

# Introduction

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As a region, Southeast Asia has been tormented by political violence through the ages. In the so-called pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial periods, ruling elites and their adversaries have resorted to small and large scale violence to advance their interests, in essence maintaining, expanding or undermining authority. The post-colonial period hardly represented an improvement on earlier times: witness the Vietnam war, the communist insurgencies in Malaysia and the Philippines, the genocide during the regime of Pol Pot in Cambodia, and the retaliatory actions following the coup d'état in 1965 in Indonesia.

The last few decades have found several Asian countries plagued by communal and regional violence, as in the south of Thailand, the Philippines and in several parts of Indonesia. This is exemplified by ethnic violence, such as the harassment of Chinese in Indonesia in 1998, the forced displacement of the Madurese in Kalimantan, and the sporadic attacks against Vietnamese in Cambodia. Quite often these forms of violence overlap and are difficult to disentangle, complicating the search for a way out of the violence.

While many new Southeast Asian nations used violence in the years after independence to maintain or overthrow the ruling elite or the political system, violence now seems to be employed, in particular, to prevent or to realize the separation of a part or province of the state (East Timor, Mindanao, Papua, and until recently Aceh), to acquire or resist regional autonomy (Kalimantan), to support or thwart the power struggles of regional elites, or to protect or attack the integrity of the nation. The various attempts at democratization and decentralization in several Southeast Asian countries, increases in welfare between the 1960s and the 1990s in most states, along with the residual fallout from the financial crises in the late 1990s, have made it somewhat easier to mobilize people to fight for regional or communal goals at odds with the interests of the national establishment.

In this issue we continue the on-going discussion about the nature, forms, scale, conditions, background, course, and consequences of regional,

communal and ethnic violence. Earlier drafts of the essays published here were presented at a session on violence in Southeast Asia at the Fourth Conference of the European Association for Southeast Asian Studies (EUROSEAS) held from 1–4 September 2004 in Paris. They confirm that in certain circumstances ethnicity and regional ties still represent a powerful tool for recruiting people for political objectives and violent struggles. They further show how relationships linking people to their communal or ethnic leaders are often incompatible with the relationships of citizens to their nation, and subsequently often lead to violent outcomes. Many of the region's violent conflicts are the results of incidents, sometimes provoked, which create tensions within or between population groups. Often they pit indigenous peoples, who consider themselves 'sons of the earth', against migrants, the latter often seen to represent an uncaring or exploitative central government or dominant ethnic group. These situations can challenge the state's monopoly over the use of violence, and in a few cases even represent a threat to the state. Some of the essays also suggest that state interventions to deal with violence are often ineffective, misinterpreted, or partisan, and complicate efforts to deal with the root causes. This points to the need for both academics as well as policy makers to consider the historical, economic, and cultural backgrounds to contemporary expressions of violence.

In the first article Nicholas Herriman deals with the killings of sorcerers in the eastern tip of Java, in 1998. Whereas most authors have argued that they were engineered through conspiracies and provocations, he makes a convincing case that they were the result of a number of developments that coincided amid the political vacuum, in the months after Suharto stepped down. Local-level misinterpretation of national political changes and perceived lawlessness, combined with counterproductive government and security force action, allowed communities a free hand in dealing with suspected sorcerers. The author's argument is strengthened by evidence of similar actions being taken in the past under similar circumstances.

Ramses Amer describes the controversial and vulnerable position of ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia, giving a detailed account of the numerous attacks against members of this minority, in the last 25 years. He shows how popular resentment of the Vietnamese and occasional violence is periodically stirred up by political parties bidding for the population's favour in the run up to elections. The minority also serves as a pawn in the complex relations between Cambodia and Vietnam. It appears that the safety of the minority is only guaranteed during times of stable foreign policy relations between the two countries.

Muridan Widjojo explores how the Indonesian government and their security forces employ a nationalist discourse to justify the methods used to deal with the low-level insurgency in the resource-rich province of Papua, tracing the history of the conflict and the growth of Papuan advocacy

movements. This security approach has been increasingly opposed by Papuan intellectuals and ordinary people caught in the middle, who are now resorting to a discourse of independence. With both sides having a vested interest in keeping the secession issue alive, there is apparently little that can be done to stop the cycle of violence or to begin to address the myriad and pressing needs of the troubled Indonesian province.

Muhammad Najib Azca traces the various roles played by the security forces in attempting to deal with the ethnic and religious conflict in the Moluccas. He contends that various security forces played different and changing roles depending on the dynamics of the situation on the ground. Their behaviour was also influenced at the time by Indonesia's democratic transition, one in which elites were struggling to maintain their positions by resisting reforms. A detailed examination of the major incidents in the conflict clarifies patterns of security sector involvement, how security force dynamics influenced the course of the conflict, and what policies were adopted by the central government to deal with the problem — policies each of which carried its own risks.

The last two articles deal with the bloody confrontations between Madurese and other ethnic groups in parts of Kalimantan around the turn of the century. To understand why the Madurese became the main target of ethnic violence, Huub de Jonge and Gerben Nooteboom compare the relationships between the Madurese and other ethnic groups, like the Dayaks and the Malays, in strife-torn West Kalimantan and in the relatively peaceful East Kalimantan. They conclude that disparities in cultural, political, and economic terms largely determined whether or not the already stigmatised Madurese became scapegoats for the frustrated aspirations of other ethnic groups. Madurese apparently paid a high price for their lack of high-level support in society at a critical moment of Indonesian transition.

Hélène Bouvier and Glenn Smith turn their attention to the various explanations given for the massacres and ethnic cleansing that occurred in Central Kalimantan. Hitherto most accounts have drawn exclusively on the Dayak version of the events. Here, the authors have added divergent narratives collected among internally-displaced Madurese. What emerges from their comparison are two different conspiracy theories: one claiming the Dayaks pre-empted the Madurese as they were attempting to take over the province, the other asserting that Dayaks provoked incidents in order to justify an expulsion of the Madurese and seize their land and jobs. Although both of these suffer from the same weakness of other conspiracy theories, the authors conclude that the possibility of pre-planning cannot be ruled out. Also, that inadequate knowledge of the conflict has a lasting effect on the reconciliation process and the return of the displaced.