

FORCED MIGRATION, ADAT, AND A PURIFIED PRESENT IN AMBON, INDONESIA



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On the Indonesian island of Ambon, the revitalization of *adat* (customary land tenure) is shaped by a post-conflict dynamic aiming to induce a reconciliation between distrustful Christians and Muslims. This resurgence of *adat* reflects how indigenous communities cope with spatial relocation resulting from interreligious violence. Resettled indigenous communities in Ambon can be termed “communities in exile,” as people express feelings of territorial alienation and wish to return to the home village where they possess genealogical ties to the land. The desire to return expresses an urge to instate a renewed and purified *adat* order, where segregation by religion has been overcome. (Resettlement, *adat*, Indonesia, communities in exile)

The resurgence of *adat* since the end of the Suharto-led New Order regime in May 1998 is one of the most unexpected, yet pertinent factors that came to characterize political, economic, and social life in many parts of Indonesia. *Adat*, narrowly defined, is customary land tenure or “a complex of rights and obligations which ties together three things—history, land, and law—in a way that appears rather specific to Indonesia” (Davidson and Henley 2007:3). Many authors have illustrated how a resurgence of *adat* in Indonesia has been deployed in relation to particular issues of village governance and competition for access to resources. *Adat*, therefore, has often played a central role in emancipatory struggles, defending the rights of indigenous populations against massive, state-led, capitalist development projects such as dam constructions or forest conversions (Warren 2005). In other cases, these socio-political struggles have had an overwhelmingly ethnic hue, and *adat* has often been deployed by local elites to their own advantage (McWilliam 2006; Fitzpatrick 2006, 2007). *Adat* has been revitalized by regional elites for access to resources and village governance in Central Kalimantan (McCarthy 2004), Central Sulawesi (Li 2007), and Minangkabau, Sumatra (F. and K. Von Benda Beckmann 2007). In some cases, ethnic struggles turned violent (Davidson 2007, 2008). This politicized deployment of *adat* in post-Suharto Indonesia is closely related with decentralization in which the regions gained more autonomy in matters of resource management (Thornburn 2004; Fitzpatrick 2007). As Fitzpatrick (2007:140) notes, “these new provisions have been seized upon by provinces and/or districts to assert control over land and resources within their territories.” In many cases, local customary systems of land tenure have gained increasing prominence in this process. At the same time, there are national legal means to enact parts of customary resource management. It would be wrong, however, to mistake the renewed popularity of *adat* simply as a tool of greedy local elites. Part of its attraction lies in its evocation of ideals of purity, authenticity, and tradition that are the basis for an ideal society (Biezeveld 2004, 2007; Davidson and Henley 2007; Li 2000, 2007).

The redeployment of adat on Ambon has two characteristics. On the one hand, it has served the political and economic interests of indigenous elites. For instance, some communities have taken lands left behind by evicted, non-indigenous communities following violent conflicts between Christians and Muslims (Adam 2009). This was done by claiming legitimate ownership over the land through an ethnic interpretation of adat. On the other hand, features of adat such as purity, unity, tradition, and authenticity figure prominently in Ambon, as with the interpretation of adat for reconciliation in a religiously fractured society (Frost 2004; Bräuchler 2007). The island experienced intense communal violence between Muslims and Christians from 1999 to 2002 resulting in the deaths of thousands of people and the displacement of approximately one-third of the population (Mason 2001; ICG 2002). The conflict erupted from a chronic rivalry between Christian and Muslim power blocks which intensified following the fall of Suharto, and a decentralization which allowed established power structures to be challenged (Bertrand 2002, 2004; Goss 2004; Van Klinken 2007; Sidel 2008).

