



SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT PAPERS

CONFLICT PREVENTION & RECONSTRUCTION

Paper No. 19 / December 2004

# Understanding Local Level Conflict in Developing Countries

Theory, Evidence and Implications from Indonesia

Patrick Barron  
Claire Q. Smith  
Michael Woolcock

CPR

## Summary Findings

---

Previous research on conflict has focused primarily on large-scale, high-profile episodes of violence and framed them in terms of ethnic/religious tensions, separatist discontent, thwarted economic opportunities, or weak institutions. Such research, often derived from secondary sources and/or from observations at a single point in time, tends to offer cultural or structuralist explanations, and technocratic solutions.

The authors first examine some of the ways in which conflict is conceptualized and researched within the literature, and discuss some of the limitations of previous approaches. They group the literature on conflict and violence into four broad camps, which for convenience they refer to as cultural sociology, political sociology, political economy, and legal anthropology. The authors highlight some of the weaknesses of this literature and research, including: insights from theory have often not been thoroughly tested empirically; econometric approaches have helped in hypothesis development, but these hypotheses have rarely been subjected to more in-depth qualitative study; measurement has often been made statically, precluding an understanding of the mechanisms and processes by which conflicts evolve; and much of the analysis has compared states, thus excluding the examination of intra-state variations.

The authors look instead at local level ('everyday') conflicts, the dynamics shaping their evolution over time, and the mechanisms by which different outcomes are achieved through engagement with (and interactions between) traditional and formal dispute resolution mechanisms. Using detailed evidence gathered by twelve researchers over six months in forty-one villages in two Indonesian provinces, the authors present an integrated

framework for understanding the pathways that conflicts can take, the conditions under which they follow one trajectory rather than another, and the characteristics that make for effective intervention. Such a framework, they argue, can help enhance the capacity of citizens, policymakers, and practitioners in developing countries to craft more constructive precedents and procedures for preventing everyday forms of conflict—an inevitable and inherent feature of development—from turning violent.

The key elements of this foundation are the importance of coherent and enforceable rules and over-arching meta-rules, the malleability and political salience of different identity group claims and the willingness, capacity and legitimacy of mediators. Individually and collectively, these elements can help to inform a corresponding set of policy recommendations for various actors focused on providing incentives, resources, and spaces for crafting viable mediating institutions that enable otherwise weak, competing, or incompatible rules systems to co-exist.

The authors also argue that these elements provide a possible challenge to the idea of a "policy recommendation" understood as a top-down instrument solely or primarily designed and implemented by technocrats or other external elites. They argue that the early detection and effective resolution of local level conflict, is in large part an "adaptive" rather than a "technical" problem, one requiring an emphasis on the role of many different parties (government, donors, academia, and civil society), at different levels, in establishing a basis for effective dialogue, evidence-based decision making, and enforceable agreements, the final specification of which is not always likely to be known at the outset.

# SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT PAPERS

---

## Conflict Prevention & Reconstruction

Paper No. 19 / December 2004

# Understanding Local Level Conflict in Developing Countries

Theory, Evidence and Implications from Indonesia

Patrick Barron  
Claire Q. Smith  
Michael Woolcock

This *Working Papers Series* disseminates the findings of work in progress to encourage discussion and exchange of ideas on conflict and development issues. Papers in this series are not formal publications of the World Bank.

This paper has not undergone the review accorded to official World Bank publications. The findings, interpretations and conclusions herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Bank for Reconstruction/The World Bank and its affiliated organizations, or its Executive Directors, or the governments they represent.

The papers carry the names of the authors and should be cited accordingly. The series is edited by the Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Unit in the Social Development Department of the Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development Network of the World Bank.

To request copies of the paper or for more information on the series, please contact the CPR Unit. Papers are also available on the CPR Unit's website.

For additional copies of this paper, please contact:

Conflict Prevention & Reconstruction  
Social Development Department  
The World Bank  
1818 H Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20433

Fax: 202-522-3247

Web : <http://www.worldbank.org/conflict> (see "Publications" in the navigation menu)

E-mail: [cpr@worldbank.org](mailto:cpr@worldbank.org)



Printed on Recycled Paper

# Table of Contents

---

Foreword

Acknowledgements

1. Conceptualizing Conflict: Contending Theoretical Considerations .....	3
1.1 Cultural Sociology .....	3
1.2 Political Sociology .....	4
1.3 Political Economy .....	5
1.4 Legal Anthropology .....	6
2. Exploring Conflict Pathways: A Method .....	7
3. Disputes, Jurisdictions, and Conflict Trajectories .....	10
4. ‘Rules of the Game’ .....	13
4.1 Compatibility of Rules .....	14
4.2 Coherence of Meta-Rules .....	18
4.3 Enforcement of Rules .....	20
5. ‘Dynamics of Difference’ .....	21
5.1 Creating and Sustaining Group Difference .....	21
5.2 Conflict and the ‘Dynamics of Difference’ .....	26
5.3 Bridging Differences Between Groups .....	29
6. ‘Efficacy of Intermediaries’ .....	30
6.1 First-Second Party Negotiations .....	30
6.2 Third Party Mediations .....	31
7. Policy Implications .....	32
7.1 Rethinking ‘Policy Implications’ Orthodoxy .....	33
7.2 Creating Mediating Institutions and Meta-rules .....	34
7.3 Innovative Enforcement Mechanisms .....	34
7.4 Supporting Intermediaries .....	35
7.5 Negotiating Difference .....	36
8. Conclusions .....	36
References .....	38

## Figures

Figure 1: Local Level Conflict Pathways .....	11
Figure 2: Characteristics of Rule Systems .....	14
Figure 3: Efficacy of Intermediaries .....	32

## Foreword

---

This paper reports results from a study that is attempting to provide a better understanding of the trajectories on local level conflicts in Indonesia. It seeks to develop a framework to answer key questions that current theoretical and research strands do not address. How and why, for example, do some local-level conflicts escalate into large-scale violence, while others do not? How do societal structures (political, economic and institutional) affect the pathways of local conflict? How do these contexts interact with specific actors and issues in a particular setting? How does the development process create and interact with existing tensions, and how can they be managed?

A description of the methodology for this study was presented in CPR Working Paper No. 9 and updated in Barron et al. (2004). In addition to trying to provide a better understanding of the trajectories of local-level conflicts, a second aim of the study was to evaluate the impact of the World Bank's *Kecamatan* Development Project (KDP, the largest social development project in Southeast Asia) on those trajectories and local conflict management capacity. Forthcoming work will present the empirical results of a large-scale assessment of KDP's impact on conflict.

Ian Bannon  
Manager  
Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Unit

## Acknowledgements

---

This paper is part of a larger study on local level conflict and participatory development projects in Indonesia. For generous financial assistance the authors are grateful to DfID, AusAID, the Norwegian Trust Fund (Measuring Empowerment Study), the World Bank's Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Unit, and the Development Economics Vice Presidency (Research Support Budget). Rachael Diprose and Adam Satu were key members of the research team, and played an integral role in developing the ideas explored here. The other researchers provided ideas throughout the study. The authors are also indebted to Scott Guggenheim and Sri Kuntari for their active support and feedback. Helpful comments were received from Luthfi Ashari, Teck Ghee Lim, Charles Sampford, Peter Uvin and participants at seminars at George Mason, Harvard, Johns Hopkins, Universitas Indonesia, Yale, the World Bank (Washington and Jakarta), the Southeast Asia Conflict Studies Network (SEACSN) conference, and the MOST-LIPI/UNESCO conference on Conflict in the Asia-Pacific. The views are those of the authors, and should not be attributed to the organizations with which they are affiliated. Address for correspondence: Michael Woolcock, 1818 H Street NW, Washington, DC 20433, USA. Email addresses: [pbarron@worldbank.org](mailto:pbarron@worldbank.org), [c.q.smith@lse.ac.uk](mailto:c.q.smith@lse.ac.uk), [mwoolcock@worldbank.org](mailto:mwoolcock@worldbank.org)

## UNDERSTANDING LOCAL LEVEL CONFLICT PATHWAYS IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: THEORY, EVIDENCE AND IMPLICATIONS FROM INDONESIA

---

Peaceful conflicts are essential features of functional democratic systems across the world. Disputes between individuals or groups about the distribution of scarce resources, about values, or about the access to power that allows influence over the two, are both inevitable and necessary. They are inevitable, because human beings are interdependent creatures and because it is impossible to meet the needs and desires of all people at the same time;<sup>1</sup> they are necessary, because—as Polanyi (1944), Moore (1967), Bates (2001) and others have shown—the very idea of human and societal progress is predicated on the idea of conflict. This is particularly true in developing countries, where poverty and lack of opportunity underscore the need for change, and where, conversely, otherwise desirable periods of economic growth themselves become a force for realigning class structures and (potentially) re-imagining the bases of group identity. Conflict, then, is a constant companion on the road of both economic crisis and opportunity because it involves changing configurations of power and resource allocation, as well as challenges to existing interests, aspirations, perceptions, and expectations. As such, conflict is a necessary catalyst to, and an inevitable by-product of, development. The challenge thus becomes one not of limiting conflict but of managing it in constructive ways.

Understanding conflict is important for both instrumental and intrinsic reasons in formulating development policy. Instrumentally, we need to understand the processes by which violent conflict breaks out because destructive conflict can set back social and economic development gains by decades; hard-won development successes can be wiped out in an instant. Moreover, the physical, economic, and psychological insecurity that accompanies outbreaks of violence, and that lingers long thereafter, negatively impacts on freedom and choice, the very basis of development itself (Sen 1999). Intrinsically, reducing the human suffering that is a product of violence (and other factors) is important in its own right, irrespective of whether it also makes settings more attractive to investors. Local conflict mediation mechanisms in many developing countries, moreover, are deeply rooted in distinctive normative traditions and customary laws, and as such are intricately linked to people's sense of identity. Whether from an instrumentalist or intrinsic perspective, development actors—including the World Bank, bilateral donors, and non-governmental organizations—have in recent years increasingly come to see conflict reduction and post-conflict reconstruction as part of their mandate.

Even with the recognition of the scale of violent conflict in the developing world—and the toll it takes on populations, in particular, but also on governments, firms, and donor agencies—it seems that precious few actual or potential strategies exist for responding to them. Part of the reason for this, we suggest, is that the vast majority of research on conflict in the developing world—or at least the research that dominates the thinking of influential commentators and policymakers—has focused on large-scale, high-profile incidents of violence and has framed them in terms of ethnic/religious tensions, separatist discontent, thwarted economic opportunities, or weak institutions. Methodologically—in Indonesia, and elsewhere—data has often been derived from secondary sources and/or observations at a single point in time. Little use has been made of ethnographic or comparative and historical methods that seek to follow the evolution of local conflicts over time and explain differences in outcome in otherwise similar conflicts. Analytically, both explanations and prescribed solutions have tended to have a cultural or structural basis,

---

<sup>1</sup> Conflict, to use Coser's classic definition (1956, p. 8), is the "struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power, and resources, a struggle in which the aims of opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate rivals." If status, power, and resources are scarce—as, inevitably, they are, given the fact that they are, in part, relational constructs—it would seem that conflict is inevitable. For an interesting discussion of contrasting views over the inevitability of conflict, see Bjorkqvist (1997).

in which common aggregate variables are posited to explain (and/or predict) the likelihood of conflict, usually seen as being, in some core sense, ‘bad’. In short, the dominance of research on large-scale conflicts using aggregate statistics from secondary sources has given rise to conceptual frameworks that largely ignore the local level, even though it is from this point that many eventually large-scale conflicts begin and are experienced.<sup>2</sup> While such approaches clearly have their merits, deeper consideration of the dynamics of local level conflict trajectories and their engagement with broader social and political forces, we argue, could provide a more informed understanding of conflict’s nature and causes, and thus a basis for crafting more coherent (and potentially more effective) policy responses.

This paper seeks to present integrated frameworks to help us understand the different pathways local level conflicts can take, the conditions under which they follow one trajectory rather than another, and the characteristics that make for effective intervention. The frameworks draw upon elements of the existing literature, and were developed inductively on the basis of detailed evidence gathered by a team of twelve researchers in two (very different) Indonesian provinces. The researchers followed the evolution of more than seventy local level conflicts—some violent, some not—collecting data on how and why conflicts developed as they did, as well as data on the structures (demographic, political, social, economic) of the communities in which they were living.<sup>3</sup> Using such frameworks, we argue, can help us understand variations in the incidence of conflict and the extent to which it becomes violent in developing countries, and thereby enhance the capacity of citizens, policymakers, and practitioners alike to better understand both ‘the problem’ and the plausible ‘solutions’.

We argue that three realms of variables shape the pathways along which conflicts travel: the presence of coherent and enforceable rules and overarching meta-rules (what we call ‘the rules of the game’); the porosity and salience of group identities (‘the dynamics of difference’); and the willingness, capacity, and legitimacy of mediators (‘the efficacy of intermediaries’). Identifying these elements suggests a set of policy recommendations that center around creating incentives, resources, procedures, and spaces for crafting mediating institutions and intermediaries that enable incompatible rule systems to co-exist, and that allow difference to be negotiated in non-violent ways.

The paper proceeds in eight sections. First, we examine some of the ways in which conflict is conceptualized and researched within the literature, and discuss some of the limitations of previous approaches. We then outline, very briefly, the basic methodology we employed to choose research sites and collect and analyze data. In Section Three we present our model for understanding the ways in which conflicts develop and present a basic outline of the frameworks we use to help us understand the pathways conflicts take. Sections Four and Five provide detailed explanations of two analytical frameworks that we have developed—the ‘rules of the game’ and ‘dynamics of difference’—to help us understand the contexts in which conflicts are most likely to emerge, turn violent, and/or escalate. Section Six outlines a third analytical realm—the ‘efficacy of intermediaries’—and explores the qualities that an actor (whether first, second, or third party) must have if an intervention is to be successful. We then consider in Section Seven some of the broad policy implications of our findings, and, particularly, the parameters along which effective interventions might be crafted to help lower the likelihood and escalation of violent conflict. Section Eight concludes.

---

<sup>2</sup> There are exceptions, notably the work of Mamdani (1996, 2001), which historically links the political and social impact of colonialism with the status of and relationships between contemporary ethnic groups, customary institutions and ethnic conflict. See also Li (2002), which builds on Mamdani’s approach.

