Unwelcome Guests:
Relations between Pengungsi Maluku Utara and Their Hosts in Sulawesi Utara

Christopher R. Duncan
(Goldsmiths College, University of London)

Abstract

This paper looks at the deteriorating relations between the population of Sulawesi Utara and the approximately 35,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) who fled there from the neighboring province of Maluku Utara. These IDPs first began arriving in large numbers in November of 1999 when communal violence broke out on the islands of Ternate and Tidore in Maluku Utara. They continued arriving until the violence came to a halt in June of 2000. Initially, relations between the two groups were positive. However, the extended presence of 35,000 IDPs created several problems, including a decrease in wages and an increase in housing costs. Negative perceptions of IDPs and jealousy over IDP aid have created further misunderstandings. Additionally, IDP experiences with locals have led them to distrust the local population. On a few occasions these tensions have broken out into violence, and some fear this is a foreshadowing of the future should large numbers of IDPs decide to stay in Sulawesi Utara. This paper examines the relationships between these groups, as well as some of the efforts made by international NGOs to address these issues.

Introduction

While the ethnic, religious and political conflicts that have swept Indonesia since 1998 are a frequent topic of academic discussion, very little has been written about the 1.3 million people displaced by these conflicts. These IDPs or pengungsi are spread throughout the archipelago, and although many of these conflicts have stopped, many IDPs have not yet gone home. In September of 2001 the Indonesian government announced that Indonesia maintain “unity in diversity”?: Responses to religious-ethnic discord, refugees and regional autonomy in Eastern Indonesia” for their comments.

1 This paper is based on fieldwork carried out in North Sulawesi from June 2001 until November 2002 sponsored by LIPI and Universitas Sam Ratulangi. The research was funded by the Anthropologists Fund for Urgent Anthropological Fieldwork in coordination with the Royal Anthropological Institute and Goldsmiths College, University of London. A previous version of this paper was presented at the at the 3rd International Symposium of the Journal ANTROPOLOGI INDONESIA: ‘Rebuilding Indonesia, a Nation of “Unity in Diversity”: Towards a Multicultural Society’, Udayana University, Denpasar, Bali, 16–19 July 2002. I thank all the participants in the panel ‘How will Eastern Indonesia maintain “unity in diversity”?: Responses to religious-ethnic discord, refugees and regional autonomy in Eastern Indonesia’ for their comments.

2 Translation note: Dalam bahasa Indonesia tidak ada bedanya di antara orang yang mengungsi ke luar negeri dan orang yang mengungsi di dalam negeri. Kedua-duanya disebut ‘pengungsi’. Tapi, di bahasa Ingriss, dan dalam hukum internasional ada
the ’IDP/refugee problem’ would be solved by December 31, 2002. The government’s plan contained no details on how this was going to be accomplished other than providing three options for IDPs: 1) pemulangan; 2) pemberdayaan, or; 3) pengalihan (Departemen Sosial 2001). This new policy was greeted with confusion by many IDPs, because it was released at a time when people were still being displaced by ongoing violence in Poso and Ambon. The document also announced that all government aid to the displaced would cease on December 31, 2001. This led some IDPs to speculate that the plan was aimed at appeasing host communities, many of whom were beginning to wonder when the IDPs were going to go home.

The prolonged presence of over 1.3 million displaced people in Indonesia has obviously been a financial and social burden on host communities throughout the archipelago. Tensions have arisen almost everywhere there are IDPs (e.g.; Buton, Sulawesi Tenggara (Tempo 2001; Jakarta Post 2001a). Exactly how host communities deal with these burdens and resulting tensions are less obvious (Chambers 1986; Voutira and Harrell-Bond 1995; Whitaker 2002). These developments cannot be ignored, as it was clashes between indigenous communities and outsiders that created many of these IDP situations in the first place (Sudagung 2000; Sihbudi and Nurhasim 2001; Duncan 2002). If their return, or integration, is not dealt with properly, regional governments will simply be sowing the seeds of future conflicts. In response, the Indonesian government has focused on returning IDPs to their previous homes in an effort to avoid possible conflicts. Despite its concerns, the Indonesian government, at all levels, has done very little to mitigate tensions between IDPs and host communities. In what follows, I look at the changing relationships between IDPs from the violence in Maluku Utara and their local hosts in Sulawesi Utara. I examine some of stereotypes and points of tension that have developed between the two groups, as well as at some efforts (or lack thereof) by the government and NGOs to deal with the potential for conflict.

