

will not be an easy read for the uninitiated, since it stays close to the sources and eschews any strong narrative or thematic line. Fortunately it has a good index, and will prove a boon and a joy for those interested in these issues to consult. The field is much enriched by the addition of someone with Peter Borschberg's linguistic skills to the small band of specialists on these difficult sources.

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Indonesia

Ethno-religious violence in Indonesia: From soil to god

By CHRIS WILSON

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Chris Wilson's book, comprised of eight chapters, examines a series of communal violence incidents in North Maluku from 1999 to 2000. In late 1999, as the violence turned extreme in Ambon, the North Maluku region was established as a separate province as part of the decentralisation process initiated by President B. J. Habibie. This was, however, merely the prelude to the series of violent clashes in the region. The North Maluku conflict left over 3,000 people brutally murdered, and several hundred thousand people displaced. While most previous research has focused on the Ambon conflict, and regarded the cases of North Maluku as a part or consequence of it, this book addresses the latter by finding motives from localised contexts, distinguishing the violence from the Ambon conflict. The book provides full-fledged accounts of the North Maluku conflict with very detailed and well-examined descriptions and analyses.

While other accounts on North Maluku regard the nature of the conflict as a religious one from the beginning, Wilson explains that, initially, it was a small dispute between two small ethnic groups, which had resulted from political and economic reasons rather than religious issues. He particularly seeks to explain the five phases of the violence, namely initiation, escalation, dispersion, political exploitation and eventual religious war. Then, he examines the nature of the violence in each phase and concludes that the North Maluku conflict was caused by multifarious factors, including political, social, economic circumstances and factors of human agency.

On the analysis of the initiation of the violence, Wilson reveals that the conflict took place between the migrant Muslims (the Makians) and the local residents (the Kaos) in the area of the Malifut district. This section gives us insightful observations on the changing modes of society in the post-Suharto era and the dynamics of the responses of societal groups and individuals. Particularly, the widened autonomy of local provinces and cities caused many local groups to compete for new chances to establish new provinces, districts or sub-districts. The Makian-Kao conflict was initially caused by the Makians' effort to have dominant power in the new sub-district, which was traditionally

the land of Christian Kaos and also the land of abundant resources such as gold mines. In addition, as an autonomous sub-district, Malifut suddenly became a viable option to serve as the capital of one of the new districts that would make up the new North Maluku province. Political and economic agendas, therefore, were fundamental to the rising tension in the region before the conflict.

Yet, what exacerbated the ethnic conflict is the involvement of human agencies, which saw these changing socio-political circumstances as opportunities to widen their individual interest and become emotionally attached to the conflicting groups. For instance, the Sultan of Ternate and his security guard (*Pasukan Kuning*), and his numerous political rivals monitored each other to deter the expansion of the powers of their rivals through this chaotic circumstance. The security forces, many of which were local personnel and collaborated with the politicians, felt pressure not to act against their own community. Furthermore, the finding of the forged 'Bloody Sosol letter', which purportedly proved the existence of a Christian conspiracy to drive Muslims from Halmahera, deteriorated the situation. These human agencies spread rumours that this was intrinsically a religious conflict in order to earn more support from other ethnic groups.

The violence, which dispersed into the entire region of North Maluku, developed in more complex ways. The local rivalries and conflicting interests of individuals brought the inter-communal violence into the Muslim circles. The clashes between the *Pasukan Kuning* and its opposing militant group – the *Pasukan Putih* (which was allegedly known to be assisted by the Laskar Jihad, the Java-based paramilitia), led by the opponents of the Sultan of Ternate – illustrate the complexity of the violence. In revealing its nature, the author stresses that this case shows the local character in both participation and goals. In this way, he emphasises that the case is different from the Ambon conflict, where the Laskar Jihad was deeply involved.

In summary, Wilson concludes that the cause of the violence was a combination of many elements, such as economic opportunism, political inequality, high-level political competition, insecurity, ethnic and religious antagonism, territory and natural resources. In addition, he explains that the long-prevailed nepotism and corruption practices during the New Order period were also a factor. Moreover, the fact that various human agencies which saw and pursued new opportunities to widen their political and economic gains, often through collaboration with the security forces, acted as another most important factor. The emotional responses of the security forces to the Muslim groups exacerbated the conflicts. These aspects show variance according to the time and place.

The most significant part of Wilson's contributions is its role in challenging previous views, which overemphasised the roles of the rumours represented by the Bloody Sosol letter, and Laskar Jihad. Rather than these factors, Wilson focuses more on the dynamics of the human interests in the changing modes of societies and politics in the post-Suharto period. The book provides, by far, the most vivid descriptions of the violence in various regions along various time periods, which were made more understandable by the addition of theoretical explanations of the nature of the violence in each phase.

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