The Links between Violence and Institutional Change in Hila, Eastern Indonesia

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Introduction

From 1999 until 2002, the island of Ambon in Eastern Indonesia was the site of a high-intensity conflict between Muslims and Christians. Apart from a tragedy in terms of human suffering, physical destruction and economic decline, this violence produced new forms of political and economic regulation in which new elites obtained the power to manipulate existing institutions defining access to resources. An important factor in this process was the issue of migration. Because about one third of the total Ambonese population was displaced at the height of the conflict (ICG, 2002), lots of people had to disband their properties and their lands. Throughout this conflict-induced displacement, customary elites took the opportunity to regain a more secure access to land by reinforcing their position as the 'legitimate' owners of the land. Their claims were made by referring to *adat*. This is a customary inspired form of resource management in which tradition and clan affiliation stand central. This process got further enforced by new legislation that came into being after the fall of the New Order in 1998 and gave a stronger legal status for 'customary' and 'community-based' forms of resource management. This will be illustrated through an ethnographic micro-study of the rural village of Hila, situated on the island of Ambon. Next, it will be discussed how violence and institutional change interrelate with each other and how this is linked to the outbreak and continuation of the violence in this specific case.

Background

During the course of its post-colonial history, Indonesia has always been affected by violence. In most cases, a civil militia challenged the Indonesian state. Shortly after the formal independence of Indonesia in 1949, we witnessed the rebellion of the separatist *RMS (Republik Maluku Selatan –*

Republic of South Maluku) in Ambon and the more religious inspired Darul Islam rebellion that aimed for the establishment of an 'Islamic State of Indonesia'. During the repressive New Order that lasted from 1966 until 1998 these sorts of conflicts continued, taking the character of a separatist 'liberation' movement in the peripheral islands fighting the authoritarian, military-backed centre in Jakarta. Among the best known conflicts were the longstanding struggles of the *Fretilin* (*Frente Revolucionária de Timor Leste Independente – Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor*) in East Timor and of the *GAM* (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka – Free Aceh Movement*) in Aceh.

With the implosion of the New Order in May 1998, apart from an intensification of these separatist struggles, there emerged a new form of violence in Indonesia that was communal in character. In these conflicts communal fault lines that were translated through ethnic or religious identities lie at the root of the violence. These communal conflicts emerged in the peripheral islands outside of Java. In the province of West Kalimantan, major riots erupted between Dayaks versus Chinese and Madurese. Religious violence between Christians and Muslims in the provinces of Central Sulawesi, North Maluku and Maluku, where the island of Ambon is situated, filled the headlines of Indonesian newspapers in the entangled months after the fall of the New Order. Among these different communal conflicts, the violence that enraged throughout the island of Ambon, stands out as the most prolonged and causing the most devastation. From 1999 until 2002, this small island was the site of a high-intensity conflict between Muslims and Christians leading to the internal displacement of one third of the total population and the direct killings of some 5000 people (ICG Asia Report 31, 2002; Mason, 2001; CARDI, 2005). With the signing of the Malino II peace agreements in 2002, the bloodshed came to an end but irregular low intensity violence kept on affecting the island.[1] Until today, the region is susceptible to sporadic acts of

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[1] The best known example are the wide riots in the city of Ambon in April 2004 that led to the death of some 60 people (ICG Asia Briefing No. 32, 2004).

violence, such as bomb attacks, but these are conducted by radicalised minorities and are no longer backed by broad sections of society.

The implosion of the New Order and the subsequent rise of a new sort of communal violence have forced scholars of Indonesian society to look for new models and frameworks explaining civil unrest (Schulte Nordholdt, 2003; Purdey, 2004; Van Klinken, 2007). Throughout the vast literature that has been written on this topic, one can detect some commonalities. The eruption of communal violence after the fall of the New Order in 1998 in Indonesia has often been represented using a distinction between economically motivated conflicts versus identity conflicts. In this classification, the ethnic riots in Kalimantan are explained as a struggle for access to the forest by greed driven elite-politics manipulating ethnic identities (Peluso and Watts, 2001, Van Klinken, 2006). Models trying to explain the outburst of religious violence in the regions of Central - Sulawesi (Poso) and Maluku (Ambon) on the other hand have more difficulties coming to grips with the economic logics behind the violence. Part of this difficulty can be explained by the distinct character of the conflict in the different regions. While the violence in Kalimantan took the form of short-term riots, the violence in both Poso and Ambon turned into a full-grown conflict that lasted for a couple of years. One of the major challenges scholars studying communal violence in Indonesia face is precisely how in both Ambon and Poso these initial riots turned into such a long-term conflict.

