

***Religious Violence and Conciliation in Indonesia: Christians and Muslims in the Moluccas.* By Sumanto Al Qurtuby. Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge, 2016. Hardcover: 215pp.**

Between 1999 and 2001, rival ethnic and religious communities fought violent conflicts in five Indonesian provinces which led to large-scale loss of life, displacement and destruction. In the decade and a half since then, a series of in-depth quality academic studies have given us a good understanding of the causes and dynamics of most of these conflicts. However, among these conflicts the one in Maluku Province — perhaps the most severe of the five — has been relatively understudied. With *Religious Violence and Conciliation in Indonesia*, Sumanto Al Qurtuby has done an excellent job of helping to fill that gap. Indeed, he has written one of the best studies of the Maluku conflict.

By synthesising previous literature and adding new insights from his own extensive fieldwork among both Muslims and Christians in Maluku, Al Qurtuby provides a detailed account of the origins, distinctive evolution and resolution of the conflict. Much of the book is riveting, containing new and important information which will be very useful for scholars of Indonesia, conflict, peacebuilding and religion. One main focus is on the role of religion — “religious networks, organizations, discourses, and practices” (p. 5) — in provoking the violence and in facilitating its end. Unlike many polemical studies which see religion as either all important or irrelevant to conflict, Al Qurtuby takes a nuanced and healthily sceptical approach to his analysis.

Chapter One provides a dramatic account of the early stages of the fighting and its rapid spread to the villages and islands outside Ambon City. The author vividly illustrates the various roles of important actors in the conflict, particularly in the way they used religious scripture and doctrine to first justify the violence and then to end it. The author provides a detailed comparative discussion of the use of religious scripture and concepts of jihad and holy war by Muslim and Christian leaders which this reviewer has not seen in any other study. He shows how local Muslim leaders saw and framed the conflict as jihad from its earliest days, well before the entry of the Java-based *Laskar Jihad*. Yet the arrival of that militia and others such as *Laskar Mujahidin* brought the ideas of Sayyid Qutb and other Salafi scholars into the conflict. Grasping the exact role of religion in facilitating collective violence is one of the most

challenging tasks for a scholar of religious conflicts, but Al Qurtuby pulls it off admirably.

There is fascinating new information throughout the discussion of all phases of the conflict. The author finds that local fighters lost enthusiasm for the conflict once they realized they were being manipulated by those in power, surely a hypothesis worth testing against other cases. He provides absorbing examples of how local traditions (*adat*) have become syncretized with Islam and Christianity, and how such syncretism sometimes maintained the peace while at other times it did not. Maluku's cultural tradition of *pela gandong* — longstanding ties of mutual assistance between villages — is often advanced as the solution to inter-religious violence in the province. However, the author is sceptical about the ability of such structures to prevent violence. He reminds us of an important but often neglected point that the large migrant population is generally excluded from such *pela gandong* relationships.

The chapters on the resolution of the conflict are, like those on the conflict itself, nuanced. Unlike some observers, Al Qurtuby believes that civil society should not be given exclusive credit for peacebuilding. To be sure, civil society organizations, and religious and community leaders did play a crucial role, utilizing religious discourses as well as local norms and structures to build peace. But the author also illustrates the complementary role played by local and national governments. The determination of the national government to bring an end to the fighting provided space for the community to consider peace. Government funds were used to facilitate meetings — from informal grassroots gatherings through to the large Malino II peace negotiations — and to buy off radicals with jobs. In adeptly showing that state-society synergy led to peace, the author has provided an important case study of theoretical and practical relevance to other conflicts.

In the final substantive chapter, Al Qurtuby addresses the violent riots and other incidents that have occurred in Ambon and Maluku since the end of major hostilities. Although he is not able to provide quite as compelling an explanation for these events as he did for the main conflict, he demonstrates that religious suspicions remain in Ambon. He also finds that ethnic and regional cleavages have now surpassed, or at least come to rival, religion as the main source of political tension and mobilization in Maluku, a conclusion this reviewer also drew after fieldwork in the affected areas. As Al Qurtuby notes, conflicts morph over time, and that post-conflict peacebuilding must address contemporary realities as well as past tensions.

This book is a detailed account of the complexity involved in collective violence and will be invaluable for those testing and building theory of the causes, dynamics and resolution of violent conflicts. It is a very welcome addition to the large body of scholarship on violent conflicts in Indonesia.

CHRIS WILSON is a Senior Lecturer in Politics and International Relations at the University of Auckland. Postal address: Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142, New Zealand; email: chris.wilson@auckland.ac.nz.