<sup>3</sup> Details of the methodological foundations of the study are provided below.

## 1. Conceptualizing Conflict: Contending Theoretical Considerations

What causes differences in levels of violent conflict? Summarizing the way in which scholars answer such a seemingly simple question is difficult; the literature is diffuse, and theoretical threads—and the different methodological foundations on which they rest—are hard to examine comparatively. There are a number of reasons for this. First, different literatures have focused on different types of conflict. The underlying reasons for ethnic conflict may be very different to the factors that explain class conflict and political revolution; understanding conflict between social groups may require different conceptual foundations to those necessary for thinking about conflicts between communities and the state. Second, ‘conflict studies’ is the archetypal inter-disciplinary subject, where all manner of social scientists are joined by environmentalists, psychologists, and biologists, to name but a few. Perhaps inevitably, added insights from disciplinary diversity are often lost in the absence of a common *lingua franca*. In short, theorists and polemicists of conflict not only ask different questions, but ask (and answer) them in different tongues. Nevertheless, providing a brief overview of at least some of the streams in the literature is important, not least because different conceptualizations of what constitutes and causes conflict have informed both methodological attempts to understand it and (albeit often implicitly and indirectly) corresponding policy responses.

Collectively, as Horowitz (2000, pp. 95-96) has argued, we now have an at least relatively substantial (if diverse) theoretical base for thinking about why violence occurs and varies, in a way that was not true in the past. The literature on conflict and violence can be grouped into four broad camps, which for convenience we shall refer to as cultural sociology, political sociology, political economy, and legal anthropology. Each makes a series of core claims about the causes of conflict and its underlying escalation mechanisms, doing so on the basis of specific empirical foundations. We outline these various characteristics, and then assess their strengths and weaknesses in terms of their utility for understanding and constructively responding to local level conflict.

### 1.1 Cultural Sociology

This perspective, also known as primordialism,<sup>4</sup> emphasizes the long history of ethnic affiliation as a sorting category for group construction and boundary maintenance, and the extent to which ascriptive attachments have persisted, even while the breakdown of kinship, and the development of the modern state, has increased the importance of other civic identities and bureaucratic forms of relations. Primordialists, influenced by the romanticism of German Enlightenment thinkers, tend to emphasize both the uniqueness and longevity of bounded cultures, and the groups that embody them, and explain conflict in terms of psychological and cultural forces that frame the ways in which individuals within groups understand themselves and others (Ross 1993). Longstanding cultures may influence levels of conflict through either the content of the cultures themselves, or the ways in which different cultures relate to each other. The former view emphasizes the different characteristics of different cultures<sup>5</sup> and the extent to which they embody values of violence or peace.<sup>6</sup> The latter argues that because cultures are different, and because ethnic affiliation remains *the* attachment over which people will shed blood, culturally plural

---

<sup>4</sup> The term primordialism was coined by the sociologist Edward Shills (1957) and popularized by anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1963).

<sup>5</sup> Conceptions of cultures as the embodiment of ‘primordial sentiments’ flow from the culture and personality and national character studies of, amongst others, Ruth Benedict (1934) and Margaret Mead (1958).

<sup>6</sup> The conflict resolution literature has picked up on this point. A number of scholars have sought to find cultural patterns (primarily by looking at cultural norms) that legitimize more or less peaceful behavior. See, for example, Levine (1973) and, more recently, Ross (1999) who argues that psycho-cultural dispositions in a community or society shape the intensity of conflict in a given location.

societies—where different ethnicities live side by side—are bound to have higher levels of conflict; this is the explicit claim of Huntington (1993) and his (in)famous ‘clash of civilizations’ thesis.<sup>7</sup>

These views have been largely discredited in the academic literature as over-simplified, although they can serve as a useful balance to the purely resource-competition based theories (e.g., Homer-Dixon 1999).<sup>8</sup> Cultural sociologists tend to reify cultural identities—and resulting group formations—as static and given, with little consideration given to how identities wax and wane, and how group boundaries become more or less porous, in response to endogenous and exogenous forces, whether historical, geographical, or political, or in combination. Further, as an explanatory tool for examining the incidence, severity, and longevity of violent conflict, primordial views have vast limitations in predicting variation over both time and space. They say little about why some ethnic groups live together for centuries, and then rise up against each other, or about why in some cases ethnic groups can live peacefully side by side, and in others not. Nevertheless, cultural explanations of conflict have persisted in scholarly and (especially) popular discourse.

## 1.2 Political Sociology

In reply to the essentialism and determinism of the cultural sociologists, a second literature emanating from political sociology has highlighted the socially constructed nature of ethnicity and the extent to which conflict often has an instrumental basis, thereby becoming a mechanism for individuals or groups to advance their interests (e.g., Rothchild 1997). Ethnicity, it is argued, is neither static nor given: seeking membership in identity groups may be a natural human trait, but people have multiple layers and forms of identity and may choose to emphasize different ones at different times. Ethnicity does not need to be the defining narrative of group formation, when other identities (gender, class, place of origin, etc) are often just as important. The question then becomes: why do particular identities (ethnic or otherwise) get emphasized at different points in time, and under what conditions—and via what mechanisms—does this translate to inter-group conflict?

There are two strands of responses to this question within the political sociology literature. The first emphasizes the role that intellectual and political elites play in creating (and sustaining) conceptions of the self and the group. Eric Wolf (1964, 1999), for example, has argued that cultures are, in part, derivative of the power relations that prevail within a community, and that cultural formations and the dynamics that underpin them can—with proper study—be understood by examining how power is structured and deployed. Brass (1991) extends the point to show how these cultures, created and sustained by leaders for reasons of power, are then used as resources to be mobilized for the acquisition of further political power, economic benefits, and social status. The empirical bases of many of the instrumentalist assertions rest on the close examination of particular conflicts in particular situations, and as such have sought to deduce (or ascribe) rational motivations to the actions of particular actors. Whether the analysis is structural or relational, ethnicity and group identity gains saliency through the rational pursuit of interests (individual and/or collective).<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Related accounts of cultural motivations for conflict have been popularized in the media; see, for example, Kaplan (1997) and Mydans (2001). Among economists, the early work of Easterly and Levine (1997) made similar claims with respect to Africa (though these authors and others extending this line of research now make stronger links between growth collapses and the role of institutions).

<sup>8</sup> As Li (2002, p. 4) has argued, “An emphasis on culture and meaning... is needed to counter the crude materialism of neo-Malthusian accounts... that attribute conflict to the pressure of people on resources, radically underspecifying the diverse forms and mechanisms of this ‘pressure’, and failing to account for populations under extreme economic stress who nevertheless establish conditions of tolerance and peace.” See also Mamdani (2001, p. 197).

<sup>9</sup> McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001), in the context of their summary of social movements theory, point out the difference between structural and rationalist explanations for episodes of contention. Structural analyses look at the interests of collectivities (communities, classes, etc.) and examine both individual and group relations. Rational

The second strand in the political sociology literature stresses the importance of understanding the characteristics of the civic institutions within which conflicts are embedded. In his study of ethnic conflict in India, Varshney (2002) criticizes the focus on formal institutions, arguing that it is the strength of informal civic associational structures and, to a lesser extent, informal networks that helps explain the likelihood of violence between ethnic groups. Where the membership of such structures and networks are socially diverse, Varshney argues, citizens have frequent, sustained, and personal interactions with those who are demographically ‘different’ from them, thereby making it harder for opportunist elites to ignite or fan conflicts along communal lines. Through their overlapping membership in social, political, and business associations, citizens find their interests and aspirations conjoined; in contrast, within more balkanized social environments, erstwhile potential triggers for group-based conflict are more effectively reduced, anticipated, and mitigated. From a policy standpoint, however, it is less clear whether and how such diverse settings can be nurtured and sustained, whether by community members themselves or via some form of policy/project intervention initiated by an external agent.

### 1.3 Political Economy

A third camp in the literature has also sought to take incentives seriously in understanding why conflict occurs, but has looked less at the role of individual actors (and/or the role of identity) and more at the societal structures that arrange material incentives, and thus make conflict and violence more or less likely. This approach tries to identify particular factors of social, political and economic organization that correlate with variations in conflict/violence levels. Galtung (1969) posits that where underlying conditions of domination and exploitation exist in a society, true ‘positive peace’ will never exist. The basic implication is that attempts at managing conflict must address fundamental (primarily class) inequalities. Burton (1990) argues that conflict flows from the denial of the provision and assurance of basic needs by government institutions and/or the market. Levels of conflict are thus determined by the extent to which basic needs are met. Both Charles Tilly (1999) and Frances Stewart (2002) have emphasized the economic basis of conflict but have argued that inequality between groups is what matters in explaining conflict: in Tilly’s case between different cohorts in the income distribution; in Stewart’s, in her work on horizontal inequalities, in differences between ascriptive groups in terms of their access to power and resources.<sup>10</sup>

Other scholars explain variations in violence by emphasizing the presence (or absence) and type of formal institutions. Most notably, Gurr’s work on civil wars (Gurr, Marshall, and Khosla 2001) has attempted to show the types of regime—on a scale ranging from democracy to totalitarian states—that make countries more or less likely to experience civil war. Gurr and his collaborators argue that states are less likely to experience turmoil if they are fully-fledged democracies or autocracies. However, states with political systems that lie in-between, or that are in transition between the two end poles, are more likely to undergo civil unrest. In the Indonesian context, other authors have highlighted, amongst other things, the weak legal system (Welsh 2003), natural resource endowments (Ross 2002), the post-New Order transition (Malley 2001), and variations in the nature and consequences of devolution of power to the regions (ICG 2003).

---

analyses, in contrast, use the individual as the unit of analysis, focusing on the incentives for individuals to join rebel groups and use them as vehicles for the pursuit of their interests (e.g., World Bank 2003).

<sup>10</sup> In many ways, this is similar to some of the instrumentalist approaches we identified above that seek to show the pursuit of material incentives in explaining ascriptive group formation and mobilization. However, Stewart seems to put less emphasis on the strategic role of individuals within the groups than on the inherent claim of individuals (structured in groups) to equal access to power and resources.

In a similar vein, Collier and Hoeffler's (2000, 2004) oft-cited work identifies the various economic, political, and demographic factors that explain and predict the onset, duration, and severity of civil wars. These and other studies<sup>11</sup> using large-N cross-national data can be useful in helping, at a very general level, to identify useful explanatory variables, but they suffer from a number of weaknesses. First, by virtue of using national-level data, they only show variations in aggregated levels of conflict between states, rather than intra-state variations. Second, they tend (although do not necessarily need to) measure conditions at one point (that is, statically) and hence fail to show why changes in levels of violence in a given place occur. Third, even when they can answer questions regarding which variables correlate with violence levels, there are difficulties in determining the direction of causality;<sup>12</sup> it is also difficult to understand why, and the processes through which, particular variables gain saliency.<sup>13</sup> These are key concerns when attempting to use data for policy prescription purposes in specific places facing specific problems and specific constraints.

#### 1.4 Legal Anthropology

Largely eschewing the search for general theories of conflict, anthropologists studying traditional or customary mechanisms of dispute resolution have focused instead on understanding how particular communities maintain order in the context of perennial human conflicts surrounding property (ownership, boundaries), common pool resources (water), leadership (selection criteria, scope and limits of authority), and family dynamics (inheritance procedures, domestic disputes, sexual relations).<sup>14</sup> In many respects these mechanisms are as varied as humanity itself, and yet if the general historical arrow points in the direction of greater codification of laws and increasing professionalization of their adjudication and enforcement, then it is also the case that the road itself is littered with overlapping and competing ontological understandings of what 'rules' are, which ones have jurisdiction over which areas under which circumstances, and what procedures constitute a fair and reasonable approach to upholding and enforcing them.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, even in putatively 'developed' countries, simultaneously navigating within and between different normative systems for governing behavior is a central individual and collective challenge (see Ellickson 1991); moreover, the very need for a legal profession testifies to the perennial ambiguities that reside within even the most codified system.

With respect to understanding local conflict, contributions from anthropologists of legal systems have been useful in a number of ways. First, they have drawn attention away from supposed 'causes' of conflict and onto how problems are managed. This has helped shift the focus from overly positivist and

---

<sup>11</sup> Other examples include the Correlates of War study at the University of Michigan and Pennsylvania State University (see Singer 1990), the Conflict Data Project at the University of Uppsala (see Wallensteen and Sollenburg 1998), and the Minorities at Risk project at the University of Maryland (e.g., Gurr 2000, Fox 2002). See also Gurr, Marshall, and Khosla (2001). The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute has a good list of sources; see <http://projects.sipri.se/conflictstudy/ConflictDataSets.html>

<sup>12</sup> A major issue in econometric conflict research is the problem of endogeneity; that is, disentangling factors that simultaneously influence both the dependent and independent variables from those that influence only one or the other. In conflict studies, this manifests itself in the common situation where initial conflicts, or their impacts, themselves become a "cause" of subsequent conflict, making it very difficult to identify the presence and relative importance of truly exogenous factors that initiated the conflict and/or continue to sustain it. Following particular cases of conflict over time, we argue, helps to clarify (though does not fully resolve) such issues.

<sup>13</sup> Conflicts are often ignited and sustained by single issues or events that are seemingly trivial (e.g., in one case we followed, a stray goat), and that as such could hardly be adequately accounted for in an aggregate statistical database. Moreover, given the almost infinite number of interaction terms that would need to be considered in an orthodox regression equation to tease out the efficacy of such issues, comparative case study approaches are often more appropriate. On this particular methodological point, see Ragin (1987).

<sup>14</sup> Moore (2004) presents a useful single-volume overview of the 'classic' readings in this field.

