

**Interrogating the Relationship between Tradition and Peace:
Tradition, Indigeneity and Violence in West Kalimantan, Indonesia¹**

Jessica Soedirgo
Doctoral Student
Department of Political Science, University of Toronto
jessica.soedirgo@utoronto.ca

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Abstract: Indonesia's democratic transition was marked by the eruption of identity-driven conflict across the state. Since these outbreaks of violence, much hope has been pinned on the use of traditional and indigenous practices (*adat*) for the management and resolution of conflict. In line with other post-conflict zones (e.g. Afghanistan, Timor-Leste, Rwanda), traditional and indigenous sources of governance and identity have been actively reinvented and revived across Indonesia (Davidson and Henley 2007). Are the hopes pinned on *adat* justified? Will *adat* effectively manage conflict and prevent violence in Indonesia? Drawing from the case of West Kalimantan, this paper argues that while *adat* has yielded positive results in some cases, the process of reviving tradition and customs also has some dangers. In the West Kalimantan case, where ethnic violence took place between the indigenous Dayak and the migrant Madurese, *adat* was used by to justify and mobilize inter-group violence. This case demonstrates that *adat* revivalism may exacerbate identity-based conflict instead of preventing it, as the practice of tradition in Indonesia is tied to the performance and reinforcement of communal identity. The centrality of *adat* in the ethnic riots in West Kalimantan suggests the need to question the idealized portrayal of custom and tradition that is arguably prevalent in both academic and policy circles. The revival of traditional and indigenous practices and institutions is not a strategy that should be uncritically promoted. While it has shown to be a positive force in some contexts, the character of specific traditional practices and the character of the conflict that it is meant to resolve needs to be considered prior to strategy implementation.

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Introduction

From the *loya jirga* in Afghanistan to the *gacaca* courts in Rwanda, traditional practices and institutions have been revived and reinvented for conflict management and peacebuilding purposes across the globe. The successes of particularized and localized mechanisms of peace have sparked a trend in which tradition and indigenous practices and institutions have been enthusiastically embraced and prescribed as a mechanism for the provision of order. This enthusiasm for traditional and indigenous practices and institutions characterizes the literature on peacebuilding in both the practitioner and academic communities.

Following this global trend, tradition and custom have been thoroughly embraced in Indonesia after the fall of authoritarianism. Indonesia's democratic transition was marked by the eruption of identity-driven conflict across the state (e.g. nationalism in Aceh and sectarian riots in Central Sulawesi). Since these outbreaks of violence, much hope has been pinned on the use of traditional and indigenous practices and institutions (*adat*) for the creation and maintenance of social and political order. Actors at the level of the state and the level of civil society have actively sought to revive customary practices and institutions that had been swept away during the period of authoritarian rule.

Customary practices and institutions have helped manage and resolve conflict in many areas of the world. Yet, if political science has taught us anything, the creation of order is a notoriously complex endeavor. While not denying the importance of indigenous solutions, this paper argues that the process of reviving tradition and customs also potentially has some dangers. In the case of West Kalimantan, tradition and customs were used to justify and mobilize inter-group violence between the indigenous Dayak and the migrant Madurese. This case demonstrates the ways in which tradition and customs may actually exacerbate identity-based conflict instead of preventing it, as the practice of tradition in Indonesia is tied to the performance and reinforcement of communal identity. The centrality of *adat* in the ethnic riots in West Kalimantan suggests the need to question the idealized portrayal of custom and tradition that is arguably prevalent in both academic and policy circles. Ultimately, the revival of traditional practices and institutions is not a strategy that should be uncritically promoted. While it has shown to be a positive force in some contexts, the character of specific traditional practices and institutions, as well as the character of the conflict that it is meant to resolve needs to be considered prior to strategy implementation. Indigenous solutions are important to the resolution of conflict, but the uncritical revival of tradition and customary institutions can have negative consequences.

The Revival of Tradition in Peacebuilding Endeavors

Peacebuilding as a political project emerged in the post-Cold War era and is deeply rooted in the paradigm of liberal internationalism (Paris 2004, 40-54). In its original conception, liberal internationalism was a homogenizing project that sought to pacify the world through the transmission of political and economic liberalization. As a practice, peacebuilding involves the promotion of a blueprint for a liberal conception of peace through international intervention, financial restructuring, and support for sovereign state building (Mac Ginty 2008, 143). In short, peacebuilding is one of the operational manifestations of the liberal peace agenda, because it is a way of transmitting the dominant social, political and economic orders globally. Roland Paris (1997, 46) sums up this argument succinctly, stating that "peacebuilding is in effect an enormous experiment in social engineering" by Western states to transplant "Western models of social, political, and economic organization into war-shattered states in order to control civil conflict."

