Towards a New Politics of Tradition?
Decentralisation, Conflict, and Adat in Eastern Indonesia

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Abstract

The intention of this article is to discuss the relationship between the processes of fiscal and political decentralisation, the outbreak of communal violence, and what I call 'the new politics of tradition' in Indonesia.

In 1999 under the former President, Jusuf Habibie, the Indonesian parliament (DPR) voted in favour of two laws, No. 22 and 25 of 1999, which promised to leave a significant share of state revenues in the hands of the regional governments. Strongly supported by the liberal ideologues of the IMF and the World Bank, the two laws were envisaged within Indonesia as a necessary step towards devolving the centralised control of New Order patrimonialism and as a way of curbing separatism and demands for autonomy by giving the regional governments the constitutional and financial wherewithal to maintain a considerable degree of self-determination. Decentralisation was in other words touted as the anti-dote to communal violence and separatist tendencies—an anti-dote administered or at least prescribed by multi-national development agencies in most conflict-prone areas of the world.

This paper wishes to probe this idea by looking at the conflict and post-conflict situation in North Maluku. The conflict illustrates how local elites have begun jockeying for political control in anticipation of decentralisation. The process of decentralisation is in other words not merely an anti-dote but in some cases an implicated part in the production of violence. One reason for this is simply that the decentralisation of financial and political control after three decades of centralisation entails a significant shift in the parameters of hegemony—a shift towards which local political entrepreneurs in the regions are bound to react. The new 'politics of tradition' currently emerging in Indonesia is the combined result of changes in global forms of governance, a strong political focus on ethnic and religious identity in the 'era reformasi' and a local willingness to employ these identities to garner support in the new political landscape of decentralisation.¹

¹ This paper was originally presented at the workshop 'Governance, Identity and Conflict: Assessing the Impact of Democratization, Decentralization, and Regional Autonomy on Stability in Post-Suharto Indonesia' at the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS) in Copenhagen, 31 August–1 September 2001. I thank the participants at this workshop as well as those of the 3rd International Symposium of the Journal ANTROPOLOGI INDONESIA in Udayana University, Denpasar, 16–19 July 2002, for their helpful comments and suggestions. I would also like to thank the many people in Ternate, Tidore and Halmahera who have helped me understand their region, Maloko Kie Raha, a little better.
‘When Suharto goes, everything has to be reinvented’
Goenawan Mohamad (1997)

Introduction

In the last days of 1999, a peculiar street battle broke out in the bustling provincial town of Ternate, the capital of the newly formed province of North Maluku (Antara 1999). The battle, which pitted the ‘traditional army’ (pasukan adat) of the Sultan of Ternate, dressed in yellow uniforms, against the ‘traditional army’ of the Sultan of Tidore, recognisable by their white headbands, was precipitated by events on the evening of 26 December. On that night, a motley group of residents from the town section of Kampung Pisang, assisted by students from the local Khairun University and Makian refugees from the village of Malifut who had been pouring into Ternate since August, burnt down a building near the Sultan Palace in Ternate. The building, which had formerly been a Catholic school, now functioned as the headquarter of the ‘traditional forces’ of the Sultan of Ternate, after all Christians had been evicted from Ternate in November 1999. In retaliation for the destruction of their headquarter, which came as a protest over alleged harassment of Makian refugees, the palace guards of the Sultan of Ternate sacked the town section of Kampung Pisang the same night, burning down 106 houses and public buildings. News travelled fast to the neighbouring island of Tidore, where the Sultan dispatched his ‘traditional army’ to Ternate where they were augmented by Makian refugees and inhabitants from South Ternate (Antara 1999). The ensuing battle, in which the combatants were armed with home-made guns, spears, machetes and petrol bombs, continued over the following two days, and ended on 29 December 1999 with the signing of a peace agreement between ‘yellow forces’ (pihak kuning) of the Sultan of Ternate and the motley assembly of the ‘white forces’ (pihak putih) (Aldahar 2000). In the fighting between ten and twenty people had been killed (Antara 1999).

Occurring as it did in late 1999, one of the saddest and most brutal periods in ‘the civil war’ in the provinces of Maluku and North Maluku, the battle in Ternate between the ‘traditional forces’ of two neighbouring sultanates was more remarkable for its seemingly quaint revival of traditional enmity than for its level of violence. The hundreds of fatalities resulting from the clashes between Christians and Muslims in the district of Tobelo on the neighbouring island of Halmahera that took place in the very same days in late December easily dwarfed the death toll of perhaps twenty in Ternate. The Ternate clashes therefore occupied only little space in the media, which instead devoted all its attention to the brutal events in Tobelo. Indeed, the media coverage of the events in Tobelo caused an outcry in Muslim communities throughout Indonesia, many of who interpreted the Tobelo clashes as the latest manifestation of an insidious plan to Christianise Maluku and Indonesia. This interpretation of the violence in Maluku as part of a Christian plot had been promoted by ultra-conservative Muslim organisations like DDII (Dewan Dakwah Islamiyah Indonesia) and KISDI (Komite Islam untuk Solidaritas Dunia Islam) since early 1999 (Aditjondro 2000:115; published versions of this conspiracy theory include Ahmad 2000; Kastor 2000). The emotion generated by the Tobelo violence provided a convenient occasion for the launching of this idea to a broader Indonesia population for KISDI and DDII. Both groups, whose political influence had been heavily bolstered during
the 1990s by Suharto’s sponsorship of conservative Islam (Hefner 2000), therefore partook in the organisation of a series of mass demonstrations in Jakarta in January 2000 that decried the violence in Tobelo. These demonstrations in turn sparked the formation of the Laskar Jihad, a group of militant volunteers based in Yogyakarta, whose arrival in Maluku and North Maluku in April 2000 radicalised the sense that religious opposition was the real cause of the violence. The influx also set off a new round of unrest that continues to hamper attempts to initiate a process of reconciliation.