<sup>15</sup> For a useful discussion in the Indonesian context, see Bowen (2003).

deterministic views of violent conflict—that is, views that emphasize the presence of a given set of ‘structural’ factors, be they ethno-linguistic or religious diversity, the distribution of resources, geography, etc.—to the social strategies and institutional bases of conflict resolution. Second, they have provided a corrective to the overly state-centric views that have dominated much of the writing on conflict and conflict resolution, in particular that of many political scientists. Black (1976), for example, has made the point that large areas of life are governed by informally enforced social norms. He has sought to use cross-cultural comparative analysis to ascertain the key variables that dictate the likelihood that a given problem will fall under the jurisdiction of formal law, or, conversely, whether non-state dispute resolution mechanisms will be used. Others have shown the extent to which social mechanisms have regulated the ways in which disputes are resolved in pre-revolutionary New England (Auerbach 1985), amongst businesses in Wisconsin in the 1960s (Macauley 1963), and between farmers in present-day northern California (Ellickson 1991). If this is true in the West, it is likely to be even more so in the developing world, where the state tends to have more limited reach. Third, the legal anthropology literature has also been useful in advocating actor-centered ‘emic’<sup>16</sup> approaches that seek to illuminate how particular individuals or groups understand conflict and its resolution, with the methodological implication being that (ethnographic) fieldwork at the local level is necessary, first to understand the ‘problem’, and then to craft culturally sensitive, and hence workable, ‘solutions’.

Studies that explore the anthropological foundations of local dispute resolution procedures are characterized by their deep ethnographic immersion in a particular context. Ayittey (1991), for example, reviews a range of efforts (e.g., Carlston 1968, Glazier 1985) to document and explore the variety of ways in which different African tribal groups address everyday forms of conflict, especially those pertaining to land. He notes that such groups are usually well-placed to address *intra*-community disputes, and typically do a better job—even via informal mechanisms—of safe-guarding property rights than the state (pre or post colonialism), but that enduring difficulties most frequently occur in *inter*-community disputes, when different normative understandings encounter one another. Watson-Gegeo and White (1990) provide a fascinating overview of dispute resolution procedures in the Pacific island countries, some of which have been held up as more general models for ‘industrialized’ countries to emulate (see also the extensive literature reviewed in Merry 1992).

For all the richness and fascinating detail of such studies, however, they nonetheless have three primary weaknesses. First, in looking closely at one community, studies tend to give less attention to micro-macro links, and to how exogenous factors and broader processes of change affect local realities. Second, the case studies are rarely embedded in comparative frameworks. Third, they typically place more emphasis on ‘thick description’ (Geertz 1973) than on articulating possible applications to or implications for public policy.

In the sections that follow, we draw on various strands of these four literatures to present our own integrated analytical framework for understanding local level conflict trajectories. In general we tend to be most sympathetic to the arguments emanating from the perspectives of political sociology and legal anthropology, but in spelling out our framework we attempt neither a grand synthesis nor to force our evidence into the strictures of a single perspective.

## 2. Exploring Conflict Pathways: A Method

The summary of the literature above, albeit selective, has highlighted some of the weaknesses of much of the conflict research that has taken place to date: insights from theory have often not been thoroughly tested empirically; econometric approaches have helped in hypothesis development, but these hypotheses

---

<sup>16</sup> Avruch (1998) distinguishes between ‘emic’ (actor-centered) approaches and ‘etic’ (analyst-centered) approaches to understanding conflict.

have rarely been subjected to more in-depth qualitative study; measurements have often been made statically, precluding an understanding of the mechanisms and processes by which conflicts evolve; and much of the analysis has compared states, thus excluding the examination of intra-state variations.

For their part, qualitative case studies have tended to focus solely on high conflict areas, and to draw from a small empirical base (thereby rendering generalizations, and the articulation of any corresponding policy responses, problematic). Like their statistical counterparts, case study approaches have tended to concentrate on conflicts that have already reached a certain threshold of severity. By selecting on the dependent variable—that is, an incident of violent conflict—and lacking a plausible counterfactual—that is, an informed sense of what might have happened had a different set of mediating factors prevailed (or not)—they effectively render themselves silent on the dynamics by which different conflicts travel down pathways towards resolution, stalemate, or escalation. By concentrating on major episodes of violence, they overlook possible connections between smaller scale (everyday) forms of violence and large incidents, or the capacity to see the latter as (at least in part) a manifestation of, and in some cases a precursor to, the former. Many ethnographic studies are also heavily descriptive in nature, providing detailed accounts of specific events and actors, but doing so in ways that fail to connect to a specific analytic framework, or that might provide a basis for informed policy responses.

As such, while scholarly work from each of the four theoretical strands has contributed important insights to our understanding of conflict's causes, nature, and impacts, key questions remain. They remain in part because different theoretical frameworks have been inadequately integrated, and because methodological strategies have often been insufficiently developed to answer the questions both general theories and previous research have posed. How and why, for example, do some small conflicts escalate into large-scale violence, while others stagnate or get solved? To what extent, and in what ways, does societal structure (the political, economic, and institutional contexts in which conflicts arise and play out) explain conflict's incidence, nature, and determine its outcome? How do these contexts interact with particular issues, and the role of particular actors, in given places? How does the development process—by virtue of transforming economic, social, and political relations—create and interact with existing tensions, and how does this affect the ways in which these tensions can (or might) be managed?

Our study seeks to contribute to a greater understanding of these issues, with the explicit aim of helping to contribute toward the crafting of policy and programmatic responses to violent conflict in Indonesia (and, hopefully, elsewhere). The research has sought to integrate qualitative and quantitative tools,<sup>17</sup> and has involved over six months of qualitative fieldwork in forty-one villages by a team of twelve trained researchers (and supervisors), the fielding of a key informant survey, the use of national household and key informant survey data, and the creation of datasets of secondary (statistical and newspaper) data.<sup>18</sup>

At the heart of our research strategy was a focus on variation (in contexts and in conflict outcomes), which necessitated the use of a carefully structured sampling framework. Two very different provinces were chosen for the research (East Java and East Nusa Tenggara<sup>19</sup>) based on consultation at the national and provincial level.<sup>20</sup> Within each province, two districts were selected, one with a 'high capacity' to

<sup>17</sup> On the comparative advantages of qualitative and quantitative methods in development research, see Kanbur (2002) and Rao and Woolcock (2003).

<sup>18</sup> For a full description of the methodology used in this study, see Barron, Diprose, Madden, Smith, and Woolcock (2004).

<sup>19</sup> Throughout the paper, this province is referred to by its common Indonesian title, NTT, or Nusa Tenggara Timur. Both district research sites in NTT were on the island of Flores; as such, in some cases we refer to the island rather than the province.

<sup>20</sup> The provinces were chosen to be as different as possible; the rationale was that, as we are looking for common patterns, our findings would be strengthened if they held up in two different settings. Conversely, variation in conflict types and outcomes between the two provinces may give us insights into provincial level factors that affect

manage conflict, the other with ‘low capacity’. Working in both ‘high’ and ‘low’ capacity districts in each province allowed us to examine more closely the district-level factors that may affect the trajectories local conflicts take.<sup>21</sup> In each of the four districts, four ‘matched’ sub-districts were chosen using a combination of quantitative propensity score matching techniques<sup>22</sup> verified by qualitative discussions with local field staff.<sup>23</sup> Specific villages to work in (41) and cases of conflict to follow (72) were then selected using a range of criteria which aimed to elicit insights on: (a) local-level mechanisms for peace and/or conflict that were as independent of the broader institutional environment as possible; and (b) the different local-level institutional factors that helped explain differences in the pathways conflicts took and their outcomes.<sup>24</sup> As such, conflict cases were selected from a range of areas, and with wide variation in the sample of the issues being contested, the outcomes, and associated impacts. Conflicts studied included—but were not limited to—those centered on: land use and boundaries (private, public and communal); other natural, common pool, and man-made resources; political and administrative disputes; gang fighting; attacks on thieves and witch doctors; domestic violence; and disputes related to development projects and corruption.

Using a modified version of the process tracing method (Bennett and George 1997, Varshney 2002), researchers traced the chronologies of these conflict cases with the aim of trying to establish why conflicts took particular trajectories, and to examine how different actors—villagers, facilitators, local leaders—together negotiated (or failed to negotiate) different types of conflicts in different settings. By doing this, we were better able to identify the factors that transform underlying social tensions into different outcomes (violence, stagnation, or peace). Comparative analysis of these cases—integrating qualitative and quantitative data (demographic, economic, historical, political) on the contexts in which they took

---

conflict incidence. Variance was determined based on population size and density, ethnic and religious homogeneity (and dominant ethnic/religious group), and level of provincial development.

<sup>21</sup> In many ways, this is similar to the approach Varshney (2002) takes in India. However, we extend his principle of matching sites with similar structures but different conflict outcomes down to both lower geographic units (the sub-district and the village) and, indeed, to actual cases of specific conflict incident (see below). We also used a larger range of variables to match our research sites (Varshney concentrates only on population size and religious mix).

The selected district sites were: Pamekasan (low capacity, East Java), Ponorogo (high capacity, East Java), Manggarai (low capacity, NTT), and Sikka (high capacity, NTT). Local researchers were recruited in each district and given extensive training to ensure that they deployed a high quality and uniform research protocol.

<sup>22</sup> The propensity score is a statistical measure designed to calculate the probability of a given household or village being selected for inclusion in a program; on this, see Rosenbaum and Rubin (1985), or for an introduction, Baker (2000).

<sup>23</sup> In addition to attempting to provide a better understanding of the trajectories of local level conflicts, a second aim of the study was to evaluate the impact of the World Bank’s *Kecamatan* Development Project (KDP, the largest social development project in Southeast Asia) on those trajectories and local conflict management capacity. While this paper does not examine the linkages (conceptual and empirical) between the project and conflict (management), in forthcoming work we present the empirical results of a large-scale assessment of KDP’s impact on conflict. For our present purposes, it is enough to state that in each of the four sub-districts we selected a ‘control’ (non-KDP) sub-district and a statistically identical ‘treatment’ (KDP present) sub-district, plus two additional ‘treatment’ sub-districts to further explore variation.

<sup>24</sup> Since our primary unit of analysis was the local level, most of our fieldwork took place in villages. Such an approach allowed us to examine variations in violence levels within not just Indonesia, but the country’s regions. Despite the impact of common external or structural factors caused by economic and political transition (and, in particular, the economic crisis, democratization and decentralization of the post-Soeharto era), large variations exist in the level and impacts of violence. This suggested the presence of some endogenous causes of violence, or at least uneven impacts of exogenous forces. Selecting disputes at the local level to follow helped us explore why, despite similar structural or transitional features, some villages experienced violence while others did not, and the factors that are most salient for explaining this variance. For fuller details on the selection criteria, see Barron, Diprose, Madden, Smith, and Woolcock (2004, pp. 39-43).

place—allowed us to discover both commonalities and difference in patterns of escalation, resolution, etc., which in turn helped to explain similar/alternate outcomes.<sup>25</sup>

### 3. Disputes, Jurisdictions, and Conflict Trajectories

By comparing conflicts that erupted in similar socio-economic environments, we were able to examine which intervening variables had an impact on the nature of the conflict, and the conflict pathway it took. Three particular analytical realms emerged as especially important for understanding how and why an initial dispute ended up taking the particular trajectory it did. The first realm centers on various elements of the ‘rules of the game’: the laws and norms that shape the immediate context in which disputants, their representatives, or external mediators engage one another. The second realm focuses on the norms and politics pertaining to inter-group (“us-them”) relations—or what we call the ‘dynamics of difference’—and the ways and means by which differences are constructed, and are able to be mobilized, re-imagined, and exploited for strategic advantage. The third realm addresses the actions of mediators, leaders or officials in conflict resolution, and the extent to which they possess the necessary legitimacy, willingness and capacity to both make and enforce decisions (we call this realm the ‘efficacy of intermediaries’).

The rules of the game, the dynamics of difference, and the efficacy of intermediaries conjointly turned out to be the essential components in understanding the trajectory that a given episode of conflict took, the likelihood that it would escalate and/or turn violent, and whether or not it was resolved. This constitutes a useful approach to looking at conflict, providing a framework for analyzing conflict pathways that is both grounded in theory *and* based on an extensive empirical (qualitative and quantitative, cross-section and panel) base. Perhaps most importantly, it also provides a concrete platform from which to identify a range of possible entry points for crafting more effective local level conflict resolution mechanisms.

To understand how and under what conditions these contextual factors become salient, however, it is first necessary to map out a finite range of pathways down which a given initial dispute can go, and a finite range of possible outcomes that can be reached. When a dispute occurs, three logically possible outcomes can be attained—resolution, stalemate, and escalation. Analytically, these outcomes will either be reached by the disputants themselves and their immediate representatives (i.e., first and second parties), or via the intervention of a person, or group of persons, who are external and, in principle, neutral to the conflict (i.e., third parties). How can these different elements be combined into a single coherent framework?

An analysis of our case studies suggests the schema outlined in Figure 1 (below). A local level conflict breaks out (for example, a dispute over the precise location of a property boundary). In most instances, the immediate parties to the conflict will first try to negotiate a solution (path 1), though in others it will be relatively clear from the outset (e.g., in the case of a murder) that a third party has immediate jurisdiction (path 2).<sup>26</sup> In most instances (because conflict is normal but violence is not), the parties to the dispute reach a resolution (path 1-3), or do so via the intervention of a third party (path 2-12).<sup>27</sup>

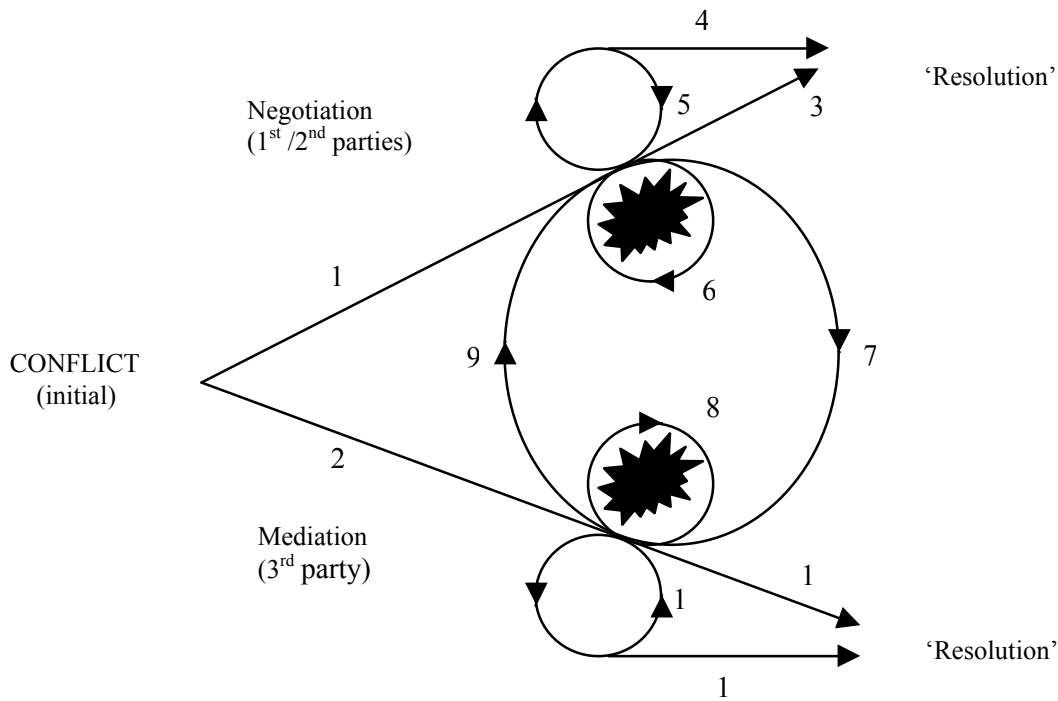
<sup>25</sup> In all, over 800 individual interviews, 100 focus group discussions, and numerous informal interviews were conducted.