The centrality of the liberal peace ideology to peacebuilding is reflected in the priorities, practices, laws, and programs established in the early years of peacebuilding. In the political dimension of peacebuilding, the goals of missions included the establishment of free and fair elections, the building of democratic institutions, and the promotion of a specific conception of human rights. For example, the liberal influence in the human rights discourse is seen in the privileging of individual rights over group rights (Donnelly 2003, 63-64). The values of liberalization are also seen in the economic dimension of peacebuilding, especially in the economic restructuring of post-conflict states to reflect Western models of market economics.

Over the past few years, the liberal peacebuilding project has been the target of much criticism. In particular, the formulaic nature of the enterprise has been the target of much vitriol. Peacebuilding projects have failed to tailor its operations to specific historical, cultural, political, and economic contexts. In fact, processes of political and economic liberalization have often had unintended and destabilizing effects. In a number of cases, such reforms have often impeded the consolidation of sustainable peace, instead of supporting the post-conflict reconciliation process. For example, the process of economic restructuring has often fueled political instability, as it has restrained government spending and its ability to mitigate inequality between groups. As Boyce (1996) has argued, the structural readjustment programs of the IMF and the World Bank often contradict the political and economic needs of post-conflict situations. To stabilize post-conflict situations, governments need policy autonomy to fund peace initiatives and other social programs that promote equitable economic growth. The history of peacebuilding has firmly suggested that there is no universal solution to the peace.

The incorporation of traditional and indigenous practices and institutions into peacebuilding projects emerged in response to the significant limits of the “one-size-fits-all” approach to peacebuilding.² This move towards embracing tradition and custom is a part of the international movement of indigenous peoples, which emerged out of a critique against the exploitative homogenization of globalization. In contrast to the liberal peacebuilding project, traditional and indigenous practices and institutions provide localized and particularized solutions for conflict management and resolution. A survey of recent practitioner and academic publications and international activity on conflict resolution and peacebuilding reveals a thriving interest in traditional and indigenous dispute resolution and peacemaking mechanisms. Many international organizations (IOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and states have highlighted the effectiveness of indigenous practices and institutions for maintaining order. For example, the UNDP has published numerous reports recommending the incorporation of indigenous and traditional practices and institutions for the building of peace for such conflicts as Indonesia, Ethiopia and Cambodia. In academia, John Paul Lederach (2005) has proposed the

² It is important to highlight the conceptual distinction between traditional and indigenous practices, laws, and institutions. Traditional or customary practices, laws, and institutions refer to those that have been in existence for a long period of time. In contrast, indigenous practices and institutions are those that have been locally inspired. The terms traditional and indigenous frequently refer to the same practices and institutions, but traditional mechanisms are not necessarily indigenous and vice versa. In other words, indigenous mechanisms can be quite new. This essay focuses on mechanisms that are both traditional and indigenous, as the two are often conflated in both practitioner and academic circles. They are certainly conflated in the Indonesian term *adat*. It is also important to recognize that traditional and indigenous mechanisms are not static, even though they are often perceived as so. The interpretation, practices, purposes and meanings of tradition changes across time and space. However, it is the perception of continuity that is significant; the idea that practices and institutions have existed since time immemorial arguably increases its legitimacy.

usage of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms, which emphasizes the importance of indigenous mechanisms of peace. In short, there has been an overall trend advocating for the revival or preservation of tradition and custom for the maintenance of order.

This enthusiasm for traditional and indigenous practices and institutions is driven by the perceived practical and normative benefits of these strategies. In particular, these practices and institutions are often highly legitimate, as they are locally inspired and/or historically significant. They are not perceived as policies that have been imposed on their population by the international community. The legitimacy of these mechanisms creates support from the local population, facilitating the implementation of peacebuilding strategies. Implementation is further facilitated by the population's familiarity with the mechanisms, meaning greater capacity for involvement in the peacebuilding process. High participation rates in peace processes aid in the creation of a sustainable peace. The capacity to continue the peacebuilding project without external aid also makes the utilization of indigenous and traditional practices and institutions particularly attractive to donors. Overall, what makes tradition and custom so appealing is their operational contribution to ideas of "grass-roots empowerment, civil society enhancement and cultural appropriateness, all of which have become mainstays of development programs and projects" (Mac Ginty 2008, 142).