When the violence began to decrease starting in 2002, questions arose about the causes for the conflict and its escalation. This led to a growing belief among Ambonese that adat needs to be revived for reconciliation and as a defense against future attempts by outsiders to pit Ambonese against each other through religious differences. The revival of adat has taken a territorial interpretation among resettled communities, and a return to the home villages is represented as a part of a restored adat based on ideals of authenticity and unity. Simply stated, the “back to adat” ideal became a “back to the home village” goal.

THE RESURGENCE OF ADAT

Among many Ambonese, and government and local NGOs, there is a sincere belief that adat can build bridges between the Christians and Muslims by stressing a common identity based on Ambonese adat. Illustrative in this regard is the resurgence of *pela*, which are alliances between two or more villages. Some of these existed before the first colonial intrusions in the sixteenth century. Although different sorts of *pela* exist, they all are mechanisms of reciprocal aid, regardless of religion (Bartels 1977, 2000). For centuries, *pela* relationships remained intact, and they were often used by Moluccans against colonial rule, but since the late 1970s these mechanisms started losing relevance (Bartels 2000). One of the reasons was a purification of religion in which both Christian and Muslim religious leaders condemned traditional beliefs as mere superstition. For example, in the 1980s academics from the local Unpatti university, researching and promoting local culture, were threatened with dismissal from the GPM (Gereja Protestan Maluku, Moluccan Protestant Church) for their interest in adat. Also, the 1979 Law No. 5 on Village Administration, which propagated a uniform system of local governance through the Javanese *desa*, decreased the political significance of traditional adat leadership. Yet, since the end of the conflict, the *bikin panas pela* (heating up the *pela*) ceremonies have been used to reconcile Christians and Muslims, despite the fact that they were never intended for this purpose.

But apart from the aim of healing wounds, the resurgence of adat includes a broader vision of preventing future conflicts, particularly religious communal violence. As part of a common identity, adat would have to withstand external influences that would divide Ambonese society. Many Ambonese believe that provocateurs manipulated religious differences through rumors and murders, which led to a vicious cycle of retaliation and hatred. The provocateurs are allegedly Javanese military elites with links to the old New Order regime and the inner circle around Suharto.¹ The idea that alien provocateurs incited Christians and Muslims against each other is portrayed as a prolongation of Dutch colonialism in which the Ambonese let foreign influences divide them.

Since the end of the conflict, people say they learned from past mistakes and will not allow external influences to pit them against each other. Local NGO activists, traditional leaders, and ordinary people declare that henceforth the Ambonese will have to search for common ground beyond religious differences. Its guiding principle exists in adat. In this regard, the resurgence of adat in Ambon reflects a mix of conservative elements presented in a future-oriented agenda. There is a tendency to claim that the purity of Ambonese society has too often been spoiled by alien influences and, as a consequence, Ambonese society needs to be purified and a traditional Ambonese order restored to avoid future conflict. This conservative orientation can also be perceived in the resurgence of viewing adat through a generational framework. That is, the lack of adat knowledge among youngsters is seen as a key reason why they could be easily aroused to violence. Therefore, the kinds of modernity particularly attractive to young people should be replaced with a “correct” knowledge of local culture and history.

Yet, it would be wrong to denigrate this resurgence of adat solely as a return to the past. Ambonese see it as a future-oriented strategy, a way to continue after the fall of the New Order and the end of the conflict. In this regard, the revitalization of adat aims to install a purified present rather than a purified past. The resurgence of adat takes multiple forms, varying between essentialist and historical notions about reinstating a true “historically correct” adat and more flexible approaches aiming to re-imagine tradition (Frost 2004). In relation to adat as a means of reconciliation, people agree that it should be an inspiration for unity in the future.²

RESEARCH CONTEXT

Despite a last major outbreak of inter-religious riots in April 2004 and the fact that communal relations in Ambon can still be tense, since 2002 the majority of those displaced could return home. However, many were unable to return because their homes and land had been taken during their absence. Such people were settled in various places around the island.