While the small number of lives claimed and its marginal relevance for national politics made the violence in Ternate between 26 and 29 December uninteresting to the national media, the clashes were nevertheless remarkable for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the religious affiliation of the protagonists. Both sides consisted almost exclusively of Muslim soldiers. The fact that Muslims were fighting Muslims in pitched street battle in the Ternatan town section of Kampung Pisang presents a challenge to the standard explanations used to account for the conflicts in both Maluku and North Maluku, namely that religious differences between Protestants and Muslims were the source of the problem. The event also questions the simplicity of another explanation, which was often appended to the representation of the conflict as religious: that religious opposition in Maluku was being stirred by members of the political elite in Jakarta to further their own goals. Instead of religious opposition or political instigation by a national elite, the street battles in Ternate in December 1999 highlight another aspect of the dynamics of violence in Post-Suharto Indonesia, namely the rise of a new politics of tradition.

### Decentralisation and regional neo-traditionalisation

I believe a new relationship between politics and culture is currently emerging in Indonesia, in which representations of cultural phenomena like ‘tradition’ and ‘religion’ are becoming key political resources. The enrolment of ‘tradition’ and ‘religion’ as symbols of group affiliation is peculiar to the ‘Era Reformasi’ in that these political imaginaries of tradition originate at the local and regional level rather than being initiated from the national scene. The ‘new politics of tradition’ launched by these new forms of political mobilisation is related, I argue, to the new political landscape of Post-Suharto Indonesia, in particular to the process of decentralisation that began when the Indonesian parliament (DPR) voted in favour of UU No. 22 and 25 of 1999, the two laws on fiscal and political decentralisation.

Law No. 22 about regional government plans to transfer political control to the heads of the more than 350 districts (kabupaten) of Indonesia over areas such as health, education, land matters, industry and trade, environment and resource extraction (ICG 2000:13). District governments are thereby given the authority to negotiate and grant business contracts within areas such as mining, logging, and fishing—a very lucrative prospect for the leaders of resource-rich districts in Outer Indonesia. In addition, law No. 25 stipulates that 80 per cent of mining, timber and fishery revenues; 15 per cent of oil revenues; 90 per cent of real

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1 While originating in regional and local imaginaries of tradition, the new politics of tradition is also linked to global changes (Kaldor 1999). The new politics of tradition are part of a global focus on the fetishised aspects of culture and tradition as legitimate markers of collective political identity (Friedman 1994) and when the politics of tradition escalate into ‘ethno-religious’ conflict, the involved parties often—as was the case in Maluku and North Maluku—see themselves as local representatives of global fraternities.
estate taxes and 30 per cent of revenues from natural gas should remain in the hands of the regional government. It is in the struggle to secure these prospective sources of profit by gaining political control at the district or provincial level that a new politics of tradition is emerging. With this new politics of tradition, important changes to the ways local identity is imagined and cultural politics is conducted are likely to occur in the coming years in Indonesia.

The paper discusses this novel confluence in Indonesia between the political process of decentralisation and new, regional forms of group identification based on appeals to ‘religion’ and ‘tradition’. This confluence arises, I argue, with particular intensity in situations of conflict, as evidenced in the rising number of ‘ethnic’ and ‘religious’ conflicts that Indonesia has witnessed since the fall of Suharto in May 1998. While the roots and motives behind these conflicts are too complex to be reduced to the strategic manoeuvres of national or regional elites (see Bubandt 2000; van Klinken 2001), these conflicts frequently give rise to a political appeal to ‘tradition’ or ‘religion’ by regional entrepreneurs in ways that during New Order rule were reserved mainly for the national elite. I am not suggesting that all New Order politics of tradition was completely controlled by the state and worked unilaterally for the state. In fact, anthropological studies of the cultural politics of the New Order have shown how ordinary people and local elites have been able to change the content and direction of centralist policy intentions thereby refashioning and complicating state politics of ‘culture’ and ‘tradition’ according to their own world views and intentions (Pemberton 1994; Picard 1997; Spyer 2000; Tsing 1993). Thus, I do not claim that all is new after 1999. The state did not control all before the fall of Suharto, just as the example from North Maluku will show that state politics are implicated, though not hegemonic, in the regional use of tradition after 1999.

As a fetishised concept, ‘tradition’ is clearly a useful political tool. It was so for the state under the New Order (Acciaioli 1985), and it continues to be so for regional and state entrepreneurs after the fall of Suharto. This, however, is not the whole story of cultural politics in Indonesia. As a habitual, highly varied set of practices, tradition also has the potential to evade and undermine regional or national agendas. This was true before the fall of Suharto and this continues to be true. I do, however, argue that the parameters for imagining and ‘politicking’ tradition have changed significantly after the fall of Suharto. More specifically, I argue that the passing of Law No 22 on Regional Government and Law No. 25 on the Central-Regional Financial Balance in 1999 forms the basis of these changing parameters. Already before these laws were scheduled for implementation in the State Budget for 2001 (GOI 2000), expectations towards the changes that these laws would bring ran high, in parliament, in the media, and in the regions.

