

**Jamie S. Davidson.** *From Rebellion to Riots: Collective Violence on Indonesian Borneo*. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2008. 312 pages.

Dave McRae

In *From Rebellion to Riots*, Davidson presents a comprehensive case study of inter-ethnic violence in West Kalimantan from 1967–2001, focusing on the context and historical lineage of each violent event. In doing so, he has produced an account that will be essential reading for students of the West Kalimantan violence, and which also makes an important contribution to the study of violence in Indonesia more generally.

Among the strongest features of Davidson's account is his impressively detailed explanation of the effects of previous incidents of violence on the geographic specificity and lines of confrontation of contemporary clashes. Through his close attention to the shifts in adversaries, forms, and locations of violence, Davidson also richly and convincingly grounds his account of each episode in its contemporary political context. In general, he has engaged strongly with existing studies of the West Kalimantan violence and the broader literature on violence in Indonesia, as well as incorporating some insights from the international literature. It is a pity, though, that the chance timing of publication means that Davidson discusses only the earlier work of Gerry van Klinken and John Sidel, and not their more recent book-length studies that consider the various instances of Indonesian violence as a set.<sup>1</sup>

Davidson opens his account by asserting the significance of violence in West Kalimantan—more deaths resulted from ethnic riots over the thirty-five years of his study than during a longer period in all of India, in a province larger than many countries wracked by violence (p. 10). Inevitably, however, many readers will be drawn to this study by the rough temporal coincidence of violence in West Kalimantan since 1997 with the other large-scale violent conflicts that followed Suharto's resignation.

Among these contemporary conflicts, the 1997 Dayak–Madura clashes in West Kalimantan were unique in taking place before Suharto's resignation. At least four hundred Madurese were killed, in what at the time was Indonesia's "gravest civilian-on-civilian bloodshed in some three decades" (pp. 5, 19). Davidson traces the historical lineage of the 1997 clashes most directly to the 1960s counter-insurgency campaign waged by the Indonesian military against communist guerrillas in the province. In a bid to drain the pool of support for these guerrillas, the military enlisted the support of local Dayak elites to form a militia to violently expel ethnic Chinese from the rural interior. Davidson highlights two ways in which this ethnic cleansing contributed to subsequent violence in West Kalimantan. First, the expulsion of the Chinese generated a land-grab contest between Dayaks and migrant Madurese over the vacated lands, sparking—in 1967—the first recorded Dayak–Madura riots in the region. Periodic clashes between Dayaks and Madurese then recurred for more than fifteen years thereafter, always in the same sites from which the Chinese had been evicted (parts of Sambas and Pontianak districts). Davidson thus impressively explains the geographic

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<sup>1</sup> These are Gerry van Klinken, *Communal Violence and Democratization in Indonesia: Small Town Wars* (London: Routledge, 2007); and John T. Sidel, *Riots, Pogroms, Jihad* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006). Sidel does not explicitly discuss the West Kalimantan violence.

specificity of future Dayak–Madura violence in a province with widespread Dayak and Madurese populations (pp. 87, 102). Second, Davidson also argues that these Dayak–Madura clashes were sufficiently frequent to generate what Stanley Tambiah has dubbed a routinization of violence, in which “(w)ithin a specific geographic location and among particular belligerents ... (v)iolence became the means through which people resolve(d) disputes” (pp. 92–93). Thus, Davidson argues, in specific locales each group had internalized an “‘us-versus-them’ antagonism” long before the 1997 clashes (p. 202). Davidson’s assertion of routinization is plausible, but the assertion would have benefited from further elaboration. For instance, one might be curious about the effects of routinization during the fourteen-year gap in clashes after the last riot that Davidson describes and the 1997 violence, and whether this gap had an impact on the routinization.

It is through highlighting the effects of this lineage that Davidson contrasts his work to two other schools of thought on the 1997 violence. The first is the critical development school, which attributes Dayak–Madura clashes to the injurious effect upon Dayaks of New Order development. Davidson allows that the effect of development may have contributed to the intensity of the 1997 violence, but argues that it cannot have been the cause, as clashes preceded its effect and, moreover, did not take place in the principal sites of economic exploitation. He deals with the second school—which he dubs Dayak institutional frustration—much the same way. Principally advanced by Jacques Bertrand, this school attributes Dayak violence against Madurese to Dayak frustration at their status as a “backward” group under the New Order. This school cannot explain why other groups labeled “backward” have not perpetrated violence, Davidson explains, nor does it account for the geographic specificity of the violence in West Kalimantan.