<sup>26</sup> As we shall discuss below, one factor that exacerbates conflict in developing countries is in fact the absence of a clear jurisdiction for addressing particular conflicts, a feature we call low problem-jurisdiction compatibility.

<sup>27</sup> There is much debate in the literature about what exactly is meant by ‘resolution’. As Nader (1990), among others, has pointed out, short-term and long-term resolution may be very different things. A conflict may initially be seen as resolved when proximate causes are addressed, because cultural norms stress the importance of ‘harmony’, or because solutions are imposed in an autocratic manner. However, if nothing is done about the fundamental underlying causes, the conflict may well re-ignite at a future point. We acknowledge that, depending on the type and result of the intervention, the end points in our model may signify only a temporary dispute-specific resolution. In that case, even when conflicts have reached this end equilibrium, another spark may again trigger a new conflict

Unfortunately, of course, these happy outcomes are not always attained. If the immediate disputants fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, their next move is usually to either recruit additional people to their cause (neighbors, family members, other sympathetic individuals, mercenaries) and/or to turn to a local leader or other designated individual (e.g., a noted ‘wise person’ in the community).<sup>28</sup> Sometimes local leaders will help the disputants reach a resolution (path 1-4); other times, for whatever reason, they will fail (path 1-5). If the dispute is seen as one that must be resolved within the community, and yet if a resolution is not or cannot be reached, a stalemate may result in which the problem remains in perpetual limbo, locked into a loop (path 5) from which it may struggle to emerge (latent conflict) or one which escalates into violence (loop 6) as cycles of vengeance and revenge take hold. At some point, local leaders, the disputants themselves, or formal authorities may seek to break the stalemate or stem the violence through the intervention of a third party (path 7).

**Figure 1: Local Level Conflict Pathways**



or re-ignite an existing one. Indeed, given the cyclical nature of conflict, and the difficulty of providing true resolution that satisfies all disputing parties, this may not be an uncommon outcome. As such, our framework should not be seen to encompass all aspects of every conflict’s lifecycle, but rather constituent elements of or episodes within a given conflict. For a justification of breaking larger events down into smaller ‘episodes’ for analysis, see McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001).

<sup>28</sup> We do not categorize such people as ‘third parties’ because, as prominent members of the community, they are not neutral, and usually do not claim to be. Moreover, although some selected conflicts (e.g., domestic disputes) are seen to be the exclusive purview of the immediate disputants (often creating, in the process, an additional layer of potential injustice, in this case for women), in most instances there is little ‘legal’ distinction (in the minds of villagers) between inter-individual and intra-community disputes. Thus, local leaders are often, analytically speaking, indistinguishable from the initial first and second parties. As we shall see, how the boundaries defining “the community” are reconfigured as a given conflict evolves is crucial.

The involvement of third parties may be successful (paths 2-12 or 1-7-12), or it may not. Third parties, having entered into initial negotiations, may decide that the problem is beyond their capacity, interest, or mandate, and may return the case to the community (path 9) or give it to a different third party. From here another stalemate may result (loop 7-9), in which both the community and any designated third party exchange responsibility for (but never actually reach) a resolution. This loop was apparent in many of the cases of community conflict involving incidents of sexual abuse that were studied. Here, power imbalances between the ‘disputing parties’ prevented any negotiated settlement. However, when a third party was called upon—often by the woman’s family—they would frequently refuse to address the problem, arguing that such matters should be kept in the family and resolved there. Only in one case (in Sikka, Flores) did a legitimate and respected third party intervene and mediate and then enforce a resolution; in all other cases a stalemate was reached, but no resolution. This form of stalemate was also common to land conflicts in the regions studied where traditional communal land ownership patterns are still strong. In these cases, the incompatibility of the problem of land ownership conflicts, with the jurisdiction of state land titling authorities, meant no third party ever had clear jurisdiction or legitimacy (in the eyes of the community at least) over mediating a land conflict.<sup>29</sup> Thus the stalemate situation (loop 7-9) was perpetuated as state authorities consistently failed to mediate adequate solutions.

Alternatively, a series of new third parties may be called upon, and one of them may find a resolution (path 10) or they may not. If it is clear that a particular third party is required to address a particular problem (e.g., a court of law to decide on a murder case), a resolution may not be reached because of inadequacies on the part of that third party (e.g., a long backlog of cases in the judicial system that leaves tensions to simmer for months, even years), leading to a stalemate (loop 11). In the worst case scenario, the third party itself becomes part of the problem (e.g., delivering a verdict that is patently unfair, as when judges are bought off by vested commercial or political interests, not uncommon among the cases followed), leading to a rapid escalation of conflict and then violence (loop 8), seen most graphically in our cases of attacks on police stations and the burning down of a court house.<sup>30</sup> By now, however, the initial conflict has evolved into a quantitatively and qualitatively different one altogether, most likely requiring a different set of potential resolution mechanisms, not least because it has reached a scale of public visibility and impact that leads it to be re-framed in more conventional (“ethnic”, “religious”) terms. It is at this point, we argue, that most of the earlier academic and policy research on conflict enters the scene. If we are to better understand how to prevent the occurrence of larger-scale conflict, understanding how such conflicts actually began and evolved is surely crucial.

The schema outlined above sets out the analytically finite range of actors, stages, and outcomes associated with a given initial dispute, though it should be clear that the actual pathway taken by any particular conflict as it evolves will most likely entail a complex sequence of these pathways (e.g., path 1-7-11-9-4, and so on). Our initial purpose here has been to build a framework within which to map, and put a boundary around, these numerous possibilities. The next step, of course, for key theoretical, empirical, and policy reasons, is to identify the conditions under which a conflict heads down one pathway rather than another. In the sections that follow, we seek to identify these conditions, drawing on the details of the local conflict case study material.

---

<sup>29</sup> John Prior (2003, 2004) highlights the grey legal areas between national law formulated in Jakarta and indigenous customary law related to land use and management of ancestral lands. Neither body of law recognizes the other, causing intractable land conflicts in the region.

<sup>30</sup> When villagers believe that they cannot access the formal legal system and receive a timely and fair hearing, they may be forced to take the law into their own hands. On the forms and prevalence of vigilantism in Indonesia, see Colombijn (2002) and Welsh (2003).

#### 4. 'Rules of the Game'

Rule systems within a society, or a smaller community, govern people's behavior in response to events, actions or choices. Rules, whether manifested as formal laws or informal norms, are the inherently guiding principles for action, and as Douglass North (1990, p. 3) has noted, shape human interactions through structuring incentives in human exchange. Understanding the rules that exist within a given society is vital if we want to understand the ways in which social, political, and economic relations are structured, and hence the ways in which people and communities interact.

Shared and understood rule systems are, we argue, vital for the effective management of conflict. Conflicts are less likely to escalate and turn violent when people have a collective sense of what behavior is acceptable—and what is not—and/or of how a particular dispute should be decided (and by whom). In contrast, when the rule system that is applicable to govern a particular action or behavior is hazy or disputed, people may be more likely to engage in provocative, and ultimately conflictual, behavior, whether because (a) they do not realize their actions clash with the norms/expectations of another party, or (b) they understand that another set of rules to their own may apply, but they do not accept their legitimacy, or (c) because they want to take advantage of confusion over which set of rules applies and, correspondingly, different interpretations of what a 'just' outcome would be. In the absence of clear and coherent rules, or accepted processes to choose between competing rules systems, conflicts can easily arise and escalate. In addition, rules (even when shared and understood) must also be enforced.

There are certain inherent problems with rule systems in transitional and multicultural societies as many levels and forms of incompatibilities can, and do, arise. As was clear in our research sites, different individuals or groups may have different traditional rules systems, that is, different laws and norms that dictate acceptable behavior and practice. In developing countries, in the absence of a pervasive formal rule of law, these customary rules may clash with each other, and, indeed, with formal state legislation. The process of development—from traditional to modern states—is also likely to bring different rule systems into close proximity with each other. Increased population movement, a result not only of globalization but of changing patterns of labor migration within countries, makes local populations more heterogeneous and, in doing so, increases the likelihood of different rule systems (each saying different things, and legitimizing different behaviors) coexisting in geographic spaces.<sup>31</sup> In developing countries, different state-instituted laws may also contradict each other, often because legislation at different jurisdictional levels says different things.<sup>32</sup> In the resulting haze, boundaries over acceptable behavior, and indeed what constitutes due process, may be unclear. In such environments, small sparks can lead quickly to big fires.

---

<sup>31</sup> Indonesia's promotion of transmigration is a good example of this. This scheme (initiated by the Dutch) was a key element of development policy during the Soeharto period, and was supported by the major development banks, with the World Bank and Asian Development Bank providing \$1.4 billion in support (Szczepanski 2002, p. 29). The program attempted to both build national identity (as opposed to people's localized geographic and ethnic identities) and spur economic growth through the better utilization of land in relatively sparsely populated provinces. Increased ethnic diversity as a result, compounded by inequitable allocation of resources between indigenous and incoming groups, with weak inter-ethnic mediating institutions, has helped spur ethnic tensions (Barron and Madden 2004, Smith 2004).

<sup>32</sup> In particular, states with high levels of decentralization, and with legislation-making ability devolved to numerous tiers of government, may experience contradictions between rules formulated and implemented at different administrative levels. In Indonesia, rapid decentralization in 2001 has resulted in a regional share of government spending of thirty percent, estimated to increase to over forty percent. Substantial policy making and administrative responsibility has also been devolved to local politicians and bureaucrats, with 2.8 million of 3.9 million civil servants being classified as regional (Hofman and Kaiser 2002).

Problems can also arise from the ways in which rule systems are enforced. Law enforcement agencies (e.g., the police, the courts, the penal system) may have insufficient capacity or incentives to enforce formal rule systems. In some cases, informal enforcement mechanisms—where a rule or decision is applied by a non-state actor or institution—may be operative, but these too can be ineffective, for similar reasons. Furthermore, where there are different enforcement agencies for informal and formal rule systems, even where both agencies are potentially effective at enforcing their respective rule systems, the effects of this enforcement may work in two different directions, canceling out the intention, and effectiveness, of the original enforcement.<sup>33</sup>

Figure 2 (below) illustrates four key variables that are at play when rule systems are being applied, and can be used to help illustrate why the application of rule systems can fail, and, consequently, why in some contexts conflicts are more or less likely. The different variables—the compatibility of rules, the presence of a coherent meta-rule, the degree of enforcement by state actors/institutions, and the degree of enforcement by non-state actors—will be discussed in turn.

**Figure 2: Characteristics of Rule Systems**

		Compatibility of Rules			
		<i>Low</i>		<i>High</i>	
		Coherent Meta-Rules		Coherent Meta-Rules	
		<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>
Enforcement	Low Formal Low Informal				
	Low Formal High Informal				
	High Formal Low Informal				
	High Formal High Informal				

#### 4.1 Compatibility of Rules

By compatibility of rules we mean the degree of difference or similarity between alternative rule systems, laws and norms. There are three primary sources of incompatibility of rule systems. The first is where for one issue, more than one set of rules is deemed applicable by disputants. Incompatibility may be between formal and informal rules, different sets of informal rules, or different, contradictory, sets of formal rules. Second, incompatibility may arise from different interpretations of the same rule, by different actors. Third, incompatibility can arise from differences between the spirit and the letter of the rule when it is applied.

##### *(a) Different rules, same issue*

Conflict is more likely where there is more than one rule that regulates a particular type of behavior or action, and where these rules say different things. There can be incompatibility between formal and

<sup>33</sup> Of course, formal actors may enforce informal rules, and vice versa. In such cases, confusion may be even greater. However, in an ideal scenario, constructive enforcement of complementary informal and formal rules would lessen confusion.

informal rules, two sets of informal rules, or two sets of formal rules. Each is worth at least brief consideration.

Within a community, or society, informal and formal rule systems coexist. For example, norms dictating the speed one can drive at on a highway in the United States may, for example, be very different to the legal speed limit.<sup>34</sup> Informal rules, the content of which is often very different to that of state law, govern a far wider range of activities in much of the developing world than in developed countries with more extensive and formalized state legal systems. In our research sites, especially in the rural areas, informal rules that pre-date the formation of the modern state still govern large elements of life. The relative youth of Indonesia as a post-colonial nation, and the correspondingly short time for national legislation to have developed into everyday and effective norms in remote and still traditional areas, has meant that traditional laws and customs continue to frame everyday life. In some areas, for example in Central Sulawesi, traditional law has informed the practice of local government, frequently putting it at odds with national state legislation (Li 2004). In two of our research sites in eastern Indonesia, contradictory traditional and state rules applied to many of the same issues. Whereas in developed states the transforming processes of modernity have fundamentally reshaped old ways and codes of living into forms that were legible to, and thus easily managed by, the state, in developing countries such as Indonesia these processes have often not taken place to the same extent.<sup>35</sup> A relative lack of capacity in the legal sector—and especially those realms of state activity that have traditionally bought loyalty, such as service provision—combined with low levels of education and a long history of suppressing political accountability, has restricted the establishment of a truly modern state.