In Central Kalimantan, for instance, widespread riots, causing the deaths of between 300 and 600 people, erupted on 18 February 2001, after two Dayak officials reportedly paid local preman a sum of Rp. 20 million to orchestrate anti-Madurese attacks in the town of

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1 The political manipulation with and invention of tradition is by no means a new phenomenon. Quite to the contrary, adat and agama/kepercayaan have been deliberate targets of political intervention by the Dutch colonial government, by Sukarno and by the New Order regime (Kipp 1993; Pemberton 1994; Philpott 2000; see also Peletz 1993). ‘Tradition’ has in other words been reinvented and re-imagined in Indonesia since colonial times. The political use of tradition did, however, accelerate during the late New Order in the 1980s. The new politics of tradition therefore inevitably employs and expands on New Order objectifications of traditions.
Sampit. According to National Police Chief, General Bimantoro, the two officials, local heads of the Department of Forestry and the regional planning office (Bappeda) respectively, feared that they stood to be demoted following a civil service restructuring in connection with preparations for regional autonomy in the district of Kotawaringin Timur (HRW 2001). According to Bimantoro, the two officials hoped to stir up general unrest and that ‘in the ensuing violence they would be needed again and so would get their old jobs back’ (Kearney 2001). Struggles over local posts in the expected wake of decentralisation were also associated with the outbreak of violence in Poso, Central Sulawesi in May 2000, in Ambon, and, as I will show in more detail later, with the communal violence in North Maluku following August 1999 (see also the important analyses in Acciaioli 2001a, 2001b, and van Klinken 2001). Violent clashes like these cannot be reduced to elite politics since social and structural inequalities as well as a host of local cultural motives and narratives also played a vital role. Nevertheless, the clashes in Sampit, Poso and North Maluku do reveal how intimately the real and imagined changes to the local balance of power associated with decentralisation interweave with communal violence after 1999. I say ‘the real and the imagined changes’ because the violence may just as well be triggered by imagined, even exaggerated expectations about decentralisation as by actual socio-economic changes. The real and the imagined role of decentralisation contributed to shaping a new cultural politics in which particular, regional interpretations of ‘tradition’, ‘religion’ and ‘identity’ are reproduced to a large extent beyond the control of the state. Decentralisation, a political phenomenon that has assumed global importance during the 1990s (Smoke 2001:3), is thus likely to entail significant changes to state-society relations in Indonesia in the future. This is not to say, however, that the contours of regionalist cultural politics are shaped by the real or imagined effects of decentralisation alone. The new politics of tra-

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4 Local Dayak groups in the district had already clashed with Madurese in December 2000 because they blamed their increasing structural marginalisation on the influx of Madurese migrants during the last decade of New Order rule. The renewed attacks therefore struck a cord with Dayak groups in much of Central Kalimantan and the violence spread to the neighbouring district of Kualakayan and to the provincial capital of Palangkaraaya, causing fears that the fighting would reach the pandemic proportions of the ethnic clashes between Dayaks and Madurese in West Kalimantan in 1997 (Dove 1997).

5 Indeed it is important to remain suspicious of such pronouncements about national or regional conspiracies as the sole root of the communal violence in Indonesia, since such theories about political instigation are stereotypical explanations that act as a convenient way of creating scapegoats while they simplify the social context of communal violence and ignore persisting structural problems and inequalities (Bubandt 2000).

6 The central government is caught in a dilemma in this regard. On the one hand, it has been important for the governments of both Wahid and Megawati to stress—to Indonesians and the major multinational organisations alike—that important political changes are being implemented in order to distance themselves from the New Order. Not the least of these changes is the restructuring of the political system entailed by laws No. 22 and 25 of 1999 on decentralisation and the granting of regional autonomy, implemented during 2001. On the other hand, the government has also been anxious to play down regional and provincial expectations toward decentralisation, being aware of the potential dangers. Thus, the minister responsible for implementing the regional laws, Surjadi Soedirdja, has been careful to emphasise that autonomy will bring few ‘structural changes’ to the bureaucratic structure, expressing his fears that the conflicts in Aceh, Maluku and North Maluku might hamper the process and that ‘regional autonomy might be a tool for the local elite to stay in power’ (Rms 2000).

7 Decentralisation programmes in Indonesia are not restricted to the Post-Suharto era, but go back to New Order experiments in 1974 and 1993. Both attempts, however, had the net effect of furthering central rule rather than weakening it (Smoke 2000; Smoke and Lewis 1996).
dition is also influenced by local politics and cultural history as well as by a history of New Order domestication of regional, religious and cultural identity. Furthermore, since the fall of Suharto communal violence has provided fertile grounds for the new politics of tradition.

This paper focuses on the regionalist politics of tradition that have emerged before and during violent conflict, but the political invocation of ‘tradition’ has also been important if often exaggerated in the process of reconciliation in post-conflict situations (see Frost, this volume). Even though I claim that the new politics of tradition are highly relevant to understanding many of the violent conflicts that dog post-Suharto Indonesia, the relevance of these new cultural politics go beyond the—admittedly many—instances of ‘violence’ in the Era Reformasi. Decentralisation and the regionalist politics of tradition will mean important changes to the way ‘culture’ is perceived and practised in Indonesia.

The new politics of tradition in North Maluku

Decentralisation of power also implies a decentralisation of political conflicts (Jha and Mathur 1999). This, at least, was the case in North Maluku where regional expectations toward decentralisation actualised a number of political conflicts that culminated in the street battle between the palace guards from Ternate and Tidore in December 1999. The most important of these conflicts surrounded the rivalry for the post as provincial governor between the Sultan of Ternate, Mudaffar Sjah, and the Regent of Central Halmahera in Tidore, Bahar Andili. This rivalry had begun in earnest in October 1999, when North Maluku after months of agitation was declared a separate province. North Maluku was thereby administratively separated from Ambon, the provincial capital of Maluku, where sectarian violence had been constantly escalating since January 1999. For the duration of 1999 a widespread sense of apprehension had developed in North Maluku that the fighting in Ambon would spread to the north, and minor incidents in several districts of Halmahera in July 1999 had heightened this fear.

Since he was crowned as the 48th Sultan of Ternate in 1987 following the death of his father in 1975 (Kartomi 1993:188), the 64 year-old Mudaffar Sjah has assumed the charismatic role as a Sultan with all the magic and cosmological power associated with this title. Addressed by the divine title Jo‘o or ‘Lord’, the Sultan is traditionally said to have great magic power and, as was the case of the traditional rulers on Java (Anderson 1990a), to be the guarantor of social and cosmological order. The Sultan was thus said to have a close connection with the still active volcano on Ternate, Gammalama, and only the Sultan was able to avert volcanic eruptions, said to be punishment for social or moral transgressions by the Ternatan population. After his coronation Mudaffar Sjah had successfully revived the ritual practice of circumnavigating the mountain (kolokie) whenever Gammalama threatened to erupt (Kartomi 1993:194). The Sultan combined his traditional charisma with an eye for the politically expedient. Like his father Mudaffar Sjah was a staunch supporter and member of Golkar and between 1977–1987 he had spent most of his time in Jakarta, as a member of the national parliament.