Having asserted the prior routinization of Dayak–Madura violence, in his own account of the 1997 clashes, Davidson devotes his attention to explaining the unprecedented scale and geographic spread of the violence. To this end, Davidson underlines the importance of a politicization of the West Kalimantan countryside that was initiated during the 1980s by several Dayak NGOs that, over time, became incorporated into the global and national indigenous rights movement. Through their rural activism to promote Dayak self-sufficiency and their information-sharing, these NGOs succeeded in producing a “thickening of reciprocal identification” as Dayaks between previous disparate communities and an increase in coordinated action (pp. 113–14). They also gained politically interested Dayak elites as allies in 1994, after these elites had failed to secure a rare appointment of a Dayak candidate to a position as district head.

In his own words, Davidson’s focus on context grounds the 1997 violence in “concrete political and temporal processes” (p. 203), and it has the advantage of positioning him well to demonstrate how the violence lent subsequent impetus to the Dayak ethno-political movement (see pp. 121–26). Nevertheless, the absence of any discussion of the organization of the 1997 violence is a noticeable omission from his account. We are left to wonder whether there were identifiable leaders in this violence (Davidson explicitly excludes the NGO activists from possible leaders of the bloodshed), to what degree it may have been organized, and whether its spread followed the movement of key combatants or happened by other means of diffusion.

Davidson then continues on to the next major clashes in West Kalimantan, which took place a mere two years later.<sup>2</sup> As Davidson details, this 1999 violence entailed a surprising shift in location and protagonists. The clashes centered on coastal Sambas district, which was not a region from which Chinese had been displaced and was an area previously free of violence. This time local Malay elites initiated the violence, despite the fact that they had not been involved in previous fighting. The commonality with previous violence was that Madurese again found themselves on the receiving end of violence, with at least four hundred people killed in the clashes and 50,000 Madurese expelled from Sambas district in the first ethnic cleansing in West Kalimantan since the expulsion of the Chinese in 1967 (pp. 20, 134, 140).

Again, for the 1999 violence, Davidson's explanation of the importance of context is thorough and richly detailed. Davidson identifies two key factors necessary to understand Malay-Madura clashes—the space for political mobilization created by *reformasi*, and the local identity politics generated by the anticipation of the decentralization that would follow the demise of the New Order regime. Seeking to counter Dayak political gains made through an exclusivist sons-of-the-soil (*putra daerah*) discourse, local Malay elites sought a way to demonstrate their own “right” to control coastal Sambas district. Their chosen method was to launch a campaign of violence against Madurese in Sambas. The choice of the Madurese as adversaries was not random, but the violence was primarily intended to demonstrate the credentials of Malay indigeneity to the Dayaks (pp. 136–38).

In comparison to his account of the 1997 violence, Davidson also gives a stronger explanation of the organization of the 1999 clashes, particularly with concern to Malay involvement. He describes Malay elites forming an organization that would lead the violence, their efforts at recruitment and preparations to attack, and, during the violence, the actions of leaders to push for more violence or to initiate attacks in areas previously unaffected (pp. 130–34).

Following the discussion of these episodes of violence, Davidson presents a chapter-length analysis of the West Kalimantan case in comparative perspective. He seeks to make two main points. First, he argues that it is important to retain a distinction between “ethnic” and “religious” violence, as ethnic conflicts have been of much shorter duration in Indonesia than religious fighting. Second, in response to a debate among those who favor elite-led and mass-led conceptions of the incipience of violence in the broader literature on conflict, Davidson asserts that within the one site of recurrent violence, the incipient phase of some incidents may be mass-led and others may be elite-led.

The comparative chapter does go some way to drawing out the broader significance of Davidson's single case. Overall, it is less convincing than the remainder of the book, however, which is perhaps not surprising in a work that is primarily a case study. The chief problem is that Davidson cannot bring enough information to bear for his comparative cases, with the result that he tends to gloss over the very complexities that he highlights in West Kalimantan. For instance, in his discussion of the distinction between religious and ethnic violence, Davidson conflates the Maluku and North

<sup>2</sup> Davidson also discusses subsequent urban riots in Pontianak in 2000 and 2001. However, I have not covered this discussion in this review.

Maluku conflicts into violence in “the Moluccas.”<sup>3</sup> Doing so masks the added complexity that North Maluku would add to the pattern, either as a conflict that involved large-scale Muslim–Christian clashes but also fighting between co-religionists, or as a religious conflict of significantly shorter duration than either Poso or Maluku. The question of whether the difference between religious and ethnic conflicts that Davidson identifies is purely a matter of context or relates to some difference in the form of the identities could also have been elaborated upon further.