A brief review of the conflict in Maluku Utara

In January of 1999 violence broke out between Christian and Muslims communities in Ambon, the capital of the province of Maluku. The northern part of the province (which would soon become the new province of Maluku Utara) remained peaceful. It was not until mid-August of 1999 that violence erupted in Halmahera in Kecamatan Kao between Makian migrants and indigenous populations. These clashes focused on plans by the regional government to create a new Kecamatan of Makian Daratan from the southern half of Kecamatan Kao. This new kecamatan would consist of all of the Makian villages that were established in 1975 when the Indonesian government moved the Makian from their homes on Makian Island and resettled them in Kao to protect them from a predicted volcanic eruption. It was also to include several Pagu villages and some villages from Kecamatan Jailolo.

The violence in August only lasted a few
days, but the problem remained unresolved. Disturbances broke out again in October, this time resulting in the total defeat of the Makian by the indigenous population. Approximately 15,000 Makian IDPs fled to Ternate and Tidore. Although the Kao-Malifut conflict was largely an ethnic one, it soon took on a religious character as the Makian are Muslim, and the majority of the indigenous people of Kao are Christian. The violence in Tidore began with the appearance of a suspicious letter calling for Christians to cleanse the region of Muslims. This letter infuriated Muslims, particularly the Makian IDPs who were still angry about their defeat at the hands of the Kao. After the violence broke out in early November approximately 13,000 largely Christian IDPs were forced to flee to Sulawesi Utara or to Halmahera. This period of violence was followed by ‘Muslim’ attacks on the western and southern regions of Halmahera sending thousands of largely Christian IDPs to Sulawesi Utara and northern Halmahera.

At the end of 1999 after months of tension, fighting broke out in Tobelo in north Halmahera resulting in the deaths of several hundred Muslims and the complete destruction of their homes and mosques. The violence spread throughout Halmahera and to nearby islands. Accounts of the Tobelo violence, made worse by exaggeration, created a national uproar that led to the creation of the Laskar Jihad, a group of self-proclaimed Muslim ‘Holy Warriors,’ who flooded into Maluku and Maluku Utara several months later to help their religious brethren. These Jihad troops, supported by some military personnel and some local Muslim populations, attacked and destroyed virtually every Christian village in Kecamatan Galela, as well as attacking other parts of the province. When the large-scale violence finally subsided in June of 2000, very few regions were untouched by the conflict and over 200,000 people had been displaced from their homes. Three years later, many IDPs remain in Sulawesi Utara or are still displaced within Maluku Utara for a variety of reasons. Lingering distrust and tensions between Muslim and Christian communities, as well as trauma prevent many from returning to their previous homes. In addition, the destruction of homes, gardens, and infrastructure has slowed the return of many families.

The IDPs in Sulawesi Utara

The vast majority of the displaced from this conflict were (and many still are) concentrated in three locations; approximately 35,000 largely Christian IDPs from Ternate, Tidore, Morotai, and the southern parts of the province fled to the neighboring province of Sulawesi Utara. Another 45,000 Christian IDPs had sought refuge in Kecamatan Tobelo in north Halmahera, while close to 100,000 Muslim IDPs from Malifut, Tobelo and elsewhere were concentrated in Ternate. The IDPs in Sulawesi Utara, the focus of this paper, lived (and many still do) throughout the province. Approximately one third were housed in large IDP camps located in the cities of Manado and Bitung. These camps ranged from the smallest containing about 125 families to the largest, which at its peak contained over 1,000 households. The remaining 25,000 IDPs lived scattered in private homes throughout the region. While people from the latter group, the majority of the internally displaced, were often difficult to locate, the IDPs in camps were highly visible. As a result IDPs were generally perceived as camp occupants in the eyes of local communities.

IDPs characterized their initial reception in Manado as a positive one. They often described the large amount of support they received from the local community, including food, clothing, shelter and spiritual counsel-
ing. Numerous churches, mosques, and community groups donated aid for the IDPs, many of who had lost everything they owned. However, the IDPs complained that they were initially placed under 24 hour guard by the police, and forced to wear large placards declaring their IDP status. The local security forces were afraid that the IDPs would bring their problems with them. The actions of the Makian IDPs in Ternate provided an example of what displaced populations could do to a city. Additionally, there were fears that the violence would spread to Sulawesi Utara, and on a few occasions investigators from Maluku Utara were found inside the camps. Thus from an early point, the local authorities felt the need to ‘protect’ Manado from the IDPs, a reoccurring theme that will be discussed below.