The success of traditional means of conflict management and resolution has created an association between tradition and order. As a result, traditional and indigenous practices and institutions have been whole-heartedly embraced in academic and practitioner communities. As seen in the case of Indonesia, the embrace of traditional and indigenous practices and institutions has led to unequivocal attempts to revive tradition and customs across the state. Unfortunately, many of the potentially problematic effects of "bringing customs back in" have not been adequately acknowledged. There have, of course, been exceptions. One of the first critiques of reviving traditional and indigenous practices and institutions came from the feminist perspective. While there are exceptions, traditional and indigenous mechanisms are traditionally patriarchal. For example, in its traditional form, the *loya jirga* used in Afghanistan never included women participants (Oates and Helal 2004, 16). Although revived traditions were altered to mandate some female representation, critics maintained that reviving these customs would ultimately reinforce and legitimate the inherent patriarchy of the systems. In the peacebuilding literature more broadly, however, have focused on the importance of traditional and indigenous practices and institutions to peacebuilding projects (e.g. Abu-Nimer 2000/2001; Smock 2002; Al-Krenawi and Graham 1999).

In particular, there has been little interest in theorizing the potential negative consequences of reviving and/or strengthening tradition and customs. For example, it is theoretically plausible that tradition and indigenous practices and institutions can bolster intergroup violence. Violence between indigenous and non-indigenous groups is not uncommon. Scholars have increasingly paid more attention to "sons of the soil" conflicts—a phenomenon first highlighted by Myron Weiner's (1978) study of Assam in the 1960s and 1970s. In this piece, Weiner recounts how the indigenous peoples violently attacked Bengali migrants due to demographic and economic pressures. Fearon and Laitin (2011, 200) note that sons of the soil violence features conflicts between a minority ethnic group concentrated in one region of a country and a relatively recent distinct migrant community from other parts of the same country. The minority ethnic group conceives of themselves as indigenous with their land as their ancestral home.

Sons of the soil conflicts suggest that there are ways in which traditional and indigenous practices and institutions may bolster or exacerbate identity-based conflict. While traditional and indigenous practices and institutions have bolstered intergroup peace in some cases, this is not necessarily the case. After all, indigenism is about a perceived “primordial” attachment to a specified land and a collective group (Niezen 2003). The performance of tradition and customs can reinforce communal identity in ways that lead to violent attacks against members of the out-group. As will be elaborated further along in the essay, tradition and custom reinforced group identity and was a rallying point for intergroup attacks in West Kalimantan, Indonesia (Davidson and Henley 2007). The centrality of tradition in mobilizing violence is not completely unexpected. After all, underlying traditional practices and institutions is a specific conceptualization of community—one that delineates who belongs in the traditional and indigenous community and can thus legitimately participate. On the other hand, this conceptualization of community also delineates who does not belong. Overall, the effect of tradition and customs on intergroup relations is ambiguous. The romanticization of tradition and custom can have problematic consequences.

Interrogating the Revival of Tradition in Indonesia

Violent conflict characterized Indonesia’s transition from authoritarianism to democracy (Bertrand 2004). These conflicts included inter-religious violence in Poso, Central Sulawesi and Maluku; nationalist movements in East Timor, Aceh, and Papua; and ethnic conflicts in West and Central Kalimantan. The amount of bloodletting across Indonesia was devastating, with the country seemingly about to follow in the steps of the former Yugoslavia. While such predictions did not come into fruition, the violence of the late 1990s and early 2000s have left an indelible impact on the politics of the country. There has been a multi-pronged effort to establish an effective conflict management and resolution system. For example, there has been a lot of focus on economic development, strengthening democratic institutions, and rehabilitating both military and policing apparatuses. These dimensions of the reform process cannot be ignored. In addition to the aforementioned efforts, however, much hope has been pinned on the use of traditional and indigenous practices (*adat*) for the creation and maintenance of order.