Davidson’s attempt to explain why religion became the dominant cleavage in some conflicts, whereas ethnicity did in others, is also problematic. For Poso, for example, Davidson endorses van Klinken’s elite-focused instrumentalist picture of “urban brokers,” choosing religion as the dominant cleavage because of its greater potential for “coalition-building” compared with ethnicity (p. 187). Such an elite-focused instrumentalist picture misrepresents the shifts in salience of identity to violence in Poso. From the outset of the conflict, being “Muslim” or “Christian” determined which side of the fighting an individual could join, without initially obliging them to join a side at all. There were never clashes between ethnically distinct co-religionists in Poso, for example, that might have complicated the salience of religious identity to violence in a way that could have required instrumentalist manipulation to establish religion as a primary cleavage of the conflict.

Davidson’s observations regarding elite-led and mass-led cases of the incipience of violence also suffer from insufficient discussion of his comparative cases. Each international case of recurrent riots that he presents—Calcutta, Kano, and Karachi—is dealt with in around three pages. As a result, the reader lacks sufficient detail to make an informed judgment on Davidson’s argument. Nor is the choice of cases explained. Overall this comparative discussion, itself an expansion of a small part of the concluding chapter of Davidson’s dissertation, still requires further development.

Davidson is on stronger ground in the concluding chapter, when he uses his close study of a single case to scrutinize five approaches to conflict resolution. His discussion of two of the approaches, in particular, has broader resonance for the other cases of large-scale violence in Indonesia. The first is the idea of ethnic partition, which in West Kalimantan amounted to the expulsion of Madurese from Sambas district, justified as a step to remove the “cause” of the problem (p. 142). Latterly, the idea of dividing troubled regions of Indonesia into separate districts has been raised as a long-term solution in both the Poso conflict in Central Sulawesi and the less prominent Mamasa conflict in West Sulawesi.<sup>4</sup> Implicit in such proposed divisions is the idea of designating one district each for rival religious and ethnic groups or political factions, effectively institutionalizing the idea that these groups cannot peacefully co-exist. Proponents of these divisions would do well to heed Davidson’s observation that to approve of such partition undermines terms such as “citizenship, republic, and Indonesian” and would require a rethinking of the very “interethnic and interreligious foundations (and promises) on which ... the idea of Indonesia has been built” (p. 206). This is a point Davidson develops further in the final section of his book, as he

<sup>3</sup> For a convincing exposition of the separate dynamic of the North Maluku conflict, see Chris Wilson, *Ethno-religious Violence in Indonesia: From Soil to God* (London: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> For details of the latter conflict, see International Crisis Group, *Decentralisation and Conflict in Indonesia: The Mamasa Case*, May 3, 2005.

discusses the unresolved tension between the assertion of indigenous rights and the constitutional right of migrants, often equally marginalized, to seek economic betterment anywhere in Indonesia.<sup>5</sup>

The second approach of broader resonance is Davidson's suggestion that revitalizing the police and formal legal system would be a first step in reviving state institutions' legitimate and effective roles in conflict resolution. His contention that prompt arrests of the perpetrators of violence could effectively ease tensions and stop violence is primarily grounded in the West Kalimantan case and international examples, but is consistent with evidence from other Indonesian conflict areas. Following weak law enforcement during the escalation of both the Maluku and Poso conflicts, for example, large rounds of arrests in mid-2005 and early 2007, respectively, disrupted the networks responsible for sporadic violence and brought about immediate security improvements. Other forms of conflict resolution remain an important complement to law enforcement, but should not be thought of as a replacement.

Overall, Davidson's study of the West Kalimantan violence demonstrates the continuing importance of the single case study to highlight shifting motivations and factors that deepen our understanding of each conflict beyond what can be elucidated by over-arching single-factor explanations. In addition, when considered as a set with other single-case studies, such as Wilson's impressive work on North Maluku,<sup>6</sup> *From Rebellion to Riots* should also ultimately contribute to more nuanced comparative accounts of violence in Indonesia.

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<sup>5</sup> Davidson has expanded this discussion in an excellent article on violence and the indigenous rights movement in West Kalimantan. See Jamie S. Davidson, "Culture and Rights in Ethnic Violence," in *Revival of Tradition in Indonesian Politics: The Deployment of Adat from Colonialism to Indigenism*, ed. Jamie S. Davidson and David Henley (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 224–46.

<sup>6</sup> Wilson, *Ethno-religious Violence in Indonesia*.