The data that describes this battle as well as the sources on the conflicts in Maluku and North Maluku in general are vague and often contradictory, just as very little first-hand information is available. A great deal of circumspection is therefore needed when assessing it. Apart from data obtained on field trips to North Maluku in 1999, 2002 and 2003, information for this paper is derived from published partisan accounts, electronic new groups and media reports. Given the uncertain status of much of the information from these sources, the following account and the interpretation based upon it will have to be provisional.
Since his coronation he had returned to Ternate to become the Golkar chairman of the North Maluku legislative assembly (DPRD). It was the 45 members of this assembly, reconfigured by the 1999 elections, who were to choose the new governor in August 2001. While Mudaaffar Sjah later denied having any ambitions to become the first governor of the province of North Maluku (Karni and Haryadi 2000), he was aware that decentralisation would mean an important shift in regional politics. In an interview in February 2000, Mudaaffar Sjah directly invoked the regional government laws: ‘According to the Law of Autonomy, now the power rests in the region’ (DH and RH 2000). Preferring to exert influence from a less profiled position, Mudaaffar Sjah was undoubtedly eager that none of his direct rivals would obtain the position of governor. Foremost amongst these rivals was Bahar Andili.

Bahar Andili was an ambitious bureaucrat of Makian descent who had risen from the position as the head of the regional planning board, Bappeda, to become the regent of Central Halmahera when this former ‘administrative area’ became a full regency (kabupaten) in 1990. The change in administrative status had opened a flow of income to Soa Sio, the capital of Central Halmahera on the island of Tidore, which promised to finally allow Tidore and Central Halmahera to step out of the shadow of Ternate, the bustling business centre of North Maluku. The Makian elite around Bahar Andili, however, also had a strong position within the political structure of Ternate. Syamsir Andili, the brother of Bahar, was the mayor of Ternate, while Abdullah Assegaf and Thaib Armaiyen, both Makianese, were formerly deputy regent and regional secretary of North Maluku in Ternate, respectively (CCDA 2000) (Gatra 5 February 2000). Their opposition to the Sultan of Ternate was also reflected in their political affiliation. Whereas the Sultan of Ternate was affiliated with Golkar, which retained its position as the largest party in North Maluku gaining 17 seats out of 45 in the regional assembly in the 1999 elections, Bahar Andili and most of the Makian and Tidore elite were members of the PPP, the main Muslim party during New Order rule. Thus, Bahar Andili appealed to more orthodox Muslims on the islands of Tidore, Makian, Bacan and Kayoa who were angered over what they saw as Ternatan dominance and arrogance. Mudaaffar Sjah had his main constituency among traditionalists in the northern section of Ternate—Muddafar had grown up in the village of Dufa-Dufa as the third son of his father, Moh Djahir Sjah (Kartomi 1993:189)—as well as among a large part of the both Muslim and Christian population of North Halmahera.

This opposition between affiliates of Golkar and PPP was a clear continuation of the regional situation in North Maluku during New Order rule. But decentralisation meant that the way this opposition was expressed in conflict changed. The establishment of North Maluku as a province in October 1999 and the projected elections of the first new governor in 2000 were one aspect of the decentralisation process that set in motion the new politics of tradition in

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9 Mudaffar Sjah had a clear—and no doubt good-faith—vision of the importance of sultanate tradition for his own legitimacy, and in the time after his coronation a number of palace traditions have been revived just as the political structure of the sultanate has been re-established. Muddyfar Sjah was also instrumental in appointing the new Sultan of Jailolo, Abdullah Sjah, and he officiated the Sultan of Jailolo’s public inauguration in September 2003.

10 At the 1999 elections PPP had won only 7 seats in the regional assembly, the same amount of seats as PDI-P, Megawati Sukarno Putri’s party that had been the overall winner of the election on a national level. The military-police faction had won 5 seats, Krisna and PDIKB each two seats, while PAN, PBB, PDI and PKB each obtained one seat (Gamma 23 January 2001).
North Maluku. The declaration of the new district of *Makian Daratan* on the island of Halmahera in August 1999 was the second.

Sparked by plans from the regional government to implement a decision by the Habibie government (PP 42/1999) to establish Malifut as a separate district, violent clashes between Makian migrants and local residents of Kao, Pagu and Jailolo descent had broken out in Malifut, a village cluster on the island of Halmahera, on 18 August 1999. Local Kao inhabitants were angered that 5 Kao villages would be integrated into the new district of Malifut. They feared that they would be subject to Makian majority rule once governmental decentralisation was implemented. Both sides also speculated that the redrawing of district borders would mean that lucrative employment opportunities and tax revenues from a newly opened gold mine in the Malifut area, partly owned by an Australian mining company, New Crest Mining, would fall to the opposing side. The Sultan of Ternate, acting out his role as the guarantor of socio-cosmological order, stepped into this melee as a mediator on 21 August (Tomagola 2000b). But his ambitions were thwarted from the beginning, since the Makian population saw him as the representative of the Christian population in Kao. The prominent sociologist from UI, Thamrin Tomagola, accused Mudaffar Sjah of instigating the attacks on the Makianese (Anwar and Indrahrini 2000), a charge repeated in most Muslim communities. Certainly, allegations that Mudaffar was present in Kao villages near Malifut in the days before the attack and his apparent campaign promises to the local Kao population before the elections in 1997 and 1999 that the Makianese would be driven out of Malifut (Tomagola 2000b:9) underscore that Mudaffar could never be seen as an impartial mediator to the Makian population in Malifut. Mudaffar himself probably had good reason to see the attempts to establish the new district of Malifut as a deliberate attempt by the Makian elite around Bahar Andili to use the central government decision to undercut his political basis in North Halmahera in the lead-up to the declaration of North Maluku as a province. The tense political oppositions latent in the August clashes meant that nothing was resolved and the matter was left unresolved only to explode again in October 1999. All 16 Makian villages were attacked on Sunday 24 October and a wave of 16,000 refugees fled to Ternate, where they settled in squalid conditions in the southern part of town. Over the next two months the Makian refugees and frustrated residents, enraged by rumours of mosque desecrations in the deserted villages of Malifut, took their anger out on the Christian population in Tidore and Ternate and by mid-November 1999 some 12,000 Christians from Ternate, Tidore and West Halmahera had fled either to North Halmahera or to refugee camps in Manado and Bitung.

