tensions in Maluku, and disagreement among political elite groups in Jakarta and the continuing violence in Ambon. In this sense, the Maluku conflict is to some extent borderless.

While the conflict is borderless, it is not "senseless", in so far as local meanings and motivations can be ascribed to the violence. Many Malukans, it is true, still do not fully understand why the conflict occurred or reached such a scale so quickly. In their perception, "it just suddenly blew up", but it is also typically blamed on immigrants and conspiracies by certain parties. They especially censure national and provincial government for failing in the fundamental obligation of the state to provide adequate security to its citizens. The violent conflict caused the disruption of law and order in many communities, and has even destroyed some communities and their resources. It has brought rapid changes to the social and physical landscape of Maluku. The unrest has shattered

the image of traditional Maluku, with its various cultural institutions, which have been thought to facilitate social harmony and sustainable resource management. In this recent case, traditional institutions, in fact, could not control the violence.

Over a long period, communities in Maluku have built and managed various institutions to enable practical cooperation between individuals and communities. Moluccan *adat* institutions had provided mechanisms for dealing with and controlling conflict and promoting reconciliation between different villages and religious affiliations, such as through *pela* alliances. *Pela* is an alliance between two villages or more that is established for particular reasons, such as to give help in times of crisis (e.g. natural disasters, war) and as reconciliation after war or conflict, as well as for reasons of kinship relation, and marriage. *Pela* inter-village alliances were established in different categories and involve villages from the same and different islands as well as the same and different faiths. The sectarian conflict has brought the disruption to law and order and many other local strategies and arrangements within and between communities. Local *adat* seems to have lost its power to control conflict. What has happened to these traditional institutions and Malukans arrangements for living together and managing their resources?

This paper examines a particular the experience of a community on Buano Island during the conflict in 2000–2001, and it looks at how prolonged unrest impacts inter-village relationships and villagers' strategies in making a living and using resources. The case study involves two neighbouring villages that practice different faiths. The villages had developed cooperative management of resources, particularly as a result of wild pigs in their gardens, which were jeopardized by the conflict.

2 The Story from Buano

Buano is a relatively small island, located off the western end of Seram in Central Maluku. It is about 22 km long and 8 km wide

at the widest point. Physiographically, the island is hilly with rapid surface drainage and very low ground water supply. The population is distributed in two main villages of "indigenous" peoples on the southeastern coast of the island, and some immigrant groups of Butonese who occupied hamlets scattered on the northwest to the southern part of the island.

The two main villages, Buano Utara and Buano Selatan, are located very close to each other. Buano Utara is the larger of the two, with a population of 4400 people in 1997. The people of this village are Muslim, have a strong sense of identity based on retention of their local language, and they seem to retain customary practices more strongly than the people in the neighboring village. Although the two villages are of roughly equal territorial extent, Buano Selatan had a population of only about 440 people in 1997. Its people are Christian and are strongly attached to the Ambon Malay language.

In the past the two villages formed a single community. It is said that their ancestors all came from Nunusaku, a secret and sacred place in mainland Seram. The first village on Buano was in the hills and it was later moved down to settle along the coast. The residents built a *baileo* as a village house where village and life-cycle rituals took place and where all village problems were discussed and solved. The *baileo* was called *baileo tujuh soa*, because at that time this community consisted of seven (*tujuh*) *soa* (clan group), and it is still located in the village of Buano Utara. Islam was introduced perhaps when the people became connected to the sultanates on north Maluku, such as Ternate, before the western colonialists arrived in Maluku. With the introduction of Christianity by the Dutch to some of the members in the 17th century, however, Christians set up a new village and the community of Buano split to become two settlements based on different faiths, as reported in a letter of VOC document, dated February 1, 1669 (VOC, 1669). These two communities developed differences in local tradition, economic activities, and resource exploitation based on their distinct religious affiliations.

Although separated by different faiths and traditions, the *orang sarani* (Christians) of Buano Selatan, and the *orang salam* (Muslims) of Buano Utara maintained their "kinship" relationship. The two villages are described as *basudara* (sibling), so it is considered incestuous for the villagers from these villages to marry each other. Several clan (*mata ruma*) names are found in both villages and members still maintain their close relations, attending rituals for building or repairing clan houses. Until about 20 years ago, it is said, the building or repairs of the mosque and the church were collective projects because villagers felt that these religious buildings were owned jointly by both communities.

The type of vegetation appearance and system of land use are also similar in the two villages, including timber forest, short-term food-crops, long term cash-crops, sago swamp, and *imperata* grassland among *melaleuca* trees. The staple diet in both villages includes cassava, taro, yam, banana, and sago and the engage in agriculture, forestry, carpentry, fishing, and some also work outside the island, although garden activity remains the main source of food for household consumption and is a principal source of income. In maintaining gardens, residents of both villages agree that wild pigs are the most destructive pest of their short-term food crops. This pest has increased in numbers along with the increase of human population, and the opening up of more gardens in the last ten to fifteen years. The threat of wild pigs to successful gardening makes cultivators consider how to build good fences and how to set traps or use other strategies to trick the animals.