The term *adat* refers to local, historically rooted customs and traditions. The concept of *adat* is admittedly abstract—and thus conceptually slippery. Unlike Rwanda’s *gacaca* courts or Afghanistan’s *loya jirga*—both of which refer to specific institutional arrangements—*adat* broadly refers to “time-honored practices and institutions, inherited by communities rather than imposed by the state, which are seen as having continuing relevance to current political concerns” (Davidson and Henley 2007, 817). *Adat* practices and institutions are region- and local- specific. As an example, the *adat* practices and institutions of Balinese villages are distinct from those practiced in other areas of Indonesia. While evolution and syncretism is possible and does occur, the distinctiveness of respective *adat* practices and institutions have caused intergroup tensions between migrants and indigenous populations. For example, Muslim migrants from other parts of Indonesia have faced difficulties integrating into Balinese villages—which arguably rank amongst the most open in Indonesia. Yet, due to their religious beliefs, Muslim migrants have been unable to fully participate in the requirements of Balinese *adat*. As a consequence, Balinese elites have expressed worries that increased migration would seriously threaten the social stability and cultural identity of Bali (Warren 2007, 173-176). It is important to acknowledge that while there is undeniable continuity between revived traditional practices

and those practiced in the past, *adat* itself is not static. However, the Bali case demonstrates that evolution and syncretism is not a painless process. It can, and does, lead to intergroup tension.

It is difficult to understand the present importance of *adat* in Indonesian politics without understanding its historical trajectory. It is especially important to understand the treatment of *adat* under Suharto's rule. As an authoritarian developmentalist regime with a nation-building agenda, the Suharto regime implemented policies intended to cultivate Indonesian nationalism and weaken the political weight of cultural and ethnic communities. For example, political topics involving ethnicity, religion, race, and class (SARA) were banned from public discourse in order to promote social harmony (Arakaki 2004, 106-107). Indonesia's cultural and ethnic diversity was largely only acknowledged through displays of multicultural costumes and art. The regime did all that it could to render *adat* politically insignificant (Davidson and Henley 2007, 9-10).

Under Suharto's New Order regime, *adat* practices and institutions were significantly weakened. While *adat* was used in state propaganda to promote the ideals of harmony and solidarity, the actual function of local and traditional institutions and practices were severely undermined by administrative reforms. In particular, Law No.5/1979—or the Village Law—completely transformed the role of *adat* in village governance. Prior to the Village Law, villages were primarily governed by local *adat*—meaning that even villages in the same region were highly heterogeneous. For the Suharto regime, the lack of standardized village administrative structures made it difficult to implement national policy. Building on prior administrative reforms, the Village Law essentially sought to eradicate this diversity to establish a standardized and uniform structure of rule. With regards to *adat*, the most significant reform was the removal of the official decision-making role of the *adat* council (KAN) in the new standardized administrative structure. *Adat* leaders were replaced by new village leaders who were screened by the state. The *adat* councils continued to exist and have influence in their respective villages, but their official removal from the administrative structure and their consequent loss of fiscal revenue meant that their authority was significantly reduced (Kato 1989).

In the 1990s and early 2000s, however, *adat* re-emerged as an important political force. The early indicators of *adat* revivalism emerged at the end of the New Order regime. For example, in the 1990s, Balinese elite used *adat* as the basis for mobilization against mega-tourism (Warren 2007) and indigenous groups in Central Sulawesi used *adat* to protest against the building of a hydroelectric dam (Acciaoli 2001). The collapse of the Suharto regime truly provided an opening for the resurgence of *adat* at both state and civil society levels. At the level of the state, the position of the *adat* councils in village governance was restored. Law 22/1999 and Law 25/1999, for example, substantively recognized the importance of *adat* for local governance. At the level of civil society, there was a proliferation of *adat*-oriented groups (Davidson and Henley 2007, 13-16). Overall, *adat* has come to embody a normative desire of community autonomy—especially with regards to issues of land, resource distribution, and conflict resolution (Bowen 2003, 63).

In the area of conflict management and resolution, *adat* has increasingly been viewed as the primary mechanism for ensuring social and political stability. Largely driven by the inability of the security apparatus to prevent violence, communities across Indonesia have turned to *adat* practices and institutions for the restoration of order. For example, *adat* leaders in the Kei islands of Southeast Maluku became important mediators between Christian and Muslim communities during the sectarian violence that rocked the province. In a similar case, Christian and Muslim communities in South Sulawesi's Toraja highlands sought the guidance of the local *adat* council

and the traditional king during the riots in the province (Davidson and Henley 2007, 13). In many cases across Indonesia, *adat* was used to address the weaknesses of the modern state.