Starting in 2007, four of these sites have been studied to better understand how land access is negotiated after resettlement. The site of Kayu Tiga consists of Protestants who had lived in the Batu Merah neighborhood of the city of Ambon,³ about half of whom spent seven years in an Internally Displaced Persons camp; the other half were dispersed in other IDP camps or lived with family or friends in different places. At the time of

research, the site consisted of about 400 households. Another site, Kate Kate, set up in 2006, consists of Muslim households of different ethnic backgrounds and from different regions. Despite this diversity, some 70 percent of the population consists of ethnic Butonese communities. The research focused on a large Butonese community that before the conflict lived in the Christian village of Eerie, on Ambon Island. Importantly, the people living in Kayu Tiga and Kate Kate did not belong to an adat law community before the outbreak of violence. They did not possess a genealogical relationship with a particular territory and its subsequent ownership rights based on adat customary law. An essential feature of Ambonese adat is that village organization is based on kinship ties, and belonging to the indigenous adat law community entitles ownership rights based on customary law (von Benda Beckmann and Taale 1996). Studying Ambonese customary land law in the 1920s, the Dutch legal anthropologist Holleman (1923:66) described this system as the linking “of fixed territories to certain groups of people.” This feature of Ambonese customary tenure was exploited by colonial policy which forced people to settle along the coast. The Dutch then set up indirect rule by creating so-called traditional law communities (*negeri*) consisting of “original” settler clans. As secure customary ownership rights are attached to certain territories, people not possessing a genealogical connection cannot claim customary ties and are put in a weak legal position. Those currently living in Kate Kate and Kayu Tiga could obtain access to land only through rights granted by the indigenous adat community or through formal state certificates. For both, the state certificates were primarily good for housing.

A third site, Iha-Liang, consists of an indigenous adat community. That is, these people possessed a genealogical relationship with a particular territory prior to their fleeing. This Muslim community lived on the neighboring island of Saparua in the village of Iha. After multiple attacks by neighboring Christian villages in September 2000, the people were taken by the Indonesian army to Ambon. In 2002 this community split, and some of the 115 households resettled in Liang. Since then, they prefer to call the place where they live Iha-Liang. A final resettlement site consists of one Christian community of some 120 households that before the conflict lived in the Muslim village of Hila, on the northern peninsula of Ambon island. After their flight in 1999, this community lived separately for three years in two IDP camps. In 2002, they were settled in Tanah Putih, which this community calls Hila-Tanah Putih. The status of this community is ambiguous, as their adat status is contested and closely linked with the impossibility of return to their village. However, some families in this community belong to the indigenous adat law community of Hila and many families have very close ties with adat law communities due to marriage, through which they could obtain land ownership rights. On the other hand, they have never been part of the adat system of village governance in Hila.

LIFE REALITIES AND LEGAL CATEGORIES

Assumptions about resettlement and forced migration have greatly influenced policy regarding internal displacement in the region. Both the local government and international NGOs considered resettlement as the final stage of a process that began with the

eviction of people, continued with their time in an IDP camp, and will end in their settling in a neutral, or “normal” environment. This meant, first, that Muslims were settled in Muslim territories and Christians in Christian territories, thus establishing mono-religious zones. Second, once settled, these people were given no further assistance and were expected to become self-reliant. In short, the populations were no longer considered a problem for the government and aid agencies. In contrast to the legal interpretation of resettlement as “the end of the trip,” in the four sites studied, a very different understanding of resettlement exists. The Indonesian term *relokasi* (resettlement) figures prominently only in policy documents of international NGOs and the local government; the term is hardly used among those resettled. Rather, *penungsi* (meaning refugee or internally displaced person) is used by the people to describe themselves. Little distinction is made between the place one is currently living in and the time spent in IDP camps before resettlement. While *camp penungsi* (refugee camp) is used for the IDP camps, *tempat penungsi* (refugee place) is commonly used to indicate where these people currently live. “Camp” is understood as having a chaotic nature while a “place” is more orderly and offers better housing facilities. Yet, both are labeled “refugee” and very few distinctions are made between the context of internal displacement and permanent resettlement. The official name, *tempat relokasi* (resettlement place) was not encountered in the everyday language of the resettled populations. In other words, resettlement is considered as an extension of a forced relocation and not as an acceptable habitation.