Questions on the reasons for the outbreak of the violence in Ambon are largely answered and bear striking similarities with the models that are used to explain the civil unrest in Kalimantan. Central in this explanation is the competition for access to vital resources in a period of institutional turmoil and uncertainty. In this political economical explanation, especially the issue of access to jobs in the state bureaucracy and the patrimonial linkages dividing the society among Christian and Muslims networks are seen as the defining

factor leading to the riots (Bertrand, 2004; Van Klinken, 2000; Van Klinken, 2007; see also Thornburn, 2002 on the Kei islands). It is however harder to find elaborate explanations in the literature for the continuation of the violence since 1999 through this lens of the political economy. To understand the course of the violence that in Ambon roughly lasted until 2002, more popular accounts in the national and local Indonesian media often refer to the framework of identity-politics that are manipulated by so called *'provokator'*.[2] In this framework, it is believed that the manipulation of existing religious identities by outside actors set in motion a vicious cycle of revenge and hatred. Religious identities on both sides of the conflict were provoked and the conflict turned into a classical identity conflict. Religious hatred was further enhanced with the influx in 2000 of non-Moluccan fighters organised in militias like the Laskar Jihad and Laskar Moejahedin that had a strong religiously inspired agenda. Mainly among Indonesian scholars and media, there is furthermore the popular belief that these *'provokator'* are Jakarta based elites that consciously provoked this violence for their own economic and political benefits by touching upon religious identities through rumours and deliberate killings (Aditjondro, 2001). Not surprisingly, people regularly justify their religously driven actions as they were being manipulated from *'orang dari luar'* (people from outside).

Although this is still a very common conviction, strong evidence proving this 'provocation-thesis' is still lacking. Putting the blame on outside forces may have a positive impact for people coming to grips with the violence, but neglects the agency, local interests and even accountability of actors in the field by holding unknown and elusive perpetrators responsible for the events (Von Benda Beckmann, 2003; Purdey, 2004). Indeed, studying the conflict in Ambon, one has to admit that the (mis)use of religious symbolism and identity markers had a major impact on the deterioration of the security situation on

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[2] This image of the *'provokator'* cannot solely be linked to the violence in Ambon but is an explanation that is used to account for the outburst of violence in many parts of Indonesia (see also, Purdey, 2004).

the island and was a stimulus to conduct acts of violence (Adam e.a., 2007). Also the mobilizing effect of rumours touching upon religious sentiments was a major drive behind the violence (Spyer, 2002). However, a full understanding of the violence that enraged in Ambon demands an integrative approach that - apart from a focus on the manipulation of religious identity through different means - takes into account the many dimensions and sometimes overlapping conflicts that characterized the violence in Ambon (Pannell, 2003). One of these dimensions that have been overlooked too often among scholars are the fierce power struggles to control the access over economic assets.

Theoretical Framework: Institutions and the Political Economy of Violence

As already described by a multitude of scholars throughout different cases in the world, civil war cannot solely be represented as a breakdown of authority and governance and human, physical and political destruction. Once a conflict erupts, it develops an internal logic, not only in psychological terms as described for the Ambonese violence, but also leading to new modes of political and economic regulation (e.g. Keen, 2000; Korf, 2004, 2005; Vlassenroot & Raeymaekers, 2006). Even in contexts in which the state appears to be totally absent and public authority is solely pursued by non-state, seemingly unruly militias, structures of local governance remain in place yet go through fundamental transformations profoundly altering power relations during and after the conflict. In this sense, conflict becomes a rational strategy as some actors deliberately manage to improve their societal position by violent means. Consequentially, while certain parties succeed to obtain political and economical benefits, other parties should be positioned on the losing end of the game.