The result is the awkward co-existence of formal and informal rules in certain remote areas. A good example of this in our more rural and remote research sites in Indonesia was the existence of customary rule systems related to the theft of agricultural goods. Traditional sanctions for theft of livestock, for example, may result in fines being paid to the community as a whole. Theft is a crime that is at the same time covered by the formal rule system, applied by the state through laws that prescribe the arrest of the thief and, in some cases, sanction imprisonment depending on the seriousness of the crime.<sup>36</sup>

A second source of incompatibility was identified where two informal rules regarding the same issue say different things. Within a community or society different groups exist, each with a different rule system that applies to their group.<sup>37</sup> This was particularly prevalent in our research sites with high levels of local ethnic diversity, even within a relatively small geographical area and collection of villages. These different systems may work well for guiding interaction and mediating disputes between members of the same group. However, whenever the disputants are from different groups (in Flores, different kinship or ethnic groups; in East Java, different family groups and different prescriptive identity groups) uncertainty

---

<sup>34</sup> A number of scholars from the law and society school (e.g., Ellickson 1991) have emphasized the extent to which formal rules play little role in regulating behavior in large realms of life, in the West and elsewhere (see Section 1.4).

<sup>35</sup> Scott (1998) describes the various motivations behind, and processes through which, the state attempts to make society “legible”. These processes include the mapping and titling of land, the creation of permanent last names, the standardization of weights and measures, the design of cities, and—most relevant to our purposes here—the standardization of language and legal discourse and institutions. The process of industrialization in the UK, and much of Europe, is another good example: the formation of early welfare states, with the provision of public education, health care and insurance, helped to standardize production practices and the rules that govern them—see, among others, Esping-Anderson (1990) and Lindert (2004). Landes (1999) applies some of these ideas to his global review of the sources and historical patterns of development.

<sup>36</sup> Bowen (2003) outlines how, and why, informal *adat* law has persisted in Indonesia from the pre-colonial period to the present day. See Prior (2003) for an analysis of incompatibilities between formal positive law and informal *adat* rules regarding land ownership and use in Manggarai, Flores.

<sup>37</sup> We explore in more detail different bases for group formation in Section Five (below).

over the applicable rule system can be manifested in either: (a) differences between the rule systems over the acceptability of an action, where an action is deemed socially acceptable under one rule system, but not under the other set of informal norms;<sup>38</sup> (b) differences in opinion about the process or mechanism that should be used to decide a dispute; or (c) differences between the rule systems about the appropriate outcome of a dispute.

A good example is a dispute we followed in Sikka, Flores, concerning the payment of the *belis* (dowry), a process governed by traditional (*adat*) customary law. In Sikka, as in much of eastern Indonesia, the payment of a ‘bride price’ is an important tradition that binds the families of the couple to be married. The *belis* involves a long multi-staged process of reciprocal gift giving, starting with non-expensive presents such as betel nut, and culminating in the exchange of large sums of money, horses, gold, and ivory. The level of *belis* is usually set so high that the families will be eternally indebted to each other, thus cementing their relationship. When the man and woman to be married are from the same village or areas (and hence are subject to the same *adat* system) this process normally works well, with people having clear and shared understandings of both the level of *belis* payable, and the process that should be followed. In a case we followed, however, the prospective bride and groom were from different villages, each of which used a different set of *adat* rules for the bride price. The problem emerged when the man left for Java to pursue work, leaving his fiancée behind. With no sign of him returning, the woman’s family decided to cancel the wedding (and hence the *belis* process). However, the two families ascribed to different *adat* rule systems for how the wedding should be abandoned when the *belis* process was already underway. The result was an argument about who was responsible for paying back which parts of the *belis*, which soon evolved into a larger dispute between the two villages.

Incoherence of different formal rules is a third source of incompatibility. This occurs where there are multiple rules on the books which convey different messages, or which legitimize different actions. In the Indonesian context, different pieces of legislation at varying levels of government convey contradictory message regarding the rights of certain ethnic groups to residency in different regions. While the constitution states that all Indonesian citizens have the right to residency anywhere in Indonesia, regional legislation in some provinces determines the right to residency according to certain local conditions, and restricts residency rights for certain ethnic groups.<sup>39</sup> Depending on who holds the balance of power, different formal rules will be applied (even though they cover the same issue) to meet different group interests.

*(b) Same rule, different interpretations*

Even where rules are in principle compatible—i.e., where the applicable rule is agreed upon—incompatibility can arise from different interpretations of the same rule. This may be true within or between groups. Furthermore, where rules are subject to different interpretations and/or where a certain (mis)interpretation is defensible, leaders can easily manipulate the rules for their own purposes, thus having an impact on how the rules are applied.

---

<sup>38</sup> Indeed, rule systems (as sets of norms) can be viewed as embodying, and framing, different cultures. As Lederach (1995, p. 8) writes, summarizing social constructivist conceptions of conflict, “social conflict emerges and develops on the basis of the meaning and interpretation people involved attach to actions and events... From this starting point, conflict is connected to meaning, meaning to knowledge, and knowledge is rooted in culture.”

<sup>39</sup> See Smith (2004) on how this system of contradictory legislation affects displaced communities from Central Kalimantan province, a situation mirrored in other Indonesian post-conflict areas.

An example of this came up in a land conflict case in one of our research sites in Manggarai, western Flores.<sup>40</sup> Two different hamlets within the same village understood the general customary rule about the giving of harvest gifts to the traditional land guardian from the two communities farming the land. Though a different clan group populated each hamlet, they had close kinship ties and their customary laws were equivalent. The gift signified respect to the land guardian and recognition that the hamlet communities did not own the land, but rather were only using it temporarily. One hamlet had fallen out of the habit of invoking the rule, which was very old, and the farmers had tired of handing over precious commodities every year to the old land guardian from the other clan group. Having worked the land for decades, they had begun to see the fruits of the land as their own to keep or sell as they saw fit. The traditional land guardian, on the other hand, resented not receiving his traditional gift, and saw it as a reflection of his loss of power in the other hamlet. Thus he incited the hamlet community within which he lived, who were also in desperate need of more land and resources, to reclaim the land farmed by the other hamlet. While both hamlets understood the general rule of giving harvest gifts as a recognition of land ownership, they had decided to interpret and apply it differently, in large part because of their interests: the one hamlet reclaimed land they needed using the lack of a harvest gift as the reason to do so; the other hamlet rejected the harvest gift practice as a sign that they felt they now owned the land, having farmed it for decades.<sup>41</sup>

*(c) The letter vs. the spirit of a rule*

An extension of incompatibility of rules through different interpretations is where the letter and spirit of the rule prescribe, or legitimize, different courses of action. A rule may exist for the purpose of bringing about a goal (the “spirit” of the rule), but the goal itself may not be written explicitly into the rule, but must be understood implicitly.<sup>42</sup> The rule itself may not refer to the goal, only to the act that must take place (the “letter” of the rule). In such cases, the spirit and the letter of the rule can be said to constitute phenomenologically different rules. Incoherence between the two can be a source of incompatibility and, we argue, conflict.

A good example of the distinction between a rule’s letter and spirit is the role of sanctions within traditional communities, as was evident in our research sites in Flores. A sanction may be applied to someone who has committed a wrongful act, such as stealing, which involves the wrongdoer providing goods, such as chickens and alcohol, to the rest of the community. The spirit of this rule is to restore harmony to the community and rebuild peaceful relations between the wrongdoer and the victim. The letter of the rule, however, only mentions what must actually take place. Similarly, within the development project our study was assessing, the *Kecamatan* Development Project (KDP) in Indonesia,<sup>43</sup> a quota for projects by women’s groups forms part of the formal conditions that must be met in order for a community group to access money for other projects. The spirit of this rule is designed to enhance women’s socio-economic position where they are otherwise marginalized. However, the letter of the rule refers only to the need for a project from a women’s group to exist before funds may be dispersed.

---

<sup>40</sup> Flores forms part of Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT) province in Eastern Indonesia, one of our two provincial research sites.

<sup>41</sup> This case also highlights the delicate interplay between cultural and economic motivations behind a conflict, and the ways in which difference between groups is exaggerated through conflict. Each clan group asserted the distinctness of their identity in opposition to the other group during the conflict, but these differences waned in importance to each group following resolution of the conflict. See Section Five for further discussion.

<sup>42</sup> For further discussion of the importance of implicit understanding of rules, especially in the context of informal rules, see Section Six which discusses forms of understanding intermediaries must possess to successfully address conflict.

<sup>43</sup> See footnote 22.

In both scenarios above, the spirit and the letter of the rule may be manipulated or misinterpreted. A traditional leader who wants a feast may impose a sanction for that reason alone, not to restore harmonious relations in the community. The offender may fulfill the letter of the law (i.e., by paying the necessary fine in kind) while not adhering to the spirit of reconciliation that the act is meant to symbolize. In either situation, there may well be an incompatibility between the views of different elements of the community as to the extent to which the rule is being applied. This is but another form of different norms (in this case the norm of what the prescribed rule actually means, and what it takes to satisfy it) rubbing up against each other. Similarly, a village head in one research site had forced a proposal from a women's group in order to access other funds, without ensuring that their project actually benefited the targeted population group.<sup>44</sup> Thus differences between the letter and the spirit of the rule can be sources of incompatibility and tensions within the rules systems in which they are applied.<sup>45</sup>

#### 4.2 Coherence of Meta-Rules

Incompatibility of rules can, indeed, be a source of conflict. Where different cultural norms existed between groups (that is, where there was an incompatibility of informal rule systems), inter-community conflict was more likely. Where differences in informal and formal rules exist, community-state conflict is possible (if communities disagree with formal state processes or decisions). Where formal rule systems contradict each other, there is room for manipulation of procedures and outcomes.

However, incompatibility of rule systems does not necessarily and inevitably spell trouble. In many cases different (even contradictory) rule systems can exist side by side. If an overarching rule or process exists for choosing and mediating between competing rules systems, incompatibility of rules is much less likely to lead to conflict. We call such mechanisms meta-rules. Meta-rules are agreements to principles about what to do where there is ambiguity or incompatibility amongst rules; they may be rule systems in themselves, or they may be authorities (individual or institutional) to which legitimacy is commonly ascribed from different groups and actors, either in general, or in specific incidences of conflict. In our 'rules of the game' model, coherent meta-rules play an important role where an incompatibility of rules has emerged. A coherent meta-rule—that is, where there is shared agreement on the rule system or rule that should apply when there are alternate rule systems that clash with each other—can (potentially) override erstwhile incompatibilities between rule systems.<sup>46</sup>

International law is perhaps the classic example of a meta-rule. The United Nations Charter,<sup>47</sup> for example, to which all member states of the UN are bound by international law and from which the Security Council takes its authority, is generally interpreted as the meta-rule to all other sets of rules regarding interaction between states.<sup>48</sup> Of course, the validity of this meta-rule is under constant debate

---

<sup>44</sup> This scenario is not always a bad one in the sense that even if the village head had not understood the spirit of the rule, if he applied the rule and a women's group had been funded there may still be benefits for those women concerned in the long run.

<sup>45</sup> Reasons for there being a gap between the letter and the spirit of the law in our cases included: (a) where the relevant law is badly drafted and unclear; (b) where the rule is a norm rather than codified law and hence more open to multiple interpretations; (c) where a law tries to patch over persistent differences in cultural norms, finding room for expression within ambiguous formal laws, etc.

<sup>46</sup> See also Sunstein and Ullmann-Margalit's (1999) discussion of "second-order decisions"; that is, the rules that individuals devise and deploy to make their way through the complex maze of organizational life.

<sup>47</sup> United Nations Charter (entered into force 24 October 1945), published in Martin and Rangaswamy (1994).

<sup>48</sup> In Article 1 (arguably the meta-rule of all meta-rules, as it comes first in the United Nations Charter and explains the application and interpretation of all other articles), the Charter states that one of the purposes of the United Nations is to maintain international peace and security through collective measures to prevent or remove threats to the peace. This rule, under conditions where international security is deemed under threat, is seen to trump other

from states wishing to resist international meddling in their own affairs, but it nevertheless exists as a guiding principle of relationships between sovereign states.

The idea of meta-rules is not only applicable to the world of international relations. Agreed processes to choose and mediate between competing laws and norms are just as vital in managing the relations of individuals and groups as they are for sovereign entities. The importance of having appropriate and accepted meta-rules at the local level was evident when comparing two of the districts on the island of Flores, eastern Indonesia, where we conducted research. Both districts had, to some degree, ethnic diversity. In Sikka, population movements over the centuries had resulted in local Sikkinese, Buginese (from Sulawesi) and Endenese (from a neighboring district) living side by side. In Manggarai, where ethnic difference is constructed at the extended family level, villages contain numerous numbers of different *suku* (kinship-ethnic groups). Perhaps not surprisingly, given the level of development in Flores and the remoteness of many villages from urban areas and modern communications,<sup>49</sup> traditional (*adat*) law and customs still play a large role in governing village life in both areas. In areas ranging from the amount and type of bride price (*belis*) payable upon engagement, to the appropriate treatment meted out to someone who has stolen a chicken, local rules are deemed applicable. What is more, in both districts different ethnic groups have maintained very different rules on these matters. Yet, in Sikka, incompatibilities between the rules of different groups rarely cause problems, whereas in Manggarai small disagreements often escalate to dangerous levels.

Why is this so? In many ways the underlying structures in the two districts are similar. In both, there is ethnic diversity; both experience relatively similar levels of poverty. Yet in Sikka, there are, to a greater extent, sets of meta-rules for choosing and mediating between the norms and traditions of different groups. In Sikka, when a specific conflict emerges, people choose between different informal rule systems and the formal rule system in deciding where (and how) they will try to solve the problem. For example, in all cases of agricultural theft in Sikka, villagers use the *adat* system to figure out the correct punishment for the thief. Even though a thief may have come from another village, where another set of traditional rules applies, with different sanctions and punishments applicable to an incident of theft, villagers understood exactly which rule system should apply. There is shared agreement between villagers that the rules of the place where the thief is caught, rather than where (s)he is from, are applicable. In other words, they have a shared meta-rule about what to do when their individual village rule systems say different things.