Primarily, this is an enduring attempt to claim access to vital economic assets. Throughout the conflict, obtaining the legal status of refugee opened the door to reconstruction funds in a region of economic decline and insecurity. Yet, claiming the status of refugee is problematic, as definitions of what constitutes internal displacement are obscure and people who were not forced to move have tried to obtain access to these funds. Once officially *penungsi*, many people were very much attached to the status. Rejecting this label and accepting a new context of resettlement, which presumes a return to a sort of normality, means losing access to the reconstruction funds related to *penungsi*. As livelihood opportunities are scarce in most resettlement camps due to limited access to agricultural land and a slow recovery of the economy after a steep decline (Adam 2008), many people think they have a right to these funds and feel abandoned by the government and NGOs. Moreover, a widespread perception that much of the refugee funds from Jakarta ended up in the hands of local politicians and real estate companies has fed the belief that one maintains a moral right to assistance. Similar issues have been noted in other contexts, such as war-torn Sri Lanka where attempts to register IDPs as “local citizens” have failed because many of the IDPs fear that their access to aid would be lost (Brun 2003:386–87).

Being a “refugee” and denying resettlement also is critical in struggles to obtain lost property. In all four resettlement sites, the home village, land, and other property left behind are not considered as lost. But losing the status of refugee and accepting a context of normality implies that one loses the right to reclaim property lost through forced departure. Butonese living in the camp of Kate Kate were frustrated that many of the lands and houses they regarded as rightly theirs were taken over after they fled.⁴ This

was also true for the Kayu Tiga camp. Therefore, the refusal to accept resettlement as normality can to a large extent be explained by feelings of deprivation in which resettlement negates the struggle to regain lost property.

THE PRESERVATION OF A COMMUNAL IDENTITY

Despite the tenacity to maintain the status of refugee in all four resettlement sites, some important differences exist. The two resettled indigenous adat communities have a much stronger sense of communal identity, their feeling of alienation is stronger, and they regard where they currently live as a place that is a historical and geographical anomaly. The Ambonese have a saying, "Having trouble in another man's land is not the same as having trouble in your own land," which was often used by the people living in Hila-Tanah Putih to express a feeling of alienation. Also revealing are the connections they make with the conflict in the Middle East. The Christians in Tanah Putih often stated that they felt akin to the people of Israel, as having been driven out of their homeland by a Muslim aggressor. These feelings of alienation and being uprooted were barely present among non-adat resettled communities, where the primary complaints were about the dire circumstances in which they had to live.

A much stronger preservation of communal identity based on where one lived before the eviction is clearly seen in the way these communities represent themselves with a name that includes their former village. For instance, the Hila-Tanah Putih people even demanded that in coming to their place, I should tell the bus and motorcycle drivers to stop at Hila-Tanah Putih rather than Tanah Putih. They also wear T-shirts that declare "Hila-Tanah Putih." The reason for making these T-shirts, they said, was that people from the surrounding area would know that they came from Hila. In Kate Kate and Kayu Tiga, on the other hand, an insistence on the identity of the home village was less present. Partly, this lies in the fact that their resettlement was not linked to a loss of prestige. With forced emigration, adat communities find themselves in a subordinate position because they no longer can claim a historical relationship to where they live. Due to their migration, the Iha community lost their customary ownership rights and had to switch to insecure usufruct rights for access to agricultural land. Equally important is the fact that these entitlements are linked with prestige. In this regard there is a fear of being viewed in the same light as the Butonese settlements in Liang. There is a constant worry that stereotypes of the Butonese communities, such as their supposed dirtiness and aggression, would be ascribed to their community as well.