Access to land is one of the most contested sites where these new forms of governance can be discerned. During a conflict, due to different dynamics such as displacement, the creation of militias and new non-state centres of authority or the breakdown of transport and market facilities; all sorts of actors perceive opportunities to adapt the institutions regulating the access to land, rather than abandoning the existing institutional arrangements (Unruh, 2004). During the course of my paper, institutions will broadly be defined as a set of social norms and expectations (North, 1990). Therefore, institutions are of primordial importance organising any sort of social interaction. Resource management makes no exception to this as institutions prescribe the generally accepted way of negotiating access to assets such as land. In this sense, property rights should be treated as institutions that include both formal legal codes and informal social norms, which define the access to economic resources (Korf, 2003). This implies that actors can have direct control over resources but they cannot have direct control over institutions as such. Rather they can obtain the power to manipulate the institutions to their own benefits (Knight, 1992). How this occurs in reality is one of the fundamental questions underlining this paper.

To grasp these shifts in power structures on who controls the access to assets such as land is an essential prerequisite truly understanding the political impact of any conflict. Since control over access to land means control over the livelihoods of people, land is, apart from a natural asset, a major political asset through which huge parts of a population can be controlled (Lavigne-Delville, 2002; Herbst, 2000). In other words, land administration is a sensitive and volatile political issue and one of the pre-eminent fields where new elites can put themselves at the foreground of the political life, certainly during a conflict or shortly after a conflict when the regular socio-political order has been altered (Huggins & Clover, 2005). Therefore, problems of access to land not always lie at the root of the violence but these can become a source of instability and tensions during the course of a conflict. This is obvious when we look at the strategies of armed militias. Control over certain organisations

defining the access to economic assets, very often by violent means, tends to become a goal in itself throughout the violence as this provides a necessary income for warring parties to perpetuate their struggle. The success by which these groups manage to do this determines for a great deal the financial capacity and socio-political legitimacy of the movement. In this regard, there is a dialectic connection between violence and institutions. Violence not only causes adapts certain institutional arrangements but these conversions on their turn have an impact on the violence itself as they define the success of certain armed groups and determine which people are on the losing and the winning side.

Before I elaborate further on these links between violence and institutions, I first wish to give a concrete illustration of how competition over land rearranges institutions regarding access to land in a complex political emergency.

Case: Lating Nustappy in Hila and Kaitetu

The case discussed here concerns the competing interests over a piece of land in the Muslim villages of Hila and Kaitetu on the island of Ambon. Before I turn to this micro-study I will first give some clarification on the institution of *'adat'* because this is an essential prerequisite to fully comprehend our micro-study. Since a broad explanation of *adat* does not fall within the outline of this paper I will limit myself to some general characteristics of what *adat* means.

- Adat in Ambon

The nature and meaning of *adat* is the source of many passionate and interesting debates both among scholars, activists and policy makers, especially since the fall of the New Order.[3] Without contradicting the scholars that plea to broaden our understanding of *adat* as a set of social expectations (Biezeveld, 2004), for reasons of clarity and considering the topic of this paper, I wish to define *adat* as a customary inspired institution of resource management. I explicitly stress 'customary inspired' because *adat* cannot simply be termed as a purely 'customary' or 'traditional' form of resource management as *adat* is created through interactions between local dynamics and colonial and post-colonial state interventions. Therefore, what is referred to as *adat* or customary should be seen as something modern that has undergone deep transformations through time. Secondly, there is no such thing as a standardised Indonesian *adat*. Throughout the many islands in the Indonesian archipelago, the content of *adat* knows many regional varieties and even fundamental differences. Thirdly, what is referred to as *adat* or customary should be treated as a set of social agreements leaving considerable space for negotiation rather than a clear-cut and fixed legal institution.

Despite this fluid character, a certain common nature of this system can be distinguished on the island of Ambon.[4] Within the Ambonese *adat*, the original community *(negeri)* consists of different original clans or *dati*. These *dati* have a non-written property right (*hak milik*) for their clan land (*tanah dati*). Land that is not distributed to the different clans is either *tanah ewang* (empty, wild land that is not yet allocated to a *dati*) or is *tanah negeri* (land that is owned by the community and managed by the *bapak raja* or traditional village

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[3] For an outstanding and recent account on this debate, see: Davidson, J. and Henley, D. (eds.) (2007). *The Revival of Tradition in Indonesian Politics. The Deployment of Adat from Colonialism to Indigenism*, London, Routledge Contemporary Southeast Asia Series