A similar case in Manggarai, in contrast, provoked a very different outcome. When a thief stole a chicken in one village, there were arguments between villages about how he should be treated. This escalated into an inter-village dispute, drawing added heat from perceptions about past actions. The result was a large-scale conflict between the different villages, triggered by a relatively small act of theft. The conflict escalated rapidly because it was not clear which rule system should apply and when, and the different parties to the conflict did not know how to choose between them. In this case, there was no shared meta-rule about how to choose between different rules about the same issue. The absence of a meta-rule meant that villagers could not resolve the problem of theft without it escalating into a much larger problem.<sup>50</sup>

---

international laws, such as the right of states to control their own domestic affairs (which is outlined in Article 2 of the UN Charter).

<sup>49</sup> Flores is part of Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT), Indonesia's poorest province with a GDP per capita (in 2002) of rupiah 2,201,100, approximately \$260 (see the Indonesian government's Bureau of Statistics figures at [www.bps.go.id](http://www.bps.go.id)).

<sup>50</sup> We should note, however, that this case is perhaps an exception; most cases of theft in Manggarai are addressed peacefully.

While we cited earlier a dispute over the payment of a bride price, in most cases a meta-rule governs which *adat* system should be used when the man and women are from different areas. The meta-rule (agreed to by groups with different customary rule systems) is that the system used in the area where the woman comes from is applicable. If, for example, a man from Flores marries a Javanese woman (where no equivalent bride price system exists), he is not responsible for paying a dowry. The presence of this meta-rule has meant that, with rare exceptions, disputes over *belis* do not tend to arise, and if they do, they generally get solved early on.

### 4.3 Enforcement of Rules

Even where there is compatibility of rules and/or a coherent meta-rule, conflict may arise and escalate in the absence of the applicable rule being enforced. Rules, without enforcement, lose their value. Given that rules are constraints that are devised to shape human interaction, an essential element of the functioning of rules is that there must be a cost to breaking them (North 1990, p. 4). Where punishment is not applied (i.e., where the rule is not enforced), people can easily ignore the constraints that the rules impose in situations where they would gain by doing so. This can lead to actions that can easily provoke conflict.

This was evident in many of the cases we followed, most notably in corruption cases that led to conflict. In one case in Sikka, Flores, a village head stole a large sum of money that was intended for the village's development budget. This transgressed both the formal code of conduct and informal community norms about the acceptable behavior of elected officials. As such, the relevant rules (formal and informal) were fully compatible. Both agreed on the process that should be followed: the offender should be tried before the district court, which should impose a suitable sentence based on the applicable legislation. However, when the village head was set free after paying a bribe to a police officer, conflict arose. Everyone understood that the village head's freedom had been bought. Without enforcement, the rules of the game, whether compatible or not, lose their meaning.

Rules can either be enforced formally or informally. By formal enforcement, we mean application of a rule or decision by an actor or institution of the state. By informal enforcement, we mean application by a non-state actor or institution. These agents can either enforce formal or informal rules. In most cases, formal actors will enforce formal rules, and informal actors the informal rules, but this is not always the case. In the absence of effective state presence, for example in areas where no policemen are located, non-state agents may (either legally or illegally) enforce state legislation or, alternatively, may resort to informal codes such as vigilante killing of thieves. Conversely, agents of the state (policemen, government officials, etc.) may enforce informal rules, particularly in cases where no formal state legislation exists to guide action, or where an informal norm is so strong that it is commonly accepted that it should override the formal rule. In such cases, no coherent meta-rule exists.

Contexts (that is, situations in given geographical areas at a given point in time) can thus be classified by the extent to which the rules of the game are coherent, that a meta-rule exists, and the extent to which rules are enforced, formally and/or informally. We argue that in situations where rules are compatible and/or where there is a coherent meta-rule, and where the agreed-upon rule or meta-rule is enforced (by either a formal or informal actor, or preferably both), conflict is less likely to occur and, when it does, is less likely to escalate. This is because there are either agreed norms of acceptable behavior or agreed processes to deal with any arguments over what constitutes unacceptable behavior, and because these norms or processes are enforced.

Thus the 'rules of the game' help to explain the likelihood of conflict occurring and escalating. However, it is also important to understand the mechanisms by which difference between groups is constructed and sustained, and how this relates to levels, forms, and likelihood of conflict.

## 5. 'Dynamics of Difference'<sup>51</sup>

The rules that govern a community constitute the procedural mechanisms to which members defer to guide behavior and maintain order, but knowledge of them alone is still inadequate for explaining local conflict trajectories. If the 'rules of the game' set the broad parameters of acceptable behavior within and between communities through the deployment of informal sets of rules and norms and formal (explicit) rule systems, what we call the 'dynamics of difference' between groups shapes how *intra*-group norms, interests, and identities are influenced, and how, in turn, the corresponding bases and political salience of differences *between* groups may fluctuate. While our study does not propose a complete theory of the construction and maintenance of 'difference' between groups, analysis of our cases did show the extent to which it is important to take account of such processes in explaining conflict. This section will first consider the dynamics underpinning the creation and maintenance of group difference; it will then explore how conflict can drive and reinforce ever-greater distances and perceived differences between groups, but also how conflict can play a transforming role in shaping identities and interests, depending on the way that a given conflict (or series of conflicts) between 'us' and 'them' is managed.

### 5.1 Creating and Sustaining Group Difference

The evidence from our study indicates that a large proportion of conflict in Indonesia found at the local level is group-based. Even where conflicts are between individuals (for example, conflicts between two people over access to a source of water), group-based identities tended to determine whom the conflicting parties are construed to be. In many respects, this is not surprising: humans are social creatures whose lives are embedded in economic, social, and political networks, from which people (in large part) deduce their identities, and through which people's interests, expectations, and aspirations are shaped. For our purposes, the more important issues center on understanding the sources and forms of group-based identity, how particular elements of otherwise multi-faceted identities become salient at certain times, and how conflict both shapes and gets shaped by these elements.<sup>52</sup>

As numerous authors (e.g., Horowitz 2000) have noted, group-based identity can be either ascriptive (whether based on race, language, clan, caste, language, and so on) or prescriptive (village location, political party affiliation, economic group where mobility is possible, etc.). In our research study sites—and certainly in many other cases—these two forms of identity may overlap in multiple and complex ways. Group identity, like other forms of identity, largely exists to the extent it can be juxtaposed against something else (Bateson 1979). As Anderson (1991) and others have reasoned, identity formation and identity transformation are conditional on demographic, political, economic, cultural, policy, and legislative environments, and changes on multiple levels. Our data suggests that understanding how groups (their leaders, and constituent individuals) interact with each other and assert, defend and reconstruct their identity—or, more accurately, particular forms of identity in response to particular circumstances—is one of the major determinants of conflict trajectories, and of whether conflicts become violent or are resolved peacefully. Group identities and interactions are not static or stagnant, just as the contexts within which they emerge are constantly changing. Recognizing this helps to explain why relationships between groups (whether based on kinship ties, residential, political, ethnic, religious or

---

<sup>51</sup> For ideas and background on this section, we are indebted to Rachael Diprose and Adam Satu.

<sup>52</sup> In most of the conflict cases we studied the scale of the conflict was not large enough to have invoked mass media coverage. Thus we do not account for the role the media can play in generating divisive perceptions of group identity. However, in other contexts this can be a key determinant of conflict escalation. Kakar (1996) and Brass (1997) have both explored this issue with reference to the divisive characterization of groups in Hindu-Muslim conflicts by the media in India.

other affiliations) that may initially appear as harmonious can quickly degenerate into group-based conflicts.

In the conflicts we explored as part of this study, three primary factors were relevant to the construction, maintenance, and (political) salience of group difference. These were: (a) history as institutional legacy and consolidation; (b) history as the invocation and re-imagining of the group's biographical narrative; and (c) appeals to present interests and future aspirations to sustain group size and vibrancy. The first refers to the ways in which political and legal events at a given moment in time conspire to institutionalize particular technologies, demographic categories, resource endowments, and rules of ownership and procedure, thereby formally consolidating long into the future—via mechanisms frequently referred to as 'path dependence'—certain arrangements and options while concomitantly precluding others.<sup>53</sup> The second factor addresses the ways in which elites are able to craft and sustain a compelling narrative (ably supported by and reified during rites-of-passage rituals and seasonal/religious festivals, and reinforced by outbreaks of conflict) of the group's origins, struggles, and defining characteristics; this narrative must be simultaneously able to provide a plausible and coherent account of everyday life *and* to adapt itself in the face of internal 'legitimation crises' or external threats or opportunities.<sup>54</sup> The narrative of a group's struggle, and thus group identity, is often reinforced by the stories told about incidents of conflict, with each side describing their own acts of violence as part of a noble response to antagonism from the other group.<sup>55</sup> The third factor concerns concrete ways in which leaders seek to protect and/or expand group membership by appealing to present interests (e.g., people's human need for security, camaraderie, money) and future aspirations (e.g., for power, status, enacting ideals). We address each aspect in turn.

*(a) History as institutional legacy and consolidation*

The influence of colonialism on ethnic group identity and the construction of differences between groups cannot be underestimated in post-colonial countries (Mamdani 1996, 2001). This is strikingly evident in the Indonesian context (Van Klinken 2003b). In areas where colonial institutions reinforced the structures of societal groups, whether through religion, governance or land titling systems, group identities reflected these changes. For example, in Manggarai (on the island of Flores), the Dutch colonial system did not significantly influence or impact Manggaraian cultural systems until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Up to this point, land was managed communally under a complex system of land guardians, who continue to wield influence today, although they are less powerful now, following decades of government land reform acts. Under the Dutch administration, officials reinforced the local land management system by supporting the prevailing lords and kings, and by documenting land boundaries as these leaders reported it to them. This approach began the process of institutionalizing boundaries between groups living in different areas of land.<sup>56</sup>

Conflicts emerged in the 1920s and 1930s in the region as boundaries between land that had previously been relatively (though not completely) fluid were enforced through the construction of maps by Dutch officials. Community groups who contested the land boundaries at that time continue to do so today; the land conflicts of the early twentieth century thus form the basis of many of the land conflicts between

<sup>53</sup> A useful overview and discussion of these processes is provided by Steinmo, Thelen, and Longstreth (1992).

<sup>54</sup> This strand of the argument draws on, among others, Habermas (1975) and Anderson (1991).

<sup>55</sup> Brass (1997) outlines several cases of the different narratives told by each group involved in the same incident of conflict. During highly politicized events, such as communal riots, it is impossible to assert any one perspective on a conflict as the most accurate account (Brass 1997, p.215). While certain facts may not be disputed, constructions of conflict, and the role of groups in these conflicts, are usually highly contested. The perpetuation of such opposing viewpoints in the press, everyday discussions and within government contributes to the construction of group difference.

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Agus Mahur, expert on the history of local land law, Ruteng (Manggarai, Flores), July 2003.

groups in the Manggaraian region in the early twenty-first century which we tracked in this study. Members of some of those groups that benefited from the Dutch administration—mostly through the acquisition of land, the source of political and economic power in the region—continued to dominate the elite until the early 1990s. At this time, a political backlash against the ruling elite, which had been building for decades, began. This coincided with the early rumblings of resistance to the Soeharto regime, but was rather removed from it. Group clashes between members of the elite clan (who were closely linked to the Dutch) and other clans continue to play out in land conflicts across the region, as smaller clans assert their claims to land which they believe they had lost to the ruling elite under Dutch rule.<sup>57</sup>

Inter-group land conflicts in Manggarai are made even more complicated because of the patently unclear ‘rules of the game’ on land management in the region. This problem is not unique to Manggarai, and is found in many other areas of Indonesia where communal land ownership patterns survive (Evers 2002). Each clan traditionally has its own land ‘guardian’ who administers communal land use. The ways in which the land guardians organize land use frequently (if not always) contradicts the way land ownership (and thus certification) is administered by the district government. However, the authority of the land guardians is not only disputed by those external to the group, such as district government officials, but is also sometimes disputed by members of the same clan, who question the clan elite’s control of communal land. These individual claims to land appeal to a different set of norms (or rights) than those that were possible under the traditional framework of land ownership. Contemporary conditions have changed, and farmers are questioning the rules which the clan elders instruct them to abide by, which some now believe denies them a voice in controlling their own livelihoods through forbidding them to own land. The nature of identity within clan groups is changing as new groups and voices emerge; the dynamics of membership of the clan groups researched in this study are thus shifting in response not only to historical changes, but local political dynamics.

Yet while societal changes can lead to new configurations of identity, historical events place limits on the kinds of change that can happen. Bertrand (2004), in his study of ethnic violence and nationalism in Indonesia, points to the role that ‘critical junctures’ have played in shaping a limited set of possibilities for how religious and ethnic groups identify themselves and their role in the nation. Some of these junctures were explicit legal acts (for example, the decision not to add the Jakarta Charter, which in effect would have pronounced Indonesia an Islamic state, to the first Constitution); others were the result of broader processes of political change (for example, the *reformasi* (democratic reform) movement which led to the downfall of Soeharto). The point is that decisions (conscious or not) from elites in key moments of political flux helped shape the ways in which groups might identify themselves and conceive of their interests within, and in relation to, the Indonesian state and, by extension, the ways in which they could perceive the boundaries between themselves and ‘the other’.<sup>58</sup>

*(b) History as the invocation and re-imagining of a group’s biographical narrative*

‘History’ can be not only a catalogue of chronological events with distinctive political and institutional consequences but a powerful biographical narrative that group elites deploy to legitimize their status and actions within it, to command loyalty and sacrifice from members, to define the group’s characteristics, and to determine its boundaries. In the face of external threats (to the leader’s status and/or power, or to the group itself), a common strategy is to depict neighboring or rival groups as unfavorably ‘other’ (or

---

<sup>57</sup> The roots of other important identity groups in our research areas (e.g., martial arts groups in Ponorogo and criminal networks, known locally as *bajingan*, in Pamekasan), can also be traced back to their role as organizations of collective resistance against the Dutch.