Control of wild pig populations is a real practical problem in Maluku and the religious division between Muslims and Christians (and Animists) means that pigs are both a source of tension and also a basis for cooperation.[1]. In Buano they are a serious envi-

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[1]2 The Nuaulu in south Seram are an example of a people who are non-Muslim (Ellen, 1996, p. 622) living in an area with demographically predominantly Muslims. This gives the Nuaulu little competition for hunting wild pigs. Furthermore, in the Sepa area of South Seram, controls on pigs may be more effective due to active and effective hunting by a larger population of Christians and the Nuaulu. The Nuaulu do

ronmental problem that is faced equally by those for whom touching or eating of pigs is forbidden by their religion, as well as by those who have a taste for the meat of the animal.

In this case, the wild pig played a practical role in the development of community relations and effective cooperation between the villages with different faiths. The problems associated with wild pigs were overcome through complementary arrangements between the two villages. If there was a pig trapped in a garden in Muslim Buano Utara, because it is forbidden for him to touch the pig, the owner would call a Christian of Buano Selatan to take the pig from the trap. The Christian would willingly help, of course, as he would be saved the time and danger of hunting for pig to obtain valuable meat. Although they built stronger and more expensive fences than their neighbours, Buano Utara people claimed that more pigs invade their gardens than in Buano Selatan because the neighbouring villagers are pig eaters. Every week at least one Buano Utara garden had a pig inside.

I previously argued (Soselisa, 1999) that the wild pig situation in Buano would probably prevent the villages becoming involved in the regional conflict. I suggested that the pragmatic resource problems would be more effective in maintaining cooperative relations between the communities than more abstract *pela* relations. In fact, neither institution could withstand the hostilities. In part, at least, I believe this is the result of increasing influence of external events and processes upon the relatively isolated community, which exacerbates inter-generational differences within both villages.

3   Tension Within and Between Villages

Older people in Buano consider that the younger people have begun to neglect local *adat* which plays such an important role in

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not fence gardens but use them as lures to attract pigs, which are then caught in traps on the edges of gardens. People from Sepa would sometimes seek out the Nuaulu to hunt pig on their behalf (Ellen, pers.comm. June 1999)

community's life. They comment that many young people like to consume alcohol, for example, causing problems in the village when they are drunk. With the increased contact with the outside world, working outside the island, and formal education obtained in places bigger than Buano, such as Ambon, young people may return to their village with new and different opinions about their *adat* and the relations between the two religions. Comments from some younger Buano Utara people who have spent part of their life outside the island indicated that they consider the people in Buano too tied to the old *adat* beliefs, so that they have not "developed". Besides this evident generation gap, factions in local politics were also an important factor in increasing tensions in community life. In Buano Utara, again, political factions emerged and sharpened dealing with candidature for village leader. These tensions within the respective communities in turn contributed to tensions between the communities.

While living as neighbours, sharing the same origins but separated by choice on the basis of religious affiliation, the two villages have been historically involved in conflicts either caused by internal island disputes or as a result of regional conflict. Besides the original division of these villages when the Dutch introduced Christianity, they experienced at least one serious conflict in 1983 when a dispute about marine resources resulted in the burning down of houses in Buano Selatan by a group of Buano Utara attackers. After the incident there was an epidemic in Buano Utara and it was widely believed to be the effect of the violence, which should not have happened between these two villages because they are therefore tied by kinship. The epidemic was seen as vengeance (*bahala*) of the ancestors for the attack on their kin and such people argued that such conflicts must be avoided in the future.

The people of Buano were finally caught up directly in the recent unrest when a group from Buano Utara attacked the Christian village of Alang Asaude on mainland Seram on December 3, 1999, resulting in the death of about forty people from both sides (Media Indonesia, 1999). Then, early on the Sunday morning of January

16, 2000, apparently motivated only by religious identity, villagers from Buano Utara attacked Buano Selatan, destroying houses and the village *adat* house, and burning the church (Maluku, 2000). The attack caused the death of several Buano Utara people and destruction of most of the Buano Selatan settlement, except the area of Kampung Baru, an extension of the village, built later to accommodate population increase. The people of Buano Selatan retreated to, and defended Kampung Baru, while others, especially women and children hid in the gardens and forest. The attack was stopped when an army group arrived from Seram. After the attack, people of Buano Selatan stayed in Kampung Baru with a group of army personnel guarding the settlement.