[4] For an elaborate explanation on the Moluccan adat system, see the different publications made by Benda Beckmann and Taale, such as Von Benda-Beckmann, F. and Taale, T. (1996), Land, Trees and Houses: Changing (Un)certainties in Property Relationships on Ambon (pp. 39-63), Mearns, D. and Healey, C. (ed.), *Remaking Maluku: Social Transformation in Eastern Indonesia*, Darwin, Centre for Southeast Asian Studies

leader). One of the essences of the whole *adat* system is that one has to belong to the original *negeri* to get a secure non-written property right based on *adat* rights. Entering a clan for people that do not belong to the *negeri* can only be done through marriage based on a patrilineal system or, only in very rare cases, through adoption. In this regard, *adat* should be seen as an exclusive way of resource management that favours the original community above migrants.

- Case-Study: Inter-Elite Competition in the Village of Hila

Before the conflict broke out in 1999, Hila was a Muslim village with one Christian minority consisting of some 120 households that lived at the borderland between Hila and another Muslim village, Kaitetu. This Christian community consists of people coming from neighbouring islands that were settled as guards around the VOC Fort Amsterdam during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[5] Living there for centuries, they settled themselves as a 'normal' community that developed strong social bonds with both the villages of Hila and Kaitetu. The land they lived on belonged to the colonial Dutch government. Although they were not a part of the original *negeri* (village) of Kaitetu or Hila, their social status was more privileged than other non-Moluccan settlers such as the Butonese that are still referred to as the 'migrants from yesterday'. This privileged status was most clearly reflected in their right to cultivate long-term crops such as *cengkeh* (clove), *kelapa* (coconut) or *durian*. Within *adat*, a free cultivation of long-term crops is only reserved for the original owners of the land. For people farming on land through a *hak pakai* (user's right), a cultivation of these long-term crops is not permitted or in case part of the harvest is shared with the owner of the land. The growing of these long term crops indicates that the Christians were

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[5] A minor part of this Christian community also consists of one 'original' Muslim family from Hila that had converted to Christianity in the past.

considered as 'legitimate' owners of the land by many sections of the communities of Hila and Kaitetu. Other, non-Moluccan settlers, such as the Muslim Butonese community that also lived for long time in the area, also received the privilege to cultivate these sorts of crops but had to share their crops with the people of Hila (Brouwer, 1998). This cultivation of long-term crops also demonstrates how the Christians themselves felt secure about the access to their lands. A cultivation of long-term crops requires a strong financial and human investment. A clove tree for instance takes years before the fruits can be harvested to be sold on the market for financial benefit. This long-term investment therefore supposes a secure access to land on which a deliberate planning for the future can be made.

Despite all this, the Christian community had to flee from their land because of the religious violence that affected the region from the beginning of 1999 onwards. After spending three years in IDP camps, they finally settled themselves in 2002 in Tanah Putih on the other side of Ambon Island. In this village, they receives a user's right to cultivate some land.

When we take a look at the causes why the community has not been able to return, we can point to three important reasons. First of all, due to feelings of distrust and unsafety, lots of people have always been restrained from going back to Hila. Yet, because the region has now been relatively stable for quite a while, it looks that these traumatic feelings are slowly withering away. Secondly, the regional government has a politics of resettling displaced communities in new places out of fear of provoking new violence. From 2002 onwards displaced people all over the region have been encouraged not to return to their original place but to resettle in a new place where they could get a free house and free and secure housing land. Despite these incentives, there have been serious negotiations between the Christian and the people of Hila and Tawiri to return. These talks quickly indicated that there was a third important factor restraining the community to return home and this was a shift in the elites regulating the access to their land. Looking at hindsight, we can

even state that this factor is the primordial reason the Christians of Hila were unable to return to their lands.

To sketch the problem briefly, there are two competing authorities that try to claim the land where the Christians once lived. On the one hand there is one party that bases their supposed title on this land on a certain interpretation of *adat*. The Lating-Nustappy clan has always stated that according to *adat* rule, the land of the Christians belonged to their clan. According to them, before the Christians entered the area and the Dutch VOC unlawfully took this land away in the 17th century, this land belonged to their clan. Next to the Lating-Nustappy clan there is a second party that tries to claim their access to the land based on semi-formal colonial legislation. Within this party we can situate the Christians of Hila and the village of Tawiri. As already mentioned, Christians came to live in the village of Hila as guards of Fort Amsterdam. During the centuries, they came to be settled there as a community but could never fully claim the *adat* rights to land that are reserved for the original village. This tension between their longstanding presence in the area on the one hand but the difficulty to claim an ownership right based for their land based on *adat* was already a source of frustration during colonial times. To cope with this problem, the Dutch colonial authorities in 1948 issued a *'Letter of Agreement between Hila Islam and Kaitetu about the boundary of the state land between these two negeri.'*[6] In this letter it is stated that the government land on which the Christians lived is formally given to the Christian community and does not belong to the *negeri* of Kaitetu or Hila. The letter is concluded with the following sentence: *'This letter of agreement is made under the agreement of the two disputed villages of Kaitetu and Hila*