RETURN TO THE HOME VILLAGE

Related to maintaining a communal identity and the characterization of living in a wrong place is a strong determination to return to where one lived before the outbreak of conflict and where much of the property people possessed there is not considered lost. The non-adat communities stated they wanted to reclaim lost property and be able to sell what they had possessed, but a discourse of return was not encountered there. These people can therefore be regarded as being "in transition." While there is no acceptance

yet of resettlement as a means of normality, it is likely that this attachment to being refugees will weaken once compensation has been awarded in proportion to the losses endured and the prospects for more viable livelihood opportunities increase. It seems that new communal identities will quickly develop at these sites.

But in Hila-Tanah Putih and Iha-Liang, narratives of return to a historical home territory remain omnipresent. There are very few intentions to reclaim lost land with the aim of selling it, rather the objective is to return and remain there. In Hila-Tanah Putih, this idea of a return was contested by some people who stated that the resettlement is permanent and there is no use dreaming about returning to Hila. Yet, a majority still considered returning to Hila a priority and do not imagine their community remaining in Hila-Tanah Putih. This contestation can partly be explained by the fact that their adat community is subject to divergent interpretations both within and outside the community. With Iha-Liang, on the other hand, the idea of permanent resettlement is totally out of the question and discussing the possibility is offensive. There is also a fear that due to their resettlement, their lands will be taken over by other communities and this would be an irrevocable loss of their adat status. Some Hila-Tanah Putih people regularly go to Hila to check the condition of the clove trees they owned before their eviction.⁵ These clove trees are very important for maintaining the right of return. As a gift from the ancestors, they are proof of ownership over the land. If the trees are removed or die, ownership of the land is lost. It is therefore very important to check and see if the clove trees are still in good condition.

Malkki (1995a, 1995b) compared Burundese refugees in Tanzania who lived in an urban setting with refugees living in a camp. The camp refugees developed an identity of being “in exile.” The town refugees were more urbane and became integrated into the local society. To a certain extent, this condition reflects the displaced in Ambon. The resettled non-indigenous communities showed a willingness to integrate with others where they were living. Also, a concern with common descent and a collective identity was less present compared to the resettled indigenous communities. They were much more pragmatic and individually oriented compared to their indigenous counterparts, who more closely resemble the Burundese camp refugees as being “in exile.” This condition denotes characteristics such as alienation, distance, and loss (Malkki 1995b). Being in exile is also inextricably linked to the notion of returning home. As some people in Iha-Liang stated, they feel like sojourners in a land not theirs, although there was little effort to consider concrete plans for a return. Discussions among resettled non-indigenous communities about reclaiming property to sell were concrete. People talked about strategies to obtain legal documents, lobbying high ranking civil servants or politicians, or in the case of Kayu Tiga, asking me to search Dutch archives for proof of ownership by the Moluccan Protestant Church of land on which most Protestants lived in Batu Merah. The strategies people in Hila-Tanah Putih or Iha-Liang had in mind for returning home were elusive and framed as a struggle that could take generations. When people in Hila-Tanah Putih compared their situation to the people of Israel, this not only expressed a feeling of being driven out of a homeland, but also referred to the long struggle it will take to reclaim it. Some farmers in Hila-Tanah Putih regarded their displacement as crucial to the economic well being of their children, explaining that it

is essential to keep the land of their home village in a sort of quarantine whereby they retrieve the ownership rights, although they do not cultivate it or inhabit it. After a few decades, when people would have forgotten about the religious tensions and land scarcity would be more pressing than today, their children could take over the place. This would give their children land and a decent livelihood while they themselves would remain in Hila-Tanah Putih.