<sup>58</sup> See Friend (2003) on the creation and consolidation of an Indonesian national identity, Nordholt (2002) on the colonization of Indonesian historiography, and Hefner (2000) on the intersection of Islam and politics in Indonesia.

‘them’) in order to reify the contiguous history, distinctiveness, and (usually) the superiority of their own identity group (‘us’). In successfully doing so, leaders are able to provide a basis for overcoming collective action dilemmas and to mobilize constituents in the service of the leader’s (or the group’s) perceived interests.<sup>59</sup> As the source and form of the external (or, for that matter, internal) threats change, skilled leaders are able to selectively and persuasively re-imagine both their community’s and their rival’s biography to suit the new challenge or opportunity.<sup>60</sup>

Examples of such ‘manipulation’ of histories were common across our research sites. In Ponorogo, a district in East Java, where distinct group identities revolve around membership of *silat* (martial arts) groups, external actors have played a role in reinforcing the boundaries of local martial arts groups; increasingly, membership of *silat* organizations has been politicized, with different district level politicians appealing to different local groups. Through such actions, they have invoked myths, often emphasizing past historical events and junctures, which have tended, in turn, to consolidate (perceived) differences in ideology between groups. This has served to strengthen and make less porous the boundaries between different *silat* groups, despite the extent to which the different organizations otherwise share a common genesis.<sup>61</sup> In parts of Manggarai, in Flores, many villagers from the Satamese ethnic group believe that their former king conquered Manggarai between 1928 and 1929. Evidence for this conquest from the remaining records of the time is limited. However, the historical myth has endured, through being passed down orally within the group, and remains a key element of stories told in the traditional (*adat*) ceremonies. To this day, many Manggarians point to the mythical events of the 1920s as the foundation for their contemporary ethnic identity.

In another of the research locations, Sikka (also on the island of Flores), a different process appears to be taking place. Largely in response to increasing urbanization in the main population centers, and improved infrastructure linking rural areas, thus absorbing pre-modern (often subsistence) economies into broader markets, traditional culture is rapidly changing. One of the mechanisms through which traditional leaders have maintained power in Flores is through their role in applying and interpreting customary (*adat*) rules. Historically, these rules have served the purpose of maintaining order, not just through their deployment in dispute resolution, but also through the promulgation of a set of *adat* values. These values, in turn, defined the boundaries of the group, usually constructed at the clan (lineage) level, with a combination of historical myths (often those of origin) and the use of socially-enforced *adat* sanctions serving to maintain the unity of the group, while, at the same time, reinforcing the power of local *adat* leaders.

As broader processes of modernization have taken place (most notably, greater population movement and, largely through improved communications, an increased awareness and presence of the formal state), the power of local leaders to enforce *adat* decisions has been weakened in Sikka district. This process has been slower in Manggarai, in the west of the island, where these modernizing processes are much weaker. In Sikka, in response to these modernizing changes, conscious efforts have been made by some *adat* (traditional) leaders to simultaneously reframe the role of *adat*, while, at the same time, drawing upon myths of local history to legitimize their role in the face of a changing environment. In recent years there have been resurgent calls for a return to ‘*adat* values’ from many local community leaders, who, in cooperation with district government, have sponsored workshops on *adat* history. As such, *adat* seems to

---

<sup>59</sup> Bertrand (2004) and Van Klinken (2003a) both outline the role of ethnic and religious group elites in mobilizing their group members at times of conflict in Eastern Indonesia.

<sup>60</sup> See Wolf (1999).

<sup>61</sup> The two major martial arts groups in Ponorogo (Setia Hati Terate and Setia Hati Winongo) are both offshoots of one organization, Setia Hati, which was formed in Madiun, East Java in 1903. Setia Hati was suspected of being a meeting ground for insurgents against the Dutch and, as such, was closely monitored by the colonial authorities. Only later did the organization split (see Probo 2003).

be growing stronger (in terms of the frequency and intensity of appeals made to ‘*adat* values’) and getting weaker (in terms of its actual jurisdictional reach and legitimacy) simultaneously.

*(c) Appeals to present interests and future aspirations*

If ‘re-imagining the past’ was a key strategy used by group leaders needing to galvanize existing members, another strategy is to sustain an aura of the group’s legitimacy and vibrancy by ‘re-imagining the present’ for non-members who could potentially be recruited to the cause. This is done largely by deft but direct appeals to present interests and future aspirations. In the conflict cases we followed, appeals were made on the basis of security, camaraderie and material resources (whether by attempting to secure them now or in the hope of gaining future access). In Ponorogo district, East Java, martial arts (*silat*) groups appealed to young men through raising fears of the other martial arts group, promising protection through membership in a unique brotherhood, and the group security which would flow from belonging to this brotherhood. In Pamekasan, on the island of Madura, in East Java, the protection provided by belonging to one of the criminal gangs (known locally as *bajingan*) also guaranteed a certain level of economic well-being. While neither of these sorts of groups are based on ethnic identity, they both use strong narratives of group belonging, and have built up myths around their group identity in order to appeal to potential members and to solidify current membership of the group. In Flores, in NTT province, appeals to traditional land rights were asserted by clan leaders during conflicts over land in attempts to secure resources, whether in an attempt to protect them from a predatory local state or from competing clan and ethnic groups. As conflicts escalated against other groups, the land guardians and clan leaders roused historical narratives of group belonging and (re)ignited fears of the other groups by referring to past conflicts.

Cases of such identity ‘manipulation’ were common in our research sites. A recurring example was the way in which candidates would seek to mobilize individuals based on their place of origin during village head elections. Attempts to win the vote of local citizens were based on appeals on the basis of the candidate sharing the same domicile (usually sub-village) as voters, and thus possessing legitimate claims on their loyalty. In certain cases, such forms of geographically-bounded identity had not been salient in the past. However, as candidates used it as a basis for mobilization, geographically-based identities would become more prominent and in some cases harden into identity cleavages, which would start to structure social relations in other domains of life. In our research sites, such mobilizing activities sometimes led to violent conflicts, especially when the election results were released. Geographically-defined groups would see their collective pride as threatened if a candidate from another area won. Pride then had to be defended through a violent clash. Without effective mediating institutions or meta-rules to govern how such conflicts should be resolved, relatively small conflicts like those over village head elections can (and do) spiral into much bigger conflicts, especially when they start drawing on other identity and group difference issues that are unrelated to the original conflict.

The bases upon which groups are constructed, and the boundaries of those groups, are thus often relatively fluid. In the cases we covered, identity changed as a result of both the specific actions of individuals—internal and external to the groups—as well as in reaction to broader social and economic forces. Contrary to conventional wisdom, groups with an ascriptive identity basis (e.g., clan groups in Sikka) were just as subject to changes as are those constructed around secular issues (e.g., *silat* groups in Ponorogo), although it appeared that significant change in the former took more time than for the reconfiguration of identity groups with a prescriptive basis.

Conceptualizing identity groups as fluid constructs whose bases and boundaries change in a constant dialectic with both processes of structural change and the actions of formal and informal authorities and actors is helpful when trying to understand how and why different groups exist, why these identities are important and the roles they play in conflict situations. Given that individuals hold multiple identities

concurrently, it is also necessary to examine why particular identities become politically salient at a given time. To do so requires an understanding of the mechanisms by which particular identities get mobilized at different times. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to develop a comprehensive theory of identity group mobilization, our study uncovered some rich data on the processes through which identity groups get mobilized. As we argue below, conflict itself has a powerful impact on these processes, both as ‘cause’ and ‘effect’.

## 5.2 Conflict and the ‘Dynamics of Difference’

Conflict itself can expose and exacerbate the mechanisms underpinning the dynamics of difference in both positive and negative ways. In our case studies of conflict, it did so via three channels: first, as a means for mobilizing group identity; second, by reinforcing divisive identity groupings; and, third, by enabling the positive re-imagining of group identity.

### (a) Mechanisms for mobilizing group identity

There are multiple mechanisms by which leaders can mobilize group identity for the purposes of conflict. As noted above, one of the most common means identified in our case studies was the encouragement of group members to fear another group. This fear was often illusory, with the real threat coming from a different group or source. However, whether real or imagined, fear was an exceptionally powerful tool for mobilizing group members to take action, normally based on the perceived need for self-protection. Group members were also mobilized through the prospect of economic or political gains. But fear and/or the prospect of political and economic gain alone was not usually enough to mobilize people to take action on their own; only where the incentives to mobilize around a common group identity were channeled through a social system (e.g., land and its strong connection to identity) or network recognizable and common to the group, was identity successfully mobilized. For example, in Flores, traditional land management systems were used to mobilize people against another group when they stood to lose (or gain) land. In Ponorogo, group leaders would invoke the rules of the *silat* (martial arts) group to require members to respond to a threat from another group. In both scenarios, fear (of the other group, and/or of loss of respect) and the possibility of gain (of secure land resources, or political position vis-à-vis the other group) were channeled through a common institutional system of the group.

In the Manggarai cases, in Flores, the *lingko* (a traditional land management) system was often used as an effective means for mobilizing people to join a land conflict by the traditional land guardians and village elders. Through the *lingko* system, land can be distributed to people within a lineage group, or to those from different lineages and hamlets.<sup>62</sup> When a land case between groups came up related to a specific *lingko*, people cultivating within that system tended to unite against the other party. In one case we followed in Golo Mangung village, a dispute over *lingko* boundaries left one villager dead and at least six others injured.

If the problem pertained to a dispute over a particular area of land or land border between two different hamlets, each with a different *tua teno* (traditional land guardian) and village elders, then leaders sometimes tried to create a new *lingko* system. This could itself be a means of conflict resolution. However, in other cases the purpose of creating a new *lingko* was to extend the geographic reach within which people could be mobilized. The potential for membership of a new land area proved to be a highly effective tool for recruiting new people to join a land conflict (in large part, because they would gain access to previously unavailable land). Such a process of mobilization caused these conflicts to grow as more people become involved. Group mobilization was therefore based in some cases on long-lasting group identities around a long established *linkgo* area. However, in others it centered on a new group

---

<sup>62</sup> See Erb (1999) on the traditional system of land in Manggarai.

identity (e.g., the new, expanded *lingko*) formed during the conflict in order to gain new land.<sup>63</sup> The other way people were mobilized around group identity in conflicts in this particular region was through appeals to common lineage or common geographical residency.

*(b) Conflict and the reinforcement of divisive identities*

A group leader's capacity to reframe or reinforce identity is vital during a conflict's evolution and (possible) escalation, especially when the very identity of the group is under attack, or when considerable gains can be made from making claims (whether political or economic) based on a specific identity.<sup>64</sup> The ability to frame group identity as under attack is an essential tool for crafting a corresponding strategic response to a conflict. In this way, conflict can intensify the boundaries between different groups which may previously have been less distinct, or where the strength of the internal mechanisms binding group members to one another may have been fairly weak. In the build-up to intense ethnic conflicts, leaders have tended to rally members of their own ethnic group around the threat of 'outside' forces. Even though our conflict case studies were not comparable in scale to those in other regions of Indonesia, the same processes of identity group mobilization were at play.<sup>65</sup> The stress on the alien nature of a rival group, which previously (even very recently in some cases) may have been relatively well integrated, forges difference where it was not obvious before, as group members retreat into their own particularistic identity, in the process shedding any sense (or pretense) of a common identity (e.g., as part of an economic collective, a farming group, religious community, or simply a hamlet).

In the cases of inter-group conflict studied here, the process of reinforcing divisive group identities through conflict was just as critical as in the better known and more serious incidents of inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflict in Indonesia. For example, during the ethnic Dayak-Madurese conflict in Central Kalimantan in 2001, leaders from both ethnic groups rallied rural members of their own group on the basis of threats from outsiders. In many rural areas, the two groups had lived relatively peacefully and had worked side by side in fields and in logging areas. The ways in which the leaders of the groups asserted differences which had been previously irrelevant to a rural community—e.g., where intermarriage and other links had formed—alienated groups from each other, and forged new differences.<sup>66</sup> In conflicts of a smaller, but no less intense, nature, some of the inter-clan conflicts in Manggarai were mobilized by the clan leaders in similar ways. The conflict in Central Kalimantan was in many respects more intense because there was an even greater lack of common rules systems, norms and institutions across the two groups, making it easier for group difference and group identity in opposition to the other group to be mobilized. In Manggarai, at least, the different clan rule systems were not in such great opposition to each other, thus limiting the conflict in certain ways.

In the cases we studied, the boundaries between groups were frequently reinforced and exaggerated during times of conflict. This was not only the case for ethnic and ascriptive identities, but also for

---

<sup>63</sup> This process was observed in three conflicts in Manggarai that we studied. It appears that it is a common trend (see Muda and Satu 2001).

<sup>64</sup> Van Klinken (2003a) and Bertrand (2004) have both considered the role of middle class and urban elites in rallying group members to support ethnic conflict in post-Soeharto Indonesia. The role of elites in mobilizing group identity was no less important in the smaller cases of inter-group conflict considered in this study.

<sup>65</sup> This is an important point when considering how small conflicts can rapidly evolve into larger ones. When mobilization efforts by leaders are not checked by third parties, or by mediators within the groups (first and second parties), group identification solidifies, making the conflicts more and more intractable as differences (or the myth of differences) are reinforced. The process of conflict escalation links group identity mobilization with the role of intermediaries, discussed in section 6.

<sup>66</sup> See Smith (2004) on the conflict between Madurese and Dayak in Central Kalimantan. Although ethnic conflict in Central Kalimantan was not one of the cases in this study, which focused on local level conflicts, similar patterns were observed in all three regions when inter-group conflicts started to escalate.

prescriptive identities. The *silat* (martial arts) group identity in Ponorogo came above any other sort of group affiliation in that region, whether to a political party, or to membership of a collective farmer's group, for example. Sometimes, these group identities overlapped and, indeed, political affiliation followed from membership of one or another martial arts group. But one of the reasons for the strength of membership of the *silat* groups, over other sorts of identities, was that leaders of these groups constantly reinforced the boundaries of the group by protecting and promoting their own group in opposition to the other martial arts groups. The strength of one *silat* group therefore depended on its opposition to the other group (and the presence of the other group). During outbreaks of conflict, group identity was continually reinforced as being distinct and individual from the other groups.