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[6] Transcription: *'Soerat perdjandjian antara Hila Islam dan Kaitetoo tentang sifat tanah goebernamen jang terdepat ditangah-tangah kadoea negeri itoe.'* This letter is kept carefully by the people of Kaitetu. For an interesting and lively account on the use of written documents in land disputes in the negeri of Hila, see: Von Benda-Beckmann, F. and Von Benda-Beckmann, K. (1994), Texts in Context: Historical Documents as Political Commodity on Islamic Ambon (pp.223-245), in: Wolfgang Marschall (ed.), *Texts from the Islands. Oral and Written Traditions of Indonesia and the Malay World*, Bern, Ethnologica Bernensia.

Islam and may be used as a legal document whenever it is needed.[7] However, as the Dutch left in 1949-1950, this colonial Letter of Agreement got never transformed into formal 'Indonesian' legislation. As a result, the status by which the Christians of Hila lived on their lands from 1950 onwards was legally insecure and vague but as the relation with both the villages of Kaitetu and Hila was good; nobody took offence in their presence.

This all changes when the Christians are forced to leave their area in 1999. Their exodus presented the Lating-Nustappy clan of Hila with the opportunity to reclaim this land as their traditional clan land. In their opinion, the land of the Christians was wrongfully taken away by the colonial occupiers and according to *adat*, belongs to their clan. This is not to say that the Lating-Nustappy clan prohibits the Christians to go back to their lands but they could only do this by recognizing that the land belongs to their clan. For the Christian community this would mean the ultimate surrender to their long-standing legal battle to obtain formal ownership rights for their housing lands.

To make matters even more complex, after the Indonesian independence the land of the Christians of Hila was attached to the administrative unit of Tawiri. This means that, although the community is referred to as the Christians of Hila and this community presents itself as coming from Hila, they belonged administratively to Tawiri. This administrative transfer has been a source of tension between the villages of Tawiri and Hila for decades and has been given a new impulse with the flight of the Christian community. Tawiri wishes that the Christian community returns as quickly as possible and wants them to receive a formal ownership right. This would enable Tawiri to securely claim the Lating-Nustappy land so that it becomes part of their village. In case the Christians do not return, the Lating-Nustappy clan can more easily reclaim their clan land. This implies that this clan from Hila would have lots of land in the neighbouring village of Tawiri. The result of this quarrel between Hila and

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[7] Transcription: '*Soerat perdjandjian ini diboeat dengan persetoedjoean kedoea negeri jang berbantah ialah: Katietoe dan Hila Islam, dan boleh dipakai sebagai soestoe acte jang ajah bilerana perloe*'

Tawiri is that the Christian community is trapped between two sides and their eventual repatriation is heavily contested. As a consequence, the Christians explicitly do not want to return out of fear of provoking conflict between these two (Muslim) villages and having to take sides with one of the conflicting parties.

The Dynamics of Violence and Institutional Change in Ambon

Looking at this one micro-study from a more general angle, I illustrated how customary authorities took the opportunity to reinforce their status as the 'legitimate' owners of a piece of land throughout the conflict. What sorts of institutional arrangements regarding access to land have been changed and how they managed to obtain this power will be discussed in the subsequent chapter.