The warm reception was short-lived. The influx of a large number of unemployed people reportedly led to a decrease in wages for manual and factory labor. Housing prices rose as thousands of families looked for places to live. More than three years after their arrival, the IDPs are now held responsible for virtually every problem befalling the province of Sulawesi Utara. Locals blame them for everything from traffic congestion, and increased crime rates, to higher real estate prices and pollution. Unfortunately, the arrival of the IDPs coincided with deteriorating government services in a time of tighter budgets, and they represented a convenient scapegoat. However, it must be pointed out that in addition to the burden posed by IDPs, there were segments of the host community that benefited from their presence, through decreased wages, and the influx of foreign aid. Once the violence in Maluku Utara subsided the provincial government started calling for the IDPs to go home, despite the fact that many of them were, and remain, unable to do so. These official statements calling for their return created a perception among locals that it was safe for the IDPs to go home, but that they preferred to stay in the camps and receive handouts. This view has strengthened over time.

**Local views of IDPs**

Over the course of three years, the local population in Manado and elsewhere in Sulawesi Utara has developed a number of stereotypes about the IDP population that have shaped their interactions with them. The truth value of these stereotypes is largely irrelevant. The persistence of these views, and the veracity invested in them by locals and government officials, ensures their continued effectiveness in defining the IDPs. The result is that civil servants, as one of the major consumers of these stereotypes, have shaped aid agendas based on these often misguided images.

The most common complaint was that IDPs were lazy and simply sat around waiting for handouts (Manado Post 2001a). Their laziness was often compared to the ‘natural industriousness of the Minahasans’. Many locals felt that the IDPs had become accustomed to receiving aid from the government or NGOs and it had removed their incentive to work (i.e.; Berita Telegraf 2001; Manado Post 2001a). Others felt that the IDPs were too selective in choosing their work. For example, one woman from Bitung visited a camp looking for a maid. She offered a salary of 100,000 Rp. per month plus room and board. A camp leader pointed out that a woman could make 80,000 Rp. per month just doing laundry for others within the camp, let alone cooking and cleaning. The response of the woman was not to change her offer, but to respond angrily—‘*so pengungsyi, mau balagu*’ (*You are already a refugee and you want to pick and choose* [your employ-

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3 An increasing amount of research is looking at both the burdens and the benefits posed by the presence of a large number of displaced persons (see Kuhlman 1990).
Many people in Manado equated this unwillingness to be exploited with laziness.

With all of these supposedly unemployed and idle people, the IDP camps came to be seen as anarchic places devoid of law and seething with rage and anger. At one point the head of Satkorlak said he wanted to keep the camps open ‘because at least in the camps the refugees’ [sic] hostilities can be contained, and not seep out into the streets.’ (Far Eastern Economic Review 2001). He seems to have forgotten that 25,000 ‘hostile’ IDPs did not live in these camps. At another point, the Chairman of the Sulawesi Utara DPR-D was quoted in the Jakarta Post (2001b) as saying that the presence of IDPs had ‘boosted arms sales and the manufacture of homemade guns.’ Others complained that the IDPs had contributed to a rise in the crime rate. However, the numbers from the bureau of statistics at Polresta in Manado and Bitung showed no correlation between the arrival of IDPs and an increase in the crime rate. In Manado the police had only arrested one IDP over the course of three years (Manado Post 2001d). In their opinion, IDPs were more often the victims of crimes (Posko Manado 2001).

The perceived threat that the IDPs posed to local peace became an issue around Christmas of 2001. During October and November of 2001, rumors began to sweep through Sulawesi Utara that the Laskar Jihad (active in Poso, Sulawesi Tengah at that time) was planning a Bloody Christmas (Natal Berdarah) for the region (Manado Post 2001e). Tensions increased around the celebration of Idul Fitri and continued until after New Years, particularly when several members of the Laskar Jihad were arrested in Manado (Manado Post 2001b; Komentar 2001). These rumors made the IDP community particularly nervous. They thought ‘tasting unrest once’ (rasa kerusuhan satu kali) was more than enough, and they had no desire to go through it again. During this period, the back of many IDP camps turned into veritable weapons factories as they prepared for attacks that never materialized. They tried to discuss these fears with their neighbors, because they thought the people of Sulawesi Utara could learn from their past experiences. However, the locals saw it differently, and accused the IDPs of being provocateurs.

