

one has adequately done this sort of work for the Madurese as a maritime community before. In this it is hard to find a better guide than the author — he has been coming back to these shores, and to these communities, for most of his adult life. He has not been satisfied with remaining comfortable in (largely uncomfortable) Madura, either, as his sailors regularly ply the tradewinds to Borneo, Sumatra and Java, circling in an arc through the middle parts of the Java Sea. Though the Madurese do a lot of fishing and small-scale trading, they are also important porters of wood through the archipelago, and satellite communities of Madurese have popped up in many places in an attempt to aid in this trade. The timber trade is big business, and because of this Madurese shippers have had some real success in carving out a niche for themselves in an increasingly competitive economy of commodity-circulation. Stenross shows how Madurese-specific craft such as the *mayang*, *golekan*, *lete-lete* and especially the *janggolan* have fit into these regional and transregional systems of exchange. They have done so legally and illegally, mirroring the dual nature, by and large, of the complex functioning of the Indonesian economy as a whole. *Madurese seafarers* is the kind of solid research — undertaken over decades — that shows us how the lived experience of others can function literally right outside of our sight. Not many people probably know of the Madurese contribution to the Indonesian economy, or to its shadow equivalent (the black market in illegally transited wood). After reading this book, however, we all will have a better idea of how the economy of the world's largest archipelagic nation functions, and the people at the geographic centre of it who help make it all run.

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Collective violence in Indonesia

Edited by ASHUTOSH VARSHNEY

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In academia, there are generally three different kinds of edited volumes. First, there are those that contain a loose collection of articles, which all vaguely relate to a specific region or subject, but otherwise have little to do with each other. Second, there are edited books that impose strict methodological guidelines on their contributors, leading to a publication in which all authors test or adopt a particular theoretical approach. Third, at times edited volumes are published in which the contributors not only follow different hermeneutical models, but in fact use the book to attack and contradict each other. Ashutosh Varshney's *Collective violence in Indonesia* falls into this latter category, with its editor and authors disagreeing on almost everything, from the scope and causes of violence to the best way of setting up databases. While

readers seeking a clear-cut proposition of a coherent model may be confused by this approach, others will find it intellectually stimulating, empirically informative and methodologically rigorous.

In essence, the volume highlights deep divisions between scholars trying to document and explain the spike of ethno-religious violence that shook Indonesia between 1997 and 2001. For instance, Varshney, Tadjoeeddin and Panggabean make the stunning claim that a 'mere fifteen districts (*kabupaten*), holding 6.5 percent of Indonesia's population in 2000, accounted for 85.5 percent of all deaths in collective violence' (p. 22). In the following chapter, however, Barron and Sharpe dismiss this figure as the result of a flawed methodology that relied only on data from provincial newspapers. Had data from district-level newspapers been used, they claim, the statistics would show a much wider distribution of violent incidents, with a significantly larger number of victims. In the same vein, the volume's contributors disagree over the causes of the conflicts. Bertrand, for example, argues that the decline and eventual fall of the authoritarian New Order regime created a situation in which the fundamental relationships between ethno-religious groups and the state were renegotiated. For him, the period 1997–2001 was a critical juncture in which the status quo gave way to violent fights over the new terms of inclusion and exclusion. Local groups, sensing that the national government was temporarily weakened and that the new arrangements would last for decades, were anxious to advance their interests by all means necessary — hence the eruption of violence in places with previously disadvantaged ethnic or religious groups. But Tajima, in the book's subsequent chapter, finds this explanation seriously lacking. He contends that Bertrand and others have overlooked the role of the military in the conflict. According to Tajima, the increased emphasis on human rights since the mid-1990s constrained the armed forces, leaving it powerless to intervene effectively when communal tensions emerged in the wake of the political transition. In contrast to Bertrand, however, he cannot explain why the violence died down as Indonesia's democracy stabilised and its military became even more constrained by public scrutiny.

Despite (or probably because of) this cacophony of opinions, the volume delivers useful material for further theory-building. The approaches chosen by Bertrand and Tajima, for instance, can be productively combined to formulate a comprehensive model to explain the emergence of violence at the time of Suharto's fall and in the early post-authoritarian transition. Arguably, the Indonesian military was not so much constrained by new concerns over human rights (as Tajima claims), but it experienced a fundamental identity crisis as far as its relationship with the state was concerned. Like other strategic groups discussed by Bertrand, the military had its terms of engagement with the regime renegotiated from 1997–2001, turning it from Suharto's palace guard (which had a strong institutional interest in suppressing any form of dissent) into an armed force largely indifferent towards the preservation of the incumbent regime. However, once senior generals became aware that democracy too can provide them with successful (and lucrative) careers, the military's effectiveness in managing security disturbances was restored. At the same time, the police went through an even more complicated process of adjustment. Like the military, the police force was impaired during the transition not due to constraints imposed by newly discovered human rights concerns, but because it had to define and establish

its role in the post-authoritarian polity. Once it had settled into that role, its capacity to manage conflict increased dramatically. As a result, much of the large-scale communal violence subsided after 2001.

Overall, the book gives an excellent overview of the multitude of methodological and theoretical approaches to the sudden proliferation of ethno-religious violence during Indonesia's democratic transition. While the conflicts in Papua and Aceh are mostly excluded, readers will find a wide range of interpretations on the religious carnage in Maluku and Poso, the ethnic tensions in Kalimantan and the vigilante killings across the archipelago. As indicated above, some readers may have preferred a more uniform conceptualisation of the chapters, but a collection of highly contradictory viewpoints is indeed more reflective of the dynamism of the scholarly debate than a methodologically standardised volume would have been. Consequently, Ashutosh Varshney is to be commended for enriching the discussion with a volume that no scholar of Indonesian affairs or theorist of communal conflict can afford to ignore.

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Laos

Spirits of the place: Buddhism and Lao religious culture

By JOHN CLIFFORD HOLT

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Although often treated in academic literature as adjunctive to the history of the Thai or Burmese kingdoms, or, in contemporary accounts, as a peripheral setting for dramatic 'secret' war narratives involving the US Central Intelligence Agency during long periods of conflict in Indochina, the arc of Lao history has begun to receive its share of refreshed scholarly attention. With the nascent Lao studies conference series that has been held over the past five years in the United States and elsewhere, and the gradual opening of the country to foreign investment and accompanying economic analyses, this new attention to the nuances of the history of Lao People's Democratic Republic clearly has been strengthened.

The objective that John Clifford Holt sets before himself and the reader in *Spirits of the place: Buddhism and Lao religious culture* is one which has been complicated by a number of factors related to the complex filigree that is the story of Laos. Holt is clear in his preface that there are certain limitations in the study, as a nuanced understanding of Sri Lankan Buddhism is difficult to project onto a Southeast Asian cultural landscape. Holt is an acclaimed scholar of Sri Lankan Theravāda Buddhism and has spent decades in this intellectual setting, and his linguistic background is steeped in the canonical traditions of Pali and Sanskrit. He