(i) Considering my definition of an institution as a set of social norms and expectations, I cannot say new institutions regulating the access to land came into being in Hila. Rather, what happened is that a new elite obtained the power to change the institutions in such a way that it benefits their own interest. As said, *adat* should be seen as an institution as it prescribes an established way of obtaining access to resources. However, there is no such thing as a standardised interpretation of *adat* and different parties can transform this interpretation for their own benefits. In this sense, this paper does not want to judge who is using the most historically correct institution as this does not exist in reality. Rather, I intend to look at the underlying power struggles that result in an adaptation of the institutional arrangements. To illustrate this process of institutional change I refer once again to my remarks about the cultivation of long-term crops. Institutional arrangements made it happen that before the outbreak of the violence, it was common for the

Christians that they could freely cultivate long-term crops. Although they did not belong to the original negeri of *Kaitetu* or *Hila*, their long-term presence which was backed by colonial legislation gave them the legitimacy to enjoy this privilege. By doing this, they challenged the claims laid out by the Lating Nustappy clan that they were normal migrants that were obliged to ask the permission for this privilege. Once the Christians left the area, the Lating Nustappy saw their opportunity to become the owners of the land and change this specific institutional arrangement. In the meantime however; a lot of other institutional arrangements regarding the cultivation of short-term crops, or access to land for housing arrangements remained the same as they were before the conflict. In this regard, we can only speak of an institutional adaptation rather than the emergence of a whole set of new institutions.

Why then did the Lating-Nustappy clan specifically want this institutional arrangement to be changed? The matter is not that this Muslim clan forbids the Christians to come back out of religious fervour. Their strategic thinking behind this move is much more tactical and complex. The Christians are allowed to come back but they can only do this under the conditions set by the Lating Nustappy clan. One of these conditions is that the Christians give permission to grow long-term crops but only if parts of the harvest are shared. The importance of this is both economic and symbolic. This institutional rearrangement provides some economic profits but this particular piece of land is only a small portion in their whole patrimony that consists of huge plots on different islands in the region. The collection of these taxes is thus not an essential prerequisite for the economic survival of the clan. Rather, the real importance for them is that the migrants symbolically acknowledge the Lating-Nustappy clan as the legitimate owners. For the clan this is essential as land is one of the factors that binds the clan together and is therefore closely linked with the identity of the Lating-Nustappy clan. They have to fulfil their responsibilities to protect all their lands which are seen as a gift of their forefathers and they have to protect their lands for the benefits of their

offspring. Loosing land would put them in great shame towards their grandchildren and their forebears.

(ii) A second question we need to ask is how the Lating Nustappy clan concretely obtained the power to transform some institutional arrangements for their own benefits? To answer this question I argue that fully understanding institutional shifts during a conflict needs a broader frame of analysis than a focus on the conflict itself. The power struggles preceding institutional change are not only subject to regional conflict-dynamics but are also shaped by national and even global processes. Fully understanding the relevance of institutional shifts therefore needs a holistic approach taking different levels of analysis into account. This implies the following: although the Lating-Nustappy clan indeed had the opportunity to reclaim land because of local changes related to conflict and displacement, this would never have been possible without parallell changes at the national and the global level. Of special importance in this case are the new national legislations that came into being after the fall of the New Order in 1998 and gave a stronger legitimacy to *adat*-based forms of resource management (Thornburn, 2004; Fitzpatrick, 2006). Especially a broad decentralisation move legally enforced *adat* inspired forms of resource management. These legal transformations in post-Suharto Indonesia on their turn have been greatly influenced by a global development discourse that puts concepts and ideas like civil society, community participation and decentralisation central and was pushed through by international donors at that time (Vedi Hadiz, 2004). A concrete consequence was that there emerged a plethora of state regulations by which the Lating Nustappy clan could legally claim the ownership over the land. Remarkably, these new regulations have never been concretely applied. Rather, it is the threat to employ this plethora of new regulations that made Kaitetu surrender as they fear the high costs to start a legal fight in court that probably would be lost anyway.

(iii) Because of this current legal standstill, the dispute between the two parties keeps on shimmering and the two villages are not at speaking terms with other. From time to time, this rivalry has provoked some serious scuffles between the villages resulting in badly wounded people on both sides. Looking at these tensions, it is utterly intriguing that the conflict we are facing here in post-conflict Ambon is between two Muslim villages whereas the real conflict was a Muslim versus Christian conflict. This proves that although religious violence initially provoked a renewed competition over land, the outcomes of this conflict cannot solely be understood in these religious terms but are translated both in religious, inter religious or even ethnic terms. These tensions have a destabilizing effect on the societal fabric in post-conflict Ambon. Without stating that these new sorts of contestations to access resources in post-conflict Ambon will immediately lead to a renewed high-intensity conflict, this slows down processes of reconciliation and economic recovery in a society that is still characterised by deep communal distrust.