It was said that there were people in Buano Utara who were against the attack. According to one informant, the attackers had been encouraged by a group of outsiders who entered Buano Utara to initiate the attack, what he called "terror from outside" (*teror dari luar*).[2] He said that old people in Buano Utara feared would happen because the *raja* can no longer control the youths. The *raja* was in a weak position, opposed by a faction dominated by young people who had spent time off island for schooling, at higher levels of formal education, even at university. My older informant stated that the Buano Utara inhabitants had begun to be affected by disease after their attack on Buano Selatan in a way that reminded him of similar retribution after the 1983 attack, but he recognized that this was unlikely to be believed by the younger generations who identified with modern and "developed" ways of thinking. The younger generation no longer accept that disease is retribution from aggrieved ancestors for attacking a neighbouring kin village, and they do not entirely believe in *adat*. The young generation shows more attachment to the wider identity of the *Umat*, which overrules their group identity as Buano people and thus their loyalty to *adat* institutions. The rapid spread of the conflict from the

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[2]3 He refused to say who the outsider group was, but an informant from Buano Selatan said that the group came from Ambon and villages on Haruku.

provincial capital spread to remote areas like Buano, shows how readily people decided to identify themselves with the wider group and problems outside their locality, the result of their progressive encapsulation into wider networks.

4 Ecological and Economic Consequences

The example from Buano shows how rapidly a system of resource management that had been constructed between communities over time can collapse. The destruction of most of Buano Selatan village physically signalled the changing relationship between the two villages and the failure of their integrated resource management practices, which may in turn lead to economic, social, cultural and ecological changes in the future. For example, after the breakdown of social relationships between Buano Utara and Buano Selatan in 2000, the invasion of wild pigs in the Muslim village had increased, and extended right down to the gardens very close to the village.[3] When an animal was caught in a trap, there was no choice other than just to pull it off the garden and throw it as far away as possible. My Buano informant added that the economic life in Buano Utara became harder after the breakdown of relationship between two Buano villages. Wild pigs roam about into people's gardens causing poor harvests, which are insufficient to feed the population. Villagers could not buy produce from their neighbors' garden as they usually did before and some of them had to buy rice from outside. Moreover, Buano Utara residents did not get receive any aid from government or other non-government organizations because they were the perpetrators, not the victims of the attack.

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[3]4 The same problem with wild pigs was faced by Muslim villagers in the Leihitu Peninsula in Ambon Island since the Christians fled the area because of the conflict. A man from Manuala Beach in Kaitetu village commented that every night many wild pigs visit the Muslim villages, and they even attack people. In his theological opinion, the allowing and prohibiting of pig consumption among different people is one of God's creations for balancing the ecosystem. When people go against the rules, disaster comes (Kompas, 2002).

5 *Adat* and Youth

Discussions among Malukans about what happened in Ambon and wider Maluku, and why the violence happened, often end up with the question of what it means to be a "true" Malukan (Brouwer and Soselisa, 1999). Images of Malukan identity are at stake. Informants say that Malukans should do not do these terrible things: "It is not our culture. We have pela, gandong, etc" (Brouwer and Soselisa, 1999, p. 1).

Moluccan culture and identity have a long history of adapting to changing political and economic conditions, from pre-colonial times (such as *patasiwa-patalima*), through the first wave of globalization (European colonialism, Islam, Christianity), to recent times (nationalism, migration, globalization, media penetration). And "violence has often been part of this history, has been constitutive of a plurality of contested and layered cultures and identities, and has been memorised in different accounts of history" (Brouwer and Soselisa, 1999, p. 2). Still, close adherence to *adat* in traditional communities may prevent the breakdown of relationships with neighbours, and *pela* alliances, for example, while formed for the purpose of mutual help, can function as peace-making efforts after conflict or warfare (Bartels, 1977). So, what happened to their *adat*? What happened with local-level practices? Why did they become weak and unable to counteract regional, national and international forces? Why has the local polarization between Muslims and Christians become so great?

Youths played a significant role in the recent violent conflict in Maluku . Examining the relationship among *adat*, power, cultural values, and tensions between generations in Maluku as a whole, youth emerges as a category that lacks the legitimacy and effective power in either *adat* institutions or the broader political economy. They lack employment opportunities and are marginalised by both village and the state. Violence is one of the ways to be someone, to be a *jagoan*, a champion.[4]

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[4]5 Malukan youth gangs are well known in Jakarta. Called *preman ambon*, they are

In the Buano case, local tensions because of the generation gap and local political situation stimulated the breakdown of relations between the two neighboring kin villages in the context of the regional conflict. Religious affiliation has more appeal as the basis of identity than local traditional community institutions in *adat*. Sharing ancient culture no longer helped in the present unrest. As it emerged during the conflict, ethnic identity has weakened and failed to overrule religious identity and solidarity.[5] The conflict divided Malukans into two distinctive groups, forming separate localities, with strict physical boundaries, that cannot be traversed as before. Individuals are forced to decide their own place; there was no space for individuals who are "betwixt and between" (Turner, 2003, p. 62). New, more modern terms have been created to name these two divided groups: for the Muslim, *Acang*, derived from a local nickname of Hasan, and *obet* for the Christians, from Robert. These terms replaced the earlier and more respectful terms of *salam* and *sarani*, which along with "*kakehan*", or native believers, worked to identify people as Muslim or Christian Malukans. While some groups evoked the term *Alifuru*, or indigenous people to distinguish authentic Malukans from outsiders during the conflict (see (Siwalima, 2001)), modern religious difference clearly dominated loyalty to any overarching Maluku identity.