In response to the influx of Makian refugees into Ternate and the riots that culminated during early November 1999, the Sultan of Ternate had hastily revived his traditional palace guard (*dewan adat*) with recruits from his traditionalist followers in North Ternate and Halmahera. During November and December this ‘traditional army’, according to some estimates numbering some 7000 people kept public order, after military and police sanctioned order had virtually collapsed. Recognisable by its yellow headband, both the traditional colour of sultanate rule in North Maluku and the political colour of the Golkar party, the palace guard was lauded by the Christian refugees for its even-handed prevention of a massacre during the anti-Christian riots of early November. The evaluation of the ‘yellow troops’ by the Makian refugees in Ternate, however, was different. They charged that the palace guard,
aided by the ‘traditional council’ known as GEMUSBA (Generasi Muda Sultan Baabullah), had abused its power and had begun a reign of terror in November that included the distribution of black lists, random assaults and kidnappings (Tomagola 2000a). The Makian population felt that the Sultan of Ternate was not only the instigator behind their eviction from Malifut, but that he now continued his pursuit to attenuate their influence in the regional centre of Ternate.

In Tidore, Bahar Andili was aware of that the appeal of a ‘traditional’ and mythically sanctioned sultanate allegiance was an important part of the power of Mudaffar Sjah. Bahar Andili, furthermore, had come under pressure in Tidore. The new province needed a capital, and while Ternate was the obvious choice for those loyal to Mudaffar Sjah, Andili had vigorously campaigned that either Soa Sio, the main town on Tidore, or Sidangoli, a timber town not far from Malifut on Halmahera were chosen (Alhadar 1999). The struggle ended in a compromise when the relatively unimportant village of Sofifi was chosen as the permanent capital (while Ternate became the temporary capital), but the campaign had taxed state funds in Tidore significantly, and Andili was being asked to account for the expenditure (CCDA 2000). In an attempt to divert attention from this issue and to counter the monopoly on traditional authority held by Mudaffar Sjah, a new Sultan of Tidore, Djafar Sjah, was inaugurated in October 1999. Unlike the Sultanate of Ternate, the Tidore Sultanate had been all but defunct since the last Sultan of Tidore, Zainal Abidin Sjah, had died in 1967. New Order regulations during the 1970s, in particular the 1979 Village Government Law, had eroded the legal authority of traditional rulers nation-wide (Warren 1990), and as a consequence no successor to Abidin Sjah had been chosen. Furthermore, while the Ternatan sultanate could boast a palace, the palace of the Tidore sultanate had been destroyed by fire several decades ago and had never been rebuilt. The sultanate palace in Tidore had been turned into a museum that generated a small income from tourists (Kartomi 1993), and in 1997 rumour had it that Bahar Andili was planning to rebuild the sultanate palace in Tidore in order to boost tourism on the island. By the time the conflict began, however, constructions had not yet begun.

Although they no longer exerted any direct political influence, the sultanates retained a great deal of symbolic power in the popular imagination in North Maluku. The symbolic and political opposition between the Sultanates of Ternate and Tidore is thus a central aspect of North Malukan historical consciousness, an opposition that had been intensified by colonial involvement by the Portuguese, the Spanish and later by the Dutch after the sixteenth century (Andaya 1993; Fraassen 1987). The opposition between Ternate and Tidore was part of a larger traditional order that encompassed the four sultanates of North Maluku, Ternate, Tidore, Bacan and Jailolo. Although the Dutch colonial government had formally abolished sultanate rule in the early twentieth century, the administrative division of the region both before and after independence continued to be legitimised by a direct reference to the sultanates (KSKMU 1991:14). The main towns on Tidore and Ternate were thus the administrative seats of the two regencies that make up North Maluku. This overlap between a symbolically potent opposition and an ad-

11 The truth was more likely that the sultanate of Ternate was unprepared to handle the organisation of some 7,000 palace guards. The guards were dispersed around town to safeguard shops and government buildings, initially at the behest of the police and army who lacked the manpower to contain the riots. In the organisational chaos and the general climate of rumour-driven anxiety, many instances of power abuse by the palace guards occurred.
ministrative division meant that the revival of the position of the Sultan of Tidore provided a convenient ‘traditional’ rallying point against Ternate within the context of the conflict and the political struggle for the spoils of decentralisation, because the title of the sultan appealed to communal sentiments and notions of identity in a way that a politically elected figure could never do.

Therefore, when the Sultan of Ternate mustered his palace guards in November 1999, a palace guard recruited from the floating mass of Makian refugees and from Tidore and Kayoan students quickly formed around the new Sultan of Tidore. To distinguish themselves from the ‘yellow troops’ of Ternate, the Tidore palace guards adopted the white head-bands that were also worn by the ‘Muslim’ side in Ambon and Central Maluku (Bubandt 2001:238).