It is wrong to think of return primarily as an economic strategy. In the Iha-Liang camp everybody agreed that livelihood opportunities were better in their resettlement site and return would likely result in the impoverishment of the community. In Iha on Saparua, they did have land ownership due to their indigenous status, but the amount of land was extremely limited. In Iha-Liang, land can be accessed only through users' rights but, as many people stated, there is enough land on which one can make a living. Moreover, where this community resettled provides access to amenities such as health care and education. Despite these advantages, narratives about returning to Saparua remained omnipresent. As a consequence, youngsters who are too young to remember the violent expulsion of their community in 2000 revealed having a highly idealized notion of Saparua village as filled with fertile land and a sea full of fish. Some even thought it puzzling that their parents did not go back there, considering all its advantages.

While the distinction between indigenous and non-indigenous resettled communities in Ambon mirrors some of the contrasts between Burundese camp and town refugees, the explanation is fundamentally different. According to Malkki (1995a:), the place of settlement (town versus camp) explains the divergent development of identities. In the case of Ambon however, these differences cannot be situated within the displacement as all four communities ended up in similar sites dispersed over the island. The contrasts encountered in Ambon can be understood by the differences in societal status (indigenous versus non-indigenous) these communities already possessed before their forced move.

TERRITORIAL REPAIRING OF A BROKEN ORDER

Narratives about returning to a former home territory are less a reasoned plan and more of an ideal reflecting a general discourse in search of a common ground that transcends religious differences. Return therefore mirrors a wish to reinstate a harmonious adat order. This ideal is not only about the spatial reparation of a pre-conflict order, it also is about an adat that needs to be revitalized, as the loss of adat throughout the New Order is one of the factors causing the violence. An essential step to halting this process is the return of resettled adat communities to where they possess a genealogical adat relationship with the land.

The ideal of adat assumes a geographical order in which indigenous communities possess a genealogical and historical relationship with a territory. In addition, the attachment to return is framed by ideals of unity. In the case of Iha-Liang, this is closely related to the wish to be reunited as a community. Due to arguments over where to resettle in 2002, the community split with one part going to Iha-Liang and one going

to Sepa on the island of Seram. Therefore, their resettlement is inextricably linked to the breakup of the community and the loss of the *bapak raja*, the traditional community leader, who decided to resettle in Seram. This was a traumatic experience that left the community feeling deserted. The desire to repatriate is linked to the reunion of a whole adat community and many people state that a return to Iha-Saparua only makes sense if the entire community is reunited. Interestingly, the recent breakup is related to events which began in the seventeenth century when the Iha kingdom fought against the Dutch colonizers. Numerous wars against the Dutch divided the Iha kingdom into Christian and Muslim parts and also led to large population movements in which different parts of the kingdom's population settled in different parts of the region. The expulsion and further division of the Muslim Iha community in Saparua is aligned with these earlier population movements. Moreover, motives behind the earlier break-up are ascribed to external forces. The notion of alien provocateurs inciting the conflict, just as the Dutch did in the past, is also present. Return to the home territory in Saparua therefore is a firm stand against divisive alien influences.

These ideals about unity also connote that removal from the genealogical adat territory is a loss of interreligious solidarity mechanisms. Typical in this regard are the constant references to *gotong royong*, which are practices of reciprocal helpfulness that go beyond religious divisions and are considered a vital part of adat as, for example, the construction and repairs of roofs of a church and of a mosque by a Muslim and Christian community. Such practices were often cited by the people of Hila-Tanah Putih as proof of an integration that transcended religious identities in their area before their eviction. The loss of these reciprocities is deeply felt as signifying the estrangement of the Christian community of Hila-Tanah Putih and their former neighboring Muslim villagers. Similar ideals of unity and harmony, particularly mutual aid mechanisms the Muslims enjoyed with neighboring Christian villagers on Saparua, were cited in Iha-Liang. An example includes gleaning cloves. With the Muslim village of Iha in Saparua having limited land, an agreement existed with surrounding Christian villages that the people of Iha during certain parts of the year were allowed to gather cloves to sell when they had fallen on the ground. The disruption of reciprocal aid mechanisms has left an ache that cannot be understood solely in an economic sense. It is part of a larger picture about the loss of amity and unity from the violence and the fact that resettlement has only reinforced this rupture. If unity is not restored, people fear that their children will not know about these former solidarity mechanisms, now seen as essential to preventing future violence.