The sentiment that *adat* will effectively manage conflict and prevent the outbreak of violence in Indonesia is widespread. The association between tradition and order has bolstered the reinvigoration of *adat* across the state. As mentioned, some of the first post-New Order reforms strengthened the political function of *adat*. Further, both international and local NGOs have implemented programs for the strengthening of *adat* practices and institutions. For example, a forthcoming report by UNDP Indonesia advocates the reestablishment and strengthening of the *adat* justice system in Aceh to manage post-conflict and post-tsunami grievances (e.g. lost property, inheritance disputes, and so forth). In interviews conducted by the author in the cities of Banda Aceh and Jakarta in August 2011, similar sentiments were echoed repeatedly. For example, a UNDP analyst stated that the implementation of customary law (*hukum adat*) would lead to societal harmony, due to the flexibility of *adat* arrangement. A senior professor at the Syiah Kuala University in Banda Aceh similarly argued that *adat* is very effective at the village level and that government and NGO programs needed to support capacity building for *adat* councils.

Along the same lines, several scholars have argued that the weakening of *adat* was an important factor in the waves of violence that erupted across the state during the transition period. For example, Dieter Bartels (2001) has argued that the Maluku violence can be partially attributed to the weakening of the *pela* system under the New Order regime. Prior to 1999, there was little intergroup violence between Ambonese Christians and Muslims. Bartels (1977) has attributed this intergroup harmony to the strength of the *pela* system. The *pela* system refers to the ties between two or more villages in the Maluku area. Villages within the same *pela* conceive of themselves as being bound in an unbreakable brotherhood, in which partner villages are enmeshed in a binding relationship of mutual reciprocity. Villages must provide assistance to their *pela* partners and provide hospitality to visitors from partner villages. *Pela* relationships are essentially conceived as a blood relation—so much so that intermarriage between members of partner villagers is forbidden. The breakdown of the *pela* system—attributed to intensified religious sentiments, migration, and New Order administrative reform—essentially removed the main mechanism for ensuring intercommunal harmony.

These above cases demonstrate that some of the hope pinned on *adat* is justified. In many situations, traditional and customary practices and institutions have made an important contribution to conflict management and resolution. However, this unproblematic embrace of *adat* may have some unintended consequences. The case of West Kalimantan shows that while the revival of *adat* can help create and maintain stability, it can also contribute to the outbreak of violence.

The Case of West Kalimantan

Located on Indonesian Borneo, the communal violence in West Kalimantan was amongst the most brutal during Indonesia's transition period. The main cleavage of violence occurred between the indigenous Dayaks and the migrant Madurese.³ Davidson and Kammen (2002) argue that the roots of the communal riots in the 1990s are rooted in the initial fissure between Dayaks and Madurese in 1966. Interestingly, the first known major Dayak-Madurese conflict

³ It is important to acknowledge that while the Madurese are considered non-indigenous, Madurese migration into West Kalimantan is not new. Malay traders and proselytizers from other parts of now-Indonesia have been settling into Kalimantan since the mid-1800s.

erupted as an unintended consequence to the anti-Chinese campaign in the 1960s. The Madurese migrant community was at the time, in a good position to take over the economic positions left behind by the Chinese community, consequently threatening the economic interests of the Dayak elite.

The 1960s violence played a key role in the formation of the Dayak identity, as it essentially hardened the salience of the then-burgeoning Dayak and Madurese identities in West Kalimantan. The identity category of “Dayak” emerged near the end of Dutch colonialism, constructed out of over a hundred sub-ethnic groups indigenous to Kalimantan. However, the “Dayak” identity had only started to gain political salience in the 1950s, when Dayak elites utilized it to gain political and institutional representation (Bertrand 2004). Its salience increased with the eruption of ethnic violence. The indigenous dimension of Dayak political identity became emphasized alongside the emergence of the international indigenous peoples’ movement. In the early stages, the indigenous dimension of Dayak identity, represented by *adat*, was effectively utilized for political claims making with regards to resource extraction and distribution. *Adat* was ultimately viewed as a form of social empowerment, enabling the Dayak to successfully make claims and reassert their autonomy (Davidson 2008, 117). However, *adat* was soon used for more nefarious purposes.