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associated with negative attitudes and activities. These groups are also thought to have contributed to the Maluku unrest (see (Aditjondro, 2000)). Such gangs also exist in Ambon, and are associated with the violence. On the other hand, during the unrest, young people became their family's hope to protect its members from attackers. That in turn put responsibility on youths to look after their community.

[5]6 In the experience of Indonesia, the emphasis of the state on religious affiliation (for example, in the doctrine of *Pancasila*) has undermined the earlier importance of ethnicity. Although the state ostensibly embraces ethnicity as an element of nationalism, many ethnic elements have been neglected and marginalised, such as those of the Outer Islands. This brings polarization between nationalism (state domination) and ethnicity, as experienced in other domains and spheres in the country.

6   What will the future bring?

One of the roots of the Maluku conflict is competition over local resources, especially between locals and incomers. The unrest has destroyed many local communities and left many displaced people living in refugee centers or in other villages. Many lost rights of access to resources, and lost their source of food security. Local resource management systems also broke down under this situation, especially when local institutions could no longer manage the conflict. Buano provides a small scale example of this situation. These circumstances led to questions about what kind of restoration would be attempted in the future.

During this conflict, the conception of an integrated Maluku community has disappeared as a result of rapid major change that destroyed the community as a whole, as well as the relationships between communities in resource use and management. The explosion of violent unrest has brought about a strict division between communities in the region. There is a new "arrangement" and new social forms between and within communities; a development of new form of limited order.

The Central Maluku conflict demonstrates the dysfunction of the Jakarta-centered government in controlling its periphery, as well as the inadequacy of the Ambon provincial government. It also shows the continuing peripheral position of Maluku in which the political situation in the center affects and controls the conflict in Maluku.

Prior to the conflict, people argued about the legal complexity where, in many cases, Indonesian state laws overruled or ignored local or *adat* laws. This resulted in the state dominating the local community's resource management. It is not surprising that during the unrest when state law and order did not work, when the state to some extent appeared to be withdrawn and ineffective, local laws also proved ineffective. This leaves us with questions about form of local resource management in Maluku in the foreseeable future, especially in an era of regional autonomy.

Nonetheless, I am optimistic. In the case of Buano, for example, I think that because of their previous symbiotic resource management practices in the island and other relationships, these two neighbouring villages will work to restore their relationships, perhaps faster than many other places in Maluku. There are many mutual relationships that might drive the Buano community to restore cooperation. Culturally, there are kinship links between them. Ecologically, they share the same environment, living side by side in a small island, and they have shared reciprocal relationships in managing their resources, especially in making a living (livelihood). The wild pig issue is one of the significant problems associated with meeting the need for basic everyday food. If many *adat* elements have become weak, especially among the younger generations, perhaps the mutual need to control wild pigs might substitute at a pragmatic level to unite the two different religious communities.[6]

Following the experiences of the current conflict where many Malukans have suffered, local communities might consider identifying and strengthening their adat institutions and other local arrangements for cooperation between communities, especially those with different faiths. Local mutual arrangements related to economic activity (such as that on Buano) may be more effective in rebuilding cooperation between communities at the pragmatic level. At the same time, inter-village alliances, such as pela, which operate at a more abstract level, can be activated, for example, through more regular *pela* renewal (*panas pela*) ceremonies. During the conflict, some *pela* partners from different faiths still continued to honour their alliances by refraining from mutual attacks, although

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[6]7 In the cooling down period of unrest in August 2002 when forced segregation between two factions had begun to relax, Muslims asked their Christian acquaintances to hunt for wild pigs in their areas (together with security forces) in order to control the increased population of the animals. This request was eagerly responded to by the Christians as pork is a welcome addition to the Christian diet and the meat can also be sold in the market at high prices. (Masariku, 2002, Crisis Centre Diocese of Amboina, 2002)

joint defence was rarely found. Typically, a *pela* alliance is a single pact only between two (sometimes more) villages and if a village has multiple alliances with several villages, each pact is unrelated to any other. To support reconciliation and eliminate conflict, this inclusive bond may be modified to form an extended network, such that all villages involve in the multiple pacts of a village are also connected to each other indirectly as allies.

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