People pointed out that relationships based on adat had been losing strength and that this had serious consequences during the riots. An example given is the relationship Iha had with a neighboring Christian village also of the old Iha kingdom. The explanation the people of Iha-Liang give for why this neighboring village did not protect them when they were attacked by other Christian villages, and why they were forcibly evicted, is the weakened ties based on adat. Therefore, rather than a mere restoration of the pre-conflict adat relationship, it is the entire relationship as such that needs to be revitalized. The first prerequisite in this process therefore is their return to the historical home village on Saparua.

CONCLUSION

Most authors agree that adat contains two related meanings. First, adat is a means of attaining access to resources. Second, it serves as an ideal of unity and harmony. Since the end of the New Order in Indonesia in 1998, opportunities have emerged to deploy adat in socio-political struggles, in particular at the province and district level. This may be why adat in its politicized sense has been stressed in recent publications. Less attention has been paid to adat as a model of unity and harmony, and a blueprint for an ideal society. Where intense violence is prevalent, the second meaning of adat serves as an inspiration to reconcile a fractured society. This seems to be part of a widespread custom in which local culture is increasingly applied in efforts to bring about peace and reconciliation (Lederach 1997).

In post-conflict Ambon, a belief that cohesion and order based on a shared adat needs to be restored is very much present. This is particularly the case with indigenous communities coping with their resettlement. In the four resettlement sites studied, *de facto* resettlement did not include resettlement in a psychological sense. Although resettlement was considered as final by the local government and aid agencies, the communities did not accept this as normal. Where they live is still considered a refugee place.

Regarding refugee status, there are remarkable differences between the four sites. In the two non-indigenous communities, the tenacity of refugee identity is part of a strategy to reclaim lost property. Many there perceive themselves as losers in a conflict where most of their property has been taken since their eviction. Therefore, constant attempts are made to reclaim their losses. Moreover, because most of these sites have limited agricultural land and livelihood opportunities are limited, many people think they have a legitimate right to reconstruction funds. Accepting resettlement as a normal condition would imply that they would forgo these rights. Yet, people did not express a willingness to return to where they lived. For this reason, these communities can be viewed as being in transition.

Although similar frustrations are encountered among the two resettled indigenous adat communities, narratives about return are omnipresent. These communities hold a deep seated sense of living in a historically wrong place. This is particularly apparent in Iha-Liang where people state that despite economic improvements, they do not feel at home and avoid discussing the issue of staying in Liang. Therefore, these communities are seen as living in exile, expressing feelings of alienation and loss, and remaining strongly attached to a pre-conflict communal identity. For them return is imperative. Rather than a plan for economic betterment, their narratives about returning to an idealized home territory should be understood as a discourse in post-conflict Ambon in search of a common ground based on an adat that transcends religious differences. Return therefore mirrors an overall wish to mentally and spatially reinstate a harmonious adat order necessary to ensure peace in the future.

NOTES

1. Although the incompetence of the security forces aggravated the conflict, there is no proof of provocateurs inciting the violence (see Azca 2003).
2. This does not mean that adat is not contested. Yet, there seems to be broad public support for the adat to unite a religiously fractured society and avoid future violence.
3. The city of Ambon, on the island of Ambon, is the capital of the province of Maluku.
4. This was the case only for houses and lands where one possessed a state certificate. Lands that were accessed through rights granted by the indigenous adat community were perceived as lost and no attempts were made to reclaim them.
5. Most of the clove trees owned by the Protestant community have been cut down by neighboring communities, indicating an intent to take over these abandoned lands.

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