The violence in the 1990s consisted of a series of Dayak-Madurese ethnic riots. The first wave of violence occurred in December 1996. There is a general consensus that the incident that sparked the violence was the stabbing of two Dayak youths in Sanngau Ledo in West Kalimantan by a Madurese man. This beating was allegedly retaliation for another beating that had occurred earlier in the month. Rumors of the incident soon led several hundred Dayak people to attack Madurese areas, leading to the decimation of several Madurese hamlets. This first wave ended on 6 January 1997.

While there were isolated attacks and rumors throughout January, the second sustained wave of violence started on 28 January 1997. This wave was far more widespread and damaging than the first, with significant bloodletting on both sides. Acting on rumors and prior attacks on Madurese houses and mosques, a group of Madurese men attacked a boarding school and stabbed two Dayak girls. This incident set off a tit-for-tat series of attacks that lasted consistently for almost two weeks. While no official numbers have been released, it is estimated that approximately 500 to 1700 people died in these attacks and 20,000 Madurese were displaced due to this violence (Bertrand 2004). The majority of the casualties consisted of Madurese individuals. These riots were, at the time, the largest episodes of violence to erupt in Indonesia in over thirty years (Davidson 2008).

Adat was an important component of the mobilization and justification of intergroup violence in West Kalimantan. Davidson’s (2007; 2008) stellar work on Kalimantan demonstrates how *adat* rituals, discourses, and institutions motivated Dayak participation in the violence. Davidson (2007) highlights the justification of the anti-Madurese violence by the Institute of Dayakology Research and Development (IDRD), the first Dayak-oriented NGO. While there are now a number of Dayak-centric organizations, the IDRD is arguably the most important and is representative of the discourses around the West Kalimantan violence (Davidson 2008). In a response to Human Rights Watch’s critique of broad Dayak participation and popular support for the anti-Madurese violence, the IDRD published an English-language response arguing the reasoning behind the violence. While it can be argued that this publication was purely instrumental, used to defend the community’s actions in order to preserve the organization’s funding and reputation. However, it is an enlightening document that outlines the reasoning

behind the violence. As Finnemore (2003, 15) argues, a justification is an attempt to connect actions to standards of appropriateness and acceptability. The IDRDR's justification thus reveals an understanding of the drivers of conflict and the normative role of *adat* in the violence.

Of particular relevance to this paper is the IDRDR's central claim that the anti-Madurese violence was dictated by *adat* law and could thus be perceived as a logical and necessary consequence of violations of that law. According to Dayak *adat*, if a member of the community is threatened or attacked, the entire community is required to collectively retaliate against the perpetrator's community for the protection of the community as a whole (Davidson 2007, 226). Thus, under Dayak customary law, the death of a Dayak at the hands of a Madurese meant that it was the collective responsibility of the Dayak community to avenge the death. Collective violence against the Madurese community is seen as an obligation imposed by *adat*, the central indicator of Dayak identity and culture. For the IDRDR then, the perpetrators of violence were motivated by the desire to fulfill Dayak *adat* law.

Schiller and Garang (2002) similarly demonstrate the importance of *adat* rituals in the mobilization of violence. They recount that the Dayaks in West Kalimantan utilized the tradition of the "red bowl"—an *adat* practice associated with tribal war. By passing around the bowl to other villages, villagers committed to fight against the common enemy. In this case, the "red bowl" practice committed many Dayaks to fight against the Madurese. Schiller and Garang argue that these rituals can help explain the intensity and scale of the ethnic violence.

It is difficult to demonstrate the causality between *adat* and the anti-Madurese violence. As Kalyvas (2003) has convincingly demonstrated, perpetrators' motivations for violence are not uniform. Non-elites carry out violence for a variety of reasons—reasons that do not necessarily align with the master frames. It is thus extremely unlikely that all of the Dayak perpetrators committed violence out of an obligation to *adat*. Many likely participated for economic interests, political interests, or other private reasons. That being said, it is highly plausible that *adat* was a driving force of the anti-Madurese violence. Prior to the 1996 and 1997 riots, *adat* had been used as a point of mobilization in the making of political claims against the state and corporations. Many of these protests spiraled into violence, with much of the violence conducted in the name of *adat* and *adat* activists playing an important role (Davidson 2007, 230). Thus, the link between *adat* and violence is not unprecedented.