The adoption of white head-bands is an indication of how the religious opposition between Christianity and Islam, a discursive opposition that had become hegemonic in Maluku with the conflict in Ambon after January 1999, frequently blended with forms of identification based on ‘tradition’. The fusion of traditional and religious opposition was particularly strong among the Makian refugees in Ternate, for whom their eviction from Malifut was part of a religious cleasing. Their anger over the Sultan’s alleged support for what was taken to be a Christian vendetta in Halmahera was further fuelled by the circulation of forged letters that suggested the Christians of Halmahera were preparing an all-out purge of the Muslim population. This fear in turn fed into the ultra-conservative Muslim conspiracy theories about the Christianisation of Indonesia that had been circulated nationally (Bubandt, in prep.).

The same sort of conspiratorial fears that the opposing side was planning the wholesale eradication, motivated the Christian attacks on Muslim villages in Tobelo district on 26 December 1999 (Ahmad and Oesman 2000:80; Bubandt 2001; Suaedy, Mahmada, Prasdi, Nugroho, and Suhartono 2000:119), and these attacks came to be the last contributing factor to the clashes between the palace guards in Ternate between 26 and 29 December, also triggering a series of attacks on Muslim villages beginning 26 December (Yayasan Sagu 2000). Over the following two weeks the confrontations spread to the districts of Galela and Jailolo and while government figures put the death toll at 907, Republika and other Muslim newspapers quoted local sources as saying over 2000 people had been killed (DH and RH 2000).

News of the attack on the Muslim population in Tobelo were reaching the Makian refugees in Ternate on 27 December, the day after a large group of Makian refugees sheltering in Kampung Pisang had attacked the head-quarter of the ‘yellow forces’ of the Sultan. While the attack had begun as a reaction to the heavy-handed treatment of Makian refugees by the ‘yellow forces’ that had occurred since November, the news from Tobelo gave the Makian confrontation with the yellow troops in the days that followed added urgency, since they seemed to confirm Makian fears that a Christian take-over, in which the Sultan of Ternate was seen as a conspirator, was imminent (Ahmad and Oesman 2000:59; Bujang 2000:120). In this context, the counter-attack on Kampung Pisang by the ‘yellow forces’ was just as inevitable as the rush to Ternate of ‘white forces’ from Tidore. The ensuing battle ended in seemingly total defeat for the Sultan of Ternate. By 29 December the palace was under siege, and

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12 The new Sultan, Djafar Sjah, in a later interview expressed his surprise and disappointment that the two palace guards would clash, and like the Sultan of Ternate, Djafar Sjah disavowed having any political ambitions, preferring instead to emphasise his peace-making efforts (DH and RH 2000).
Mudaffar Sjah was forced to sign a peace agreement in which he assumed responsibility for the destruction of Kampung Pisang and three other townships in Ternate (CCDA 2000). Rumour had it that Mudaffar Sjah was further humiliated by being forced to take off and burn his ‘traditional clothes’ in a public ceremony, a charge the Sultan himself vigorously denies. Mudaffar Sjah remained in Ternate until March but fled to North Sulawesi after the Sultan of Tidore, Djafar Sjah, and the Sultan of Bacan, Gahral Sjah, along with several academic and political figures had demanded that he and five members of the ‘traditional council’ were arrested, tried and forced to pay damages for the destruction of Kampung Pisang and the three other townships in Ternate (Jakarta Post 18 January 2000; Jawa Pos 24 June 2000; Astaga 1 September 2000). In a post-conflict climate where provocateurs were desperately needed, the persistent accusations exerted enough political pressure for Mudaffar Sjah to be dismissed as the chairman of the regional legislative assembly (satunet.com 28 January 2000).

With the most prominent Golkar member defeated, disgraced and exiled, one would have thought this would mean total victory for Bahar Andili and the Makian-Tidore elite around him. In a surprise result in July 2001, however, Andili did not even make it into the final round of the election, and he died soon after under suspicious circumstances. His death, which many of his supporters claimed was due to sorcery (doti) while other rumours asserted it was caused by ancestral retribution, thereby became another instance of occult politics in North Maluku. The election was won by Abdul Gafur—a former New Order politician and Golkar member with a bleak reputation for corruption—when he defeated Thaib Armayin, the Regional Secretary for North Maluku and representative of PAN, the National Mandate Party of Amien Rais. Of Halmaheran descent, Abdul Gafur had become a loyal supporter of President Suharto and had ended his New Order career as the Minister of Sports and Youth. Gafur’s election quickly prompted speculations about the return of a ‘new’ New Order and the rise of ‘money politics’ in regional elections, following allegations that Gafur had bribed several members of the assembly (Jakarta Post 6 July 2001; Berpolitik 10 July 2001; Kompas 14 July 2001). Gafur was also accused of misappropriating a 100 million Rp. money gift from the national mining company, PT Aneka Tambang. The money gift intended for district development of Maba, Weda and Patani was allegedly used to refurbish the mausoleum of Gafur’s parents in Patani (Gamma 23 January 2001). Gafur, in turn, charged that the accusations were slanderous and that his election to the seat of governor was deliberately blocked by the former governor, Effendie, because of

013Sultanate sources claim that the ‘yellow side’ was heavily outnumbered because the majority of the palace guard from Halmahera had been sent home to celebrate Christmas. Remembering the widespread rumours about the alleged ‘bloody Christmas’ in Halmahera, many of these were no doubt anxious to get home to defend their own villages. The peace agreement was finally brokered by the acting governor, Surasmin, the army (TNI) and the police who were concerned that the conflict would spill over into Halmahera after hundreds of ‘white troops’ had headed for Tobelo to defend their ‘Muslim brethren’ (DH and RH 2000). Some sources highlight the disorganised and anarchic state of both the army and the police in late 1999, while some Christian sources suggest that the police and army as well as the regional government, dominated as it was at the time by people from Makian, were biased against the Sultan of Ternate, and that their active help was instrumental in the defeat of the ‘yellow forces’ (CCDA 2000).