A major source of tension concerned IDP aid from the government and other sources. Many locals were angered by the sight of government trucks filled with foodstuffs going into the camps. They read (often exaggerated) media accounts of the large amount of aid being set aside for IDPs (a large portion of which never reached them). They protested that IDPs were receiving an inordinate amount of help, while local poor people had been forgotten. These complaints were most often voiced when discussing the large number of civil servants living in camps. The first wave of IDPs from Ternate and Tidore consisted of numerous civil servants and schoolteachers who were placed in camps. These IDPs were, for the most part, able to find employment once they arrived in Sulawesi Utara. The sight of duly employed civil servants in uniform, a few driving cars, living in the camps, provided proof to people in Manado and Bitung that the IDPs did not need help. Many IDPs themselves admitted that a large number of people did not need to be living in the camps, but continued to do so because it was free and they had access to aid. For example, some IDPs living in camps owned houses in Sulawesi Utara, but lived in the camps and rented out their houses as an extra source of income.4

Suspicion towards the entrepreneurship of some camp residents was not limited to the local population. IDPs who lived outside of the camps shared their jealousy. The government, NGOs and locals generally assumed
The largest cause of strife was the ‘free housing’ that some of the IDPs were promised. There were two major housing projects in Sulawesi Utara for IDPs (not including transmigration projects); the construction of a relocation site in the village of Pandu near Manado and the construction of several barracks in the village of Manembo-nembo in Bitung. From the beginning, the relocation site in Pandu was plagued by jealousy from the poorer segments of Pandu inhabitants. They demanded to know why they did not receive any housing as part of the program. At various points this jealousy broke out into conflict, resulting in the destruction of resettlement houses and physical attacks on IDPs. As the second group of houses was under construction, a group of Pandu villagers formed a ‘committee’ to ‘over-see’ their distribution. They seized the new houses and refused to give them to IDPs without sizeable cash payments. They also started making ‘patrols’ in the resettlement site, which consisted of intoxicated men with machetes walking around threatening the IDPs and stoning their homes.

IDP perceptions of locals

The IDPs were aware of their low standing in the eyes of locals, and many cited it as one of the reasons they wanted to return to Maluku Utara. They were also aware of their outsider status in the province, and were afraid to be too vocal in their complaints about local officials. Just as the locals had created stereotypes about them, the IDPs had a number of stereotypes about locals, most of them negative and based on IDP interactions with government officials at all levels. This relationship was plagued by mistrust on both sides. The officials accused the IDPs of being cheats and thieves, while the IDPs deplored the rampant corruption and lack of sensitivity among the civil service. One well-known example of the corruption concerned a shipment of rice that was to be distributed to IDPs in Bitung. Two staff members at the Department of Social Affairs sold the rice at the market rather than distribute it to the IDPs. However, they made the mistake of hiring IDPs to move the rice, and the IDPs were quick to tell others of the scheme. Despite incidents such as this, local officials vehemently denied all accusations of corruption. In contrast, IDPs admitted that they often cheated the system, arguing that civil servants would steal what the IDPs did not take for themselves.

With these examples in mind, the IDPs often referred to the ‘un-Christian behavior’ of the Minahans and complained of their lack of respect for their Christian brethren. Upon their arrival in Manado, the IDPs had expected to find a sense of solidarity with the largely Christian population of Sulawesi Utara. The deterioration of relations, and the seemingly high level of corruption among the civil servants, almost all Christians, upset them. A frequent comment was: ‘The Muslims burned our homes and stole our possessions in Maluku...’

5 The barracks in Manembo-nembo were built to house IDPs who were being evicted from two army bases in Bitung. It was the construction of a new IDP camp rather than free housing, but locals saw it the other way around and tensions ensued (Republika 2001).

6 These same Pandu residents were originally granted land by the government to ease the tension, but they were not satisfied with this arrangement. There was also a dispute over the legal status of the land (Manado Post 2001c; Sulut Post 2002).
Utara, now the Christians are stealing from us here. Additionally, the IDPs expected support for their conflict with the Muslims in Maluku Utara, a few even wanted local Christians to return with them to fight. Locals were less than receptive to these requests, being concerned with the safety of their own communities. One difference was that the IDPs had begun to identify themselves as Christians first, while the Minahasans still saw themselves as Minahasans first.

IDPs also criticized the people of Sulawesi Utara for their ‘low moral standards.’ They characterized the locals as extremely materialistic, evidenced by their propensity for shopping, and wearing the latest fashions. They also cast aspersions on the morality of the women of Manado, citing what they considered the large number of prostitutes in the region, as well as the large number of prostitutes from Manado found elsewhere. Their belief in the low moral standards of the people in Sulawesi Utara was another reason many gave for their desire to return to Maluku Utara. Worried mothers complained about the lack of moral fiber among Minahasans. ‘Manado is destroying our children’ was a common complaint. They saw the influence of drinking, youth violence, ‘free sex,’ and the pornographic VCDs readily available in the market as dangers to their children’s future.7