Further, as shown by the ritual of the "red bowl," *adat* was foundational for establishing in-group solidarity. *Adat* became a unifying force of Dayak culture—a point of commonality across a group whose subunits had little in common. The revival of *adat* institutions and the performance of *adat* practices in the making of successful political claims reinforced the Dayak communal identity and the legitimacy of their cause. These practices and institutions defined who was to be included in the community, but also who was to be excluded. Interestingly, even *adat* mechanisms meant for conflict management and resolution can bolster in-group identity. For example, in a rare peace *adat* ceremony by the Dayak Katingan community, community elite and non-elite gathered to dance and make sacrifices to their gods. This ceremony was a unilateral gesture of peace towards the Madurese. However, the performance of this highly important ceremony arguably reinforced ethnic identity, with much of the rituals involving the celebration of Dayak "victory" over the Madurese (Jakarta Post, 29 April 2001). Broadly speaking, *adat* practices and institutions can and were used to strongly emphasize the distinction between groups. In the case of West Kalimantan, it was a particularly effective marker of Dayak-Madurese intergroup difference. There are few *adat* practices and institutions with significance in the Madurese migrant community (Davidson 2007). Overall, it is unsurprising that Davidson

and Henley (2007, 828) observe that the strengthening of *adat* was directly implicated in the process that ultimately led to the violence.

While work by Bartels (1977, 2001) and Galvan (forthcoming) suggests that a strengthened *adat* would have mitigated the violence in Maluku, this conclusion does not hold in the Dayak-Madurese riots. The centrality of *adat* in the ethnic riots in West Kalimantan suggests the need to question the idealized portrayal of custom and tradition that is arguably prevalent in both academic and policy circles. The West Kalimantan does not appear to be unique. Tanya Li's (2007) work on Central Sulawesi suggests that similar dynamics are at play in this region. In the Central Sulawesi case, *adat* was used by elite to galvanize political support along ethnic lines. *Adat* was advocated as a means for controlling Bugis migration into certain areas of Central Sulawesi. This dynamic is worrying, as inter-religious violence rocked Central Sulawesi from 1998 to 2001—with the conflict having a clear indigenous/migrant dimension. Overall, as tradition and custom relies on implicit conceptions of group boundaries, these practices and institutions can be employed in ways that foster ethnocentrism and exclusionary nativism (Davidson 2008, 119).

Conclusion

Although there has been an increasing amount of work on “sons-of-the-soil” conflicts, this work has not been adequately explored by the peacebuilding literature on traditional and indigenous practices and institutions. This had arguably led to an overly enthusiastic embrace of traditional and indigenous practices and institutions in many conflict and post-conflict areas. There have clearly been plenty of cases where customary practices and institutions have helped create and maintain social and political order. However, this is not always the case. The violence in West Kalimantan shows that traditional and customary practices can also be used to strengthen in-group solidarity for the purposes of violence. Thus, the uncritical revival of tradition and custom in Indonesia may not lead to the ordered outcomes that advocates have hoped.

The content of this paper suggests that the revival of tradition and customs is not appropriate for all conflict and post-conflict situations. The West Kalimantan case demonstrates that it might not be the best solution for conflicts between indigenous and migrant groups, as the practice of tradition in Indonesia is tied to the performance and reinforcement of indigenous communal identity. Even if the reinforcement of intergroup difference had benign effects, the fact that Madurese communities have little familiarity with Dayak *adat* diminishes the potential effectiveness of such customs for managing intergroup relations in the province. Preliminary research on the relationship between Acehese villages and migrant Javanese relations in Central Aceh in the post-conflict period similarly suggests that there are obstacles to using *adat* as the main mechanism of conflict management and resolution (Kontras Aceh 2010).

This paper does not deny the importance of creating bottom-up and locally legitimate solutions to violence. Much work in peacebuilding has already established the contribution that traditional and indigenous practices and institutions can make for the maintenance of order. This paper merely points out that the process of reviving tradition and customs—even those oriented for conflict management—can potentially have some dangers. The exuberance of promoting tradition and customs should be tempered. Ultimately, a more nuanced and balanced understanding of the operation of tradition and customs in communities will help practitioners discern when such a strategy would be most effective.

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