014Aside from Abdul Gafur, Bahar Andili and Thaib Armaiyin, the fourth candidate in the elections was Mahmud Arifin Raimadoya, a lecturer at the Agricultural Institute in Bogor (IPB). Running for PDI-P, Mahmud Raimadoya was also a son of the last Sultan of Tidore and a fervent critic of Andili’s appointment of Djafar Sjah as Sultan of Tidore in October 1999 (Raimadoya 2000).
fears that Gafur would prosecute Effendie for allegedly embezzling funds allocated for the refugees of the North Malukan conflict.

While Abdul Gafur, who enjoyed the support not only of the influential Chairman of the National Legislative Assembly, Akbar Tanjung and other central politicians but also that of the Sultan of Ternate, received a warm welcome from the inhabitants of the northern part of Ternate, the defeated parties managed successfully to pressure the Minister for Home Affairs and Regional Autonomy, Suryadi Soedirja, to repeat the elections over Gafur’s alleged vote buying and the Golkar office was being burnt to the ground on Tidore (Berpolitik 10 July 2001). More than a year of complex political wrangling followed. The election result was annulled pending a police investigation into the allegations against Gafur. In April 2002 President Megawati installed Sinyo Sarundajang, a competent bureaucrat from the Ministry of Interior and Mayor of Bitung, as the acting governor but in an obvious act of defiance, the provincial parliament re-elected Abdul Gafur as governor only a week later in a special session of the DPR. Also this election was annulled for not following proper procedure and for not meeting administrative deadlines. All the major entrepreneurs, while complaining about the arbitrary and manipulative decisions of the central government, began to position themselves for the upcoming election. These manoeuvres often cut across former lines of formal political divisions, illustrating that the possibility of patrimonial influence in North Maluku, cemented in ‘traditional alliances’, weighed much more heavily than political ideologies and shifting political allegiances. Thus, during May–June 2002 the former political adversaries of Abdul Gafur and Thaib Armayin held a series of noisy rallies supported by a group calling itself ‘The People of North Maluku’ in which the supporters of the Sultan of Ternate figured prominently. The rallies demanded that Sarundajang acknowledge the result of the previous two elections and as a compromise install the two winners, Gafur and Armayin—now calling themselves ‘The Pair Working As One for North Maluku’ (Pasang Dwitunggal Maluku Utara)—as governor and deputy governor, respectively. This campaign which was strongly opposed by the Sultan of Tidore was also administratively rejected. Then less than two months later, the Sultan of Ternate, Mudaffar Sjah, in a surprise shift from Golkar announced that he would pair up with the North Malukan chairman of PPP, Rusdy Hanafi, in the upcoming elections, scheduled for October 2002. The pair withdrew from the running in August 2002, and two weeks before the election was due to be held, the PPP announced in yet another surprise turn of events that it was supporting the candidacy of Abdul Gafur for governor with the Sultan of Ternate, Mudaffar Sjah and his deputy.

The Sultan, it seemed, would be able to turn humiliation into political victory, thanks to his close connections to the national political landscape, which had allowed him to move smoothly from Golkar to the PPP, as well as to his loyal constituency in Ternate, who supported any alliance he would enter into. The Sultan’s political ambitions were intimately tied to his own sense of the importance of tradition in politics. The values of tradition were to show the way forward in the new political landscape of Post-Suharto Indonesia. Not only would tradition point the way to peaceful reconciliation, tradition was also the Sultan’s answer to debates about the core values of democracy and reform in Indonesia. In an interview, two months after his defeat in Ternate on 29 December 1999, Mudaffar Sjah was asked what the functions of the sultan were. Mudaffar Sjah answered:
The Sultan preserves local tradition. He protects our original culture. We still don’t know what our national values are. [The state philosophy of] Pancasila is equally unclear and has so far been ineffective. Therefore it is my principle to uphold the traditional values of the local region’ (Karni and Haryadi 2000).

As it happened, the Sultan’s hopes for formal political influence would be disappointed yet again. Although his co-candidature with Abdul Gafur had been authorised by Vice-President Hamza Haz and a court order had asked the Ministry of Interior, Hari Sabarno, to postpone elections to allow time to consider the inclusion of Abdul Gafur and Mudaffar Sjah to the list of contenders, elections went ahead as planned on 28 October 2002, and in a predictable election Thaib Armayin, who ran with Madjid Abdullah, was elected as the governor of North Maluku.

It would be a mistake to conclude from this that tradition in North Maluku or elsewhere in Indonesia has now been sidelined. As Indonesia prepares for the elections in 2004, it is evident that ‘the new politics of tradition’ is likely to play an important role, probably in formal politics but definitely in informal political discourse as part of the country’s efforts to invent a new set of social imaginaries after Suharto.

Conclusion: decentralisation and the new politics of tradition

In the few years after the fall of Suharto, the new politics of tradition has found a variety of discursive expressions, *adat* being used as idioms of both conflict and reconciliation (Acciaioli 2001). It is apparent that the many instances of communal violence in Indonesia after 1998, in which the new politics of tradition have played such a dominant part, are yet another instance of the global phenomenon called ‘new’ or ‘postmodern’ wars (Duffield 2001; Gray 1997; Kaldor 1999). The Indonesian conflicts thus conform to most of the criteria for the ‘new wars’. The conflicts came after the collapse of an authoritarian regime that was accompanied by a sharp decline in the popular legitimacy of the state and of the nationalist project (Kaldor 1999:82). The conflicts often involved young, unemployed men marginalized by the asymmetries built into a neo-liberal but highly corrupt economy as well as by financial crisis (Kaldor 1999:83). The conflicts turned on the new identity politics that in Indonesia went under the name of SARA, and involved the use of fear and terror to ensure political control, resulting in large numbers of internally displaced people (Kaldor 1999:8). The conflicts also involved appeals to (and alleged aid from) ‘global imagined communities’ such as for instance the Muslim ummat, the Malukan diaspora in Holland, or the ‘Christian world’ (Kaldor 1999:7). Finally, the ‘riot specialists’ who instigated and perpetuated the violent conflicts were frequently, as in Ambon, organised in criminal networks. This blurring of the border between crime and civil war the communal violence in Indonesia shared with most other ‘new wars’ (Kaldor 1999:11). There are in other words at least five reasons to see the communal conflicts in Indonesia as clear-cut instances of the ‘new civil wars’.