(iv) Understanding institutional change in a complex political emergency needs a broader frame of analysis than focussing on the active fighters. A lot of conflict analysis so far has focussed on the direct link between conflict and institutional change in the form of so-called functional violence (Lautze and Raven–Roberts, 2006) or top-down violence (Keen, 2000). With this functional violence, I mean that it is a direct objective of warring parties to obtain control over certain organisations regulating access to resources. This control then enables them to perpetuate their struggle as this provides necessary financial incomes. As a consequence, the nature of the institutions is manipulated in different ways so that it fits into their own prerogatives. This aim for control can as well be one of the reasons for the outbreak of the violence or become an objective during the conflict. Without challenging the validity of this idea, in a complex political emergency the spectrum of actors of

change having an impact on institutional reconfigurations is much broader than the warring parties themselves. Studying the conflict in Ambon, it is obvious that the warring parties never had the direct aim of adapting institutions to their own benefit in a durable manner. The most important drive to conduct the violence was indeed religiously and ideologically inspired. Nevertheless, although little violence was conducted with the direct aim to profit from economic and political opportunities, different sorts of opportunities popped up during the conflict and were seized whenever the civil population had the possibility. This is what I refer to as the indirect link between violence and institutions. An adaptation of institutional arrangements can also be an indirect side effect of the violence apart from a clear-cut motivation to start or continue the violence by violent actors. Because of the conflict in Ambon, the whole societal constellation went through such a huge transformation that parties not directly involved in the fighting could deliberately improve their societal and economic status by other means than direct violence. One of these opportunities for local *adat* elites was precisely to change the rule of the game regarding land access although this issue was not an immediate reason for the outbreak or continuation of the conflict. For instance, in my case described above, the Lating-Nustappy people have never actively engaged in the fighting, nor could I at any moment detect a clear-cut strategy by them to chase the Christians away from the contested land. It were radicalized Muslim youth groups coming from villages that had no special relationship with Hila that chased the Christians away from their land. Nevertheless, once the Christians left the area, people from Hila did try to grab the few opportunities that were offered, hereby altering the institutional arrangements through which the Christians normally organised their access to land.

Conclusion

Looking at institutional change is an essential prerequisite to fully understand the socio-political impact of any protracted crisis in the world. As institutions constitute both the formal rules and informal norms that define the access to economic resources such as land, having the power/legitimacy to alter these institutional arrangements is a way to strengten access to these resources. This on its turn improves one's own economic and societal position. As our case-study on the village of Hila illustrates, elites popped up during the conflict that saw the opportunity to fundamentally alter institutional arrangements and hereby reinforcing their access to land. During the course of the violence in Ambon socio-political regulation did not collapse and result in absolute chaos. Neither did the conflict lead to the emergence of a total new set of institutions. Rather, what we noticed is how certain elites managed to adapt the existing institutions to their own favour.

The way these links between violence and institutional change should be conceptualized is not simple and linear. The agents of change having an influence on institutional reconfigurations are much broader than the warring parties themselves. Aiming for institutional change regarding land tenure has never been a direct objective for the outbreak of the violence or even to continue the violence in the Moluccan region. Nevertheless, actors that never were directly involved in active fighting took the opportunities whenever they could to influence institutional arrangements. In this paper I referred to this as the indirect link between violence and institutional change. This stands in contrast to the direct link between violence and institutions as is obvious in the so-called functional violence of warring parties that deliberately aime to profit from socio-economic opportunities by violent means. Secondly, apart from a focus on the local conflict dynamics also the national and even global context needs to be taken into account if we want to fully understand institutional change at the micro-level of society. Violence is not the only encompassing factor defining institutional change but is only one part of a much broader picture. Of particular importance in my case is the national decentralisation move that began after 1998 and that on its turn was greatly

influenced by a particular development discours promoted by international donors such as the IMF and the Worldbank. Lastly, regarding the outcomes of the religious violence, an inter-elite competition has emerged between the villages of Hila and Kaitetu with a potential for renewed low-intensity violence that has a destabilizing effect on the Ambonese social fabric. Remarkably, these tensions cannot be framed within the classical Christian versus Muslim antagonism of the high-intensity conflict but take on new forms such, as in this case, Muslim versus Muslim.

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