**The fear of future conflicts**

More than three years after they arrived, there are still over 15,000 IDPs in Sulawesi Utara. The government’s program to encourage their return has failed to meet its objectives. Various offices make claims about how many IDPs have returned, but their numbers are incorrect for several reasons. Many IDPs used the program as an opportunity to travel to Maluku Utara, for business or pleasure, and signed up with false names, then returned when they were done. Additionally, people from Maluku Utara visiting Manado, often went home posing as returning IDPs to get the free ticket. The inevitable problems of corruption and mismanagement also hampered the program from the beginning. Furthermore, the provincial government in Maluku Utara initially refused to coordinate with Sulawesi Utara, telling one NGO that they ‘had no need to coordinate the return of IDPs with Manado, as this is the age of regional autonomy.’ Despite the slow pace of the program, there is a steady trickle of IDPs returning home. However, the largest group of IDPs, those from Ternate and Tidore, feel they cannot go home in the near future, and many do not intend to return. The majority of them have sold their houses in Maluku Utara when possible and it is likely that a large number will remain in Sulawesi Utara, particularly in Manado and Bitung.

It is this last population that has some local officials and NGOs worried. They fear future clashes between the two groups. At one meeting concerning the return of IDPs, the official in charge of handling the IDPs in Sulawesi Utara explained his personal views on why they all had to go home. He pointed out that everyone in Indonesia has a homeland and they must return there, they cannot live on someone else’s land or eventually there will be conflict. He cited numerous examples of this sort of conflict in Sulawesi Utara and Indonesia as a whole. He concluded by saying: ‘If you [the IDPs] do not go back to Maluku Utara, in ten years my children will kill your children, since this is our homeland not yours.’ Not a very comforting

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7 It should be pointed out that the local media in Manado perpetuates these ideas with almost daily opinion columns bemoaning the declining morality of local youth and the dangers of western pornography, ‘free sex’ and its influence on the sexual morals of Manado youth. They also frequently run stories about the prevalence of drugs, youth violence and the thriving trade in young women.
statement from the official in charge of handling the IDPs.

Very few NGOs or government programs have been aimed at dealing with these tensions. In late fall 2001 an international NGO called CARDI (The Consortium for Assisting the Refugees and Displaced in Indonesia) held a series of workshops with youth from the IDP camps and from Manado and Bitung. The workshops focused on the topics of tolerance, gender, peace making and the dangers of stereotypes. CARDI hoped the meetings and related activities (including a soccer league and a radio program) would improve relations between the two groups. In the end, most people directly involved with the program considered it a success. However, their efforts were not greeted with the same warmth among all segments of the IDP community. At the end of the program, a group of the youth involved made a visit to Ternate to meet with young people there. Upon their return they discussed the visit and their views on Ternate in a radio broadcast. The two girls interviewed were locals from Manado (the IDP children failed to attend). They talked for an hour about how safe Ternate was and how the IDPs should return. I listened to the broadcast with some IDPs, and they were not happy with the statements. They argued that such statements would contribute to the deteriorating relations between them and locals as the latter would be even less tolerant of their presence if they thought Ternate was safe.8

However, I would argue that this fear of future clashes between the IDPs and locals in Sulawesi Utara, outside of the relocation site at Pandu, has been overemphasized. Once the aid is stopped, and the camps are closed, the IDPs who do not go home will largely assimilate into the community. It is the continuation of aid that has angered locals, and the existence of IDP camps serves as a constant reminder of that aid. The government’s current plan to build more barracks for those who cannot, or will not, return to Maluku Utara will only prolong the problem. By building large barracks, the government will institutionalize the camp as the place of residence for IDPs. Although they will become locals according to their identity cards, they will essentially still be living like IDPs. Furthermore, the barracks will serve as a constant reminder to locals that the IDPs received free government housing, while they (many of whom are not as well off) did not.

Empowerment schemes to aid people in building individual homes as well as an honest and sincere effort by the government of Sulawesi Utara to assist in the return of IDPs would be a better solution for the long term. However, further anthropological research is needed, in Sulawesi Utara and elsewhere, to examine how IDP populations are integrating (or not) with their hosts over the long term, and to look at how conflicts between the two groups can be minimized.

8 Another CARDI program was a media campaign about IDP-local relations in late 2002. The goal was to educate locals about the continuing problems faced by IDPs, whether they stayed in Sulawesi Utara or returned to Maluku Utara. The media campaign featured weekly radio and television call-in shows that discussed various aspects of IDP life, or IDP-local relations. They also placed ads in local papers, produced a short television advertisement and held press conferences to discuss the situation of IDPs in North Sulawesi and the situation in Maluku Utara.
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