In this line of reasoning this paper has highlighted a number of cases in which conflict was linked to new forms of global governance, which arrived in Indonesia in the shape of decentralisation and ignited the new politics

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16 See Kalyvas 2001 for an excellent critique of the distinction between ‘old’ wars and ‘new’ wars.
of tradition. The re-establishment by Mudaffar Sjah of his ‘yellow troops’, the inauguration of a new Sultan of Tidore, and the revival of the Tidore palace guards by the Makian and Tidore elite around Bahar Andili in late 1999 all came within the context of the establishment of North Maluku as a separate province in October 1999. Government decree No 42 of 1999, which in August 1999 announced the establishment of the new district of Malifut, similarly led to a cascading of ethno-religious identity among Makian and Kao-Tobelo people. The riots caused by this cascading in turn contributed to the reinvention of the ‘traditional enmity’ between the Sultanates of Ternate and Tidore. To supporters of the Sultan of Ternate, conflict broke out because adat had been marginalized and pushed aside (digeser) for too long making people forget the traditional values of tolerance and pluralism. For his opponents adat had been misappropriated (ditataasnamakan) to accommodate political ambitions. As such, the street battles in Ternate in December 1999 provide an example of one of the many ways in which the new politics of traditions have become important. The riots in Ternate are instructive for the many conflicts that occurred throughout Indonesia after 1999 because it not really was a battle over ethnicity or religious affiliation as such. While particularly religious oppositions were definitely being radicalised in North Maluku in the last days of 1999 (Bubandt in prep.), the street riots in Ternate between 26 and 29 December were predominantly being fought over the legitimate use of tradition.

I believe, however, that the new politics of tradition in Indonesia has much wider political range than acting as a new form of political mobilisation in times of conflict. The consecutive process of election and political annulment in North Maluku, which at one stage resulted three competing claims to the seat of the governor, were thus thoroughly infused by imaginaries and politics of tradition, which easily crossed political party divisions. Post-conflict reconciliation is another domain in which the new politics of tradition is visible. Reconciliation was also often talked about in terms of traditional values just as traditional peace-making rituals became ubiquitous throughout Indonesia after 1999, often adopted ceremoniously in the face of a lack of political will and capability to ensure genuine reconciliation. Finally, adat has become central to a major and politically increasingly powerful discourse about the content and ‘true values’ of democracy in Indonesia.

Post-conflict reconciliation, election campaigns and political discussions about the future of democracy in Post-Suharto Indonesia have in other words become important domains for the new politics of tradition. I use the concept of ‘the new politics of tradition’ as a shorthand for a new type of political imagination that goes well beyond violent conflict and that also involves new social imaginaries about the shape of community, society, and democracy—imaginaries in which tradition plays an important role. The new politics of tradition entails, therefore, not only a ‘new’ political way of imagining tradition but by implication also a new way of imagining politics. In post-Suharto Indonesia decentralisation has been enrolled to play a central part in this new political imagination.

My North Malukan case demonstrates how many of the political appeals to tradition were generated as much by expectations about

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17North Malukan politicians claimed to have campaigned for decades to get North Maluku recognised as a separate province (Ruray 2000:8; Setyarso 2000:104), but the fact that North Maluku attained provincial status just in advance of the implementation of the laws on regional government meant that the struggle for political office within the-soon-to-be-decentralised province took on great urgency.
decentralisation as by actual political changes due to decentralisation. Decentralisation is thus not just a de facto political phenomenon; it inevitably becomes the subject of regional and local interpretations as well. I suggest treating decentralisation as a dynamic phenomenon with complex cultural and a symbolic characteristics rather than merely a straightforward political or administrative process. Doing so also entails questioning some of the modernist and evolutionist associations frequently attached to the process of decentralisation. Regional and local rumours about and expectations towards decentralisation, as people make global imaginaries their own, may thus throw a spanner in the wheel of the supposedly smooth, rational transition to liberal democracy. The processes of democratisation and decentralisation, touted by the modernist, liberal discourse of multinational organisations like the World Bank and the IMF as the best way to ensure both economic progress and national integrity (World Bank 2000), may in many instances even set the scene for a socially combustible identity politics as the regional elite struggles to adapt to a changing political landscape that is both real and imagined. This is not to suggest that decentralisation and democratisation will inevitably initiate a violent identity politics. It is, however, necessary to explore the conditions under which decentralisation plays into conflicts associated with a radicalised identity politics.

Instead of assuming that the many instances of social unrest and communal violence in Indonesia, which were fuelled by political appeals to religion, ethnicity or tradition, are incidental to or unfortunate hindrances in the way of the political process of democratisation and decentralisation (for an example of this, see the interview with UNDP administrator, Mark Malloch Brown in McBeth and Dhume 2001), a different, and I believe more valid, tack would be to investigate the circumstances under which decentralisation comes to be closely linked to violent conflict.

The new politics of tradition is neither a simple hydraulic outburst of ancient but repressed tribal identity nor a cynical invention of tradition by omnipotent political actors. The regional politics of tradition cannot be explained in culturalist terms as tribalism or in functionalist terms as the political manipulation of culture. Instead a more integrated approach is needed. As tradition is imagined in new ways for new political reasons, political practice itself is changed along the way by the emotive power of these imaginaries. The real and imagined effects of decentralisation have changed the political landscape of local politics in Indonesia, and within this landscape ‘tradition’ is both a powerful tool and a powerful force.

For a discussion of some of these problems, see for instance (Hill 1998; Törnquist 2001; The Economist 7 Aug 2000, and The Economist 1 June 2001).
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