The same processes were evident in the very different cases of inter-group land conflict in Manggarai, where negative group stereotypes were reinforced during the conflicts. In one land conflict case, people from two ethnic groups were not invited by another group to a traditional ceremony at which food is presented to the spirits of their ancestors. By not inviting these two ethnic groups, the negative image of each group involved was reinforced. In yet another context, on Madura, group stereotypes were reinforced through honor killings invoked by the cultural practice of '*carok*'.

In each set of inter-group conflict cases discussed above—land conflicts between clans, clashes between martial arts groups, inter-village conflicts over issues of pride—group differences were reinforced by and through the process of conflict. But this process is not inevitable, as conflict between groups can also sometimes lead to positive re-imaginings of group identity. As we argued above, the problem of the reinforcement of divisive group identities is sped by incompatibilities between rule systems or the lack of a meta-rule. The lack of a commonly agreed-upon system of rules for resolving inter-group conflicts itself reinforces group difference.

*(c) Conflict and positive re-imagining of group identity*

Conflicts between groups did not always have the negative effect of hardening identities into divisive and exclusionary forms. In several cases we followed, the shock associated with an outbreak of conflict allowed for a positive transformation of identity. In particular, where effective mediation served to focus groups on common interests and goals, identities could be re-imagined, with the result being that existing cleavages became more porous and specific sources of identity more inclusive.

Whether conflicts generate positive or negative constructions (or reinforcements) of group identity was primarily dependent on two factors. First, if there was a common enemy to unite against, then previously divided groups could unite and reconstruct their group differences as part of a unified group. Second, if there was a mediator (or mediating system) present that enabled divided groups to reach a common understanding of the problem, this could have a similar impact. In the second case, even if groups were not actually united through the process of conflict mediation, previous stereotypes could sometimes be lessened and the perceived divides between groups also weakened. As such, conflicts did not necessarily transform group identity, but they could modify it and bring a more communal identity to the fore. These positive outcomes from conflict were less frequent than the negative reinforcements of group identity described above, but there were a few notable examples where this took place.

In Ponorogo, East Java, a particular conflict was studied where different communities were in conflict over the building of a dam in their region. The process of conflict eventually led to the building of a new civic identity as different villages found common ground on which to disagree with the local government. The unification of different villages against the corrupt contracting and building of the dam by the local government led to the bridging of previous differences between different community groups.

In Flores, it was hard to identify many examples of conflict having a positive effect on group difference. However, there was one example of a land case in Manggarai where a strong local mediator had been able to transform a divided community. Starting in the 1950s, and particularly between 1990 and 1999, two villages in one area had been fighting violently on several occasions, with deaths, injuries and property damage on both sides resulting from the conflicts each time. Through a long mediation process (over more than a year), conducted by the local parish priest, who approached each family involved in the conflict, the priest managed to gain the trust of the conflicting parties, and to appreciate contrasting perspectives on both the roots of the conflict and the prospects for reconciliation. Finally, after this year long and steady process of mediation, both parties agreed to hold a peace ceremony. The main motivation for reconciliation was a mutual desire for peace, in order to avoid unrest and to protect against future deaths and injuries. The priest had gained enough understanding of the local community to realize that the mediation process had to link lineage and inter-marriage relations between both conflicting parties. The peace ceremony was finally held in the local church using both traditional (*adat*) and church rites, and was witnessed by the disputants, church leaders and the government (from the village to district government level). In this conflict, the result has not only been a cessation of violence but also a ‘re-imagining’ of the relations between the two groups, with both now emphasizing their common ethnic roots. Such a remarkable transformation in a divided community, where the conflict had been ongoing for over 50 years, reflects the critical role of intermediaries in forging positive transformation of group conflicts into peaceful situations. In a similar case in Madura, East Java, a Muslim leader (*kyai*) positively mediated conflict between groups, with the result that new ties between the two communities were forged.

In short, conflict could emerge as a positive force for change through social transformation, through the emergence of new civic (or common) identities across groups, or simply through the construction of a more positive community identity. Aside from the cases where a collective re-identification was made possible through unification against a common enemy, positive (rather than negative) ‘re-imagining’ of group relations could occur through a leader or an institution applying a coherent and mutually credible ‘meta rule’ to help close the gap between group differences.

### 5.3 Bridging Differences Between Groups

By exploring the creation and maintenance of group difference, we have seen that conflict frequently leads to the consolidation of boundaries between groups. Although it occurs less frequently, we have also seen that, under some conditions, conflict can expand the basis for forging identity claims. Our evidence suggests that whether conflicts had a divisive or a unifying impact depended on the presence (or absence) of an individual or group mediator, or a cross-group mediating institution; the other condition for unification was a common enemy. But which particular people and what specific institutions enable unification across group difference and disagreements to occur? What factors restrict this from taking place? What consolidates difference, rather than unity?

From our case studies, we identified that it was not only important to have the people available to mediate bridging activities between groups, but that certain resources were also essential to doing so. These resources included human resources (leadership capacity, willingness) as well as financial resources (for assisting groups to travel to meet each other, for reconstruction and or reconciliation activities), and the essential ingredient of legitimacy to act as a mediating force (neutrality was an essential feature for this, but an understanding of the situation and the multiple rules systems at work was also necessary). The following section focuses on the critical role of intermediaries, and what limits them, in bridging differences between groups.

## 6. 'Efficacy of Intermediaries'

A key policy concern clearly centers on understanding the mechanisms and conditions that make for effective conflict resolution. In autocratic regimes, local level conflicts (if they are addressed at all) tend to be “resolved” largely by decree and then ruthlessly enforced by the military or police, with little concern for debating the merits of the arguments made by disputants, upholding due process, or seeking to establish constructive precedents for future disputes.<sup>67</sup> As globalization brings more groups into contact (in both real and virtual space) more frequently, and enables those with grievances (legitimate or otherwise) to speak to a wider audience, and as politicians and citizens discover that unresolved disputes “there” increasingly spawn violence “here”, the need and demand for more democratic, transparent and legitimate dispute resolution mechanisms has intensified, both within and between states. Our case studies shed some light on these concerns.

### 6.1 First-Second Party Negotiations

Why do similar conflicts sometimes get resolved, but at other times not? What mechanisms and processes seem to make for effective local level conflict resolution? Our data suggest that when the immediate parties to a dispute are engaged in seeking a resolution, three variables are paramount in shaping the likelihood of success. First, both parties must be willing to act to seek a solution. This might initially sound self-evident, but in many instances of enduring local level conflict it turns out that one party in fact has a vested interest in having the conflict continue (we discuss the reasons for why this might be the case below). Second, the parties need to have the resources—human, financial, and administrative—to seek a resolution. Third, the parties need to have a high and shared understanding, both of the idiosyncratic details of the local context (its people, culture, and problems)<sup>68</sup> and the technical expertise needed to consolidate a final decision. Where both parties have the willingness to seek a solution, have adequate resources, and shared understanding (contextual and technical), they are likely to reach a joint resolution; where the opposite is the case—that is, where one or both parties has a low willingness to seek a solution, few resources, and/or low understanding—conflicts are likely to fester, escalate, and/or be deferred to third parties (see Figure 3).

There may also be cases when one or both disputants have a vested interest in avoiding conflict resolution, and perpetuating the dispute. For example, in one of the land conflict cases we explored in Flores, one resolution to the conflict, which appeared a long way off, would likely involve an agreement on which party had the right to access the land in question, and which party held ‘guardianship’ of this land. ‘Guardianship’—or ‘holder-ship’, as Prior (2004) has more accurately described the local concept of land management—of the land did not imply that the party would necessarily use the land, but they would then have the right to grant access to another party. The party presently holding access to the land, through farming on it, perceived that they were likely to lose this access in a settlement to the conflict. They perceived that the other party may win the claim to guardianship, and then deny them access to their fields. Therefore they had a strong interest in perpetuating the dispute, as this perpetuated their access to the land.

---

<sup>67</sup> This may of course also be the case with enforced ‘peace’ agreements by outside ‘democratic’ forces to a regional conflict, as witnessed in the situation in Iraq.

<sup>68</sup> Scott (1998, p. 311) refers to such knowledge as ‘metis’, a Greek concept that is useful as “a means of comparing the forms of knowledge embedded in local experience with the more general, abstract knowledge deployed by the state and its technical agencies.” For Scott, “metis seems to better convey the sorts of practical skills that I have in mind than do such plausible alternatives as “indigenous technical knowledge,” “folk wisdom,” “practical skills”, techne, and so on” (p. 313).

## 6.2 Third Party Mediations

Disputes can sometimes be deferred to (putatively) neutral third parties, but the result of third-party mediation is, of course, not necessarily positive. Third party intervention can take place by choice (if the state decides to intervene), by circumstance (if a given case—for example, of murder—clearly falls immediately into the jurisdiction of the formal legal system and local parties agree to this), or because the initial disputants failed to reach a resolution on their own. In addition to the variables identified above, a key factor shaping the efficacy of third parties is, according to our data, their legitimacy.

The legitimacy accorded third parties comes in two forms. On the one hand, it must be clear to all concerned that it is now appropriate for a given dispute to be adjudicated by a particular third party. Where a gap exists between a given dispute and the (perceived or actual) jurisdictional mandate of a particular third party—that is, where there is low problem-jurisdiction compatibility—legitimacy is likely to be low.<sup>69</sup> A good example of low problem-jurisdiction compatibility came through in matters pertaining to the defense of honor in our research site on the island of Madura, East Java. In cases of conflict which revolved around the need to defend and assert family pride and honor where it had been offended, agents of the state, whether village government leaders or the police, were clearly seen by the local community as having no business in trying to address this sort of problem. Generally, local state agents understood this and so did not get involved, even though the formal rule books state that the police have an explicit role to play in cases of murder or violent attacks. In the rare exceptions where the police or other government agents had become involved, resolution by this third party was unlikely, largely because of their lack of legitimacy.

On the other hand, the individual actors who comprise that third party—whether the judges, lawyers, or other kinds of arbitrators—themselves need to be of high moral and professional repute. If these actors are known to be incompetent and/or corrupt, it is highly unlikely that disputes referred to them will be addressed seriously and impartially, or that their verdicts—even if, in fact, technically sound—will be received and perceived as fair. In short, where third parties lack legitimacy, prove unwilling to seek a solution, and lack adequate capacity (resources and understanding), it is unlikely they will be able to reach an effective resolution. Even so, it was remarkable that in Sikka district, unlike in our other research sites, villagers kept persisting in their use of the formal legal system, even though they knew it to be overtly corrupt, and had received numerous disappointing prior verdicts. There appeared to be a general understanding that the legal system, however inaccessible, was the legitimate forum to use to solve cases of criminal conduct or conflict, especially when other mechanisms had failed to provide satisfactory results to one or more parties to the conflict. This was at least in part due to the longevity of the erosion of trust in and role for traditional leaders in resolving conflicts in this region. Furthermore, higher levels of education and literacy, and proximity to an urban area, had likely contributed to an awareness of the court system.

---

<sup>69</sup> For more on the gap between villagers and the formal justice system in Indonesia, see Stephens (2003), World Bank (2004).

**Figure 3: Efficacy of Intermediaries**

		Legitimacy			
		High		Low	
		Willingness to Act to Seek a Solution		Willingness to Act to Seek a Solution	
		High	Low	High	Low
Capacity	High Resources High Understanding				
	High Resources Low Understanding				
	Low Resources High Understanding				
	Low Resources Low Understanding				

However, it is not simply enough for third parties to hold legitimacy. They must also be both willing and capable of acting as a third party to a conflict. In many cases we looked at in this study, when a government official had been turned to by disputing parties at the village level, the officials were not necessarily willing to act, despite having the legitimacy to do so. There were other cases where local government leaders were willing to act, and had the legitimacy to do so, but lacked the practical or technical resources to do so. This was also often the situation for police, who due to a lack of financial resources were unable to act to control certain cases of conflict as they did not have the vehicles to get to the conflict location, or the manpower to cope with the size of the conflict. The integration of these variables is presented schematically in Figure 3.

## 7. Policy Implications

From the outset, one of our goals in this study was to articulate a set of clear, integrated, and evidence-based analytical frameworks for understanding conflict trajectories. We hope that these frameworks can assist the crafting of useable policy and project recommendations. To be sure, the broad policy recommendations that follow build on the findings of previous studies, but in so doing we attempt to reframe the ways in which conflict management as a development policy objective is conceived. Previous studies have primarily identified both the problem of and the solution to violent conflict at an aggregate or structural level—with corresponding calls for “more integrated civil society”, “better treaties”, “stronger institutions”, “more equitable development”, “enhanced judicial reform”, and “expanded cultural exchanges”. All (of) these responses are important, and in principle we endorse them. From our findings, we suggest five areas for policymakers, community leaders, practitioners, and donors to consider as they move discussion and action on conflict mediation forward.

Before exploring these, however, it is worth revisiting our opening arguments with respect to the symbiotic relationship between conflict and development. Realignments of economic and political power, reconfigurations of expectations and identities, and “great transformations” of space, social relations, and institutional structures are an inherent—even defining—feature of the development process. As such, conflicts great and small are both normal and inevitable (though violence is not). Accordingly, the development strategy challenge is one of implementing an integrated set of technocratic policies, standardized programs, and context-specific practices that simultaneously encourage economic growth, social development, *and* effective conflict management (Bates 2001). The latter component has not generally been recognized by donors or government as an integral part of the development planning

process, but it needs to be. To this end, we suggest the following five areas to which attention should be directed.

### 7.1 Rethinking ‘Policy Implications’ Orthodoxy

Our first recommendation concerns rethinking the very idea of what “policy implications” usually mean. Local level conflicts, at least in their initial stage, are primarily embedded in relational dynamics; as such, their resolutions (as and when they occur) are usually arrived at through protracted dialogue, discussion, and debate (Fukuyama 2004). While it is obviously crucial to understand local level conflicts as manifestations and microcosms of larger dialects of power, inequality, and political economy, such realizations do not alone provide a practical guide on how to help prevent or stem violence at a particular time and place.

Moreover, our evidence shows that outside forces have the crippling local impact they do in large part because there are few effective conflict resolution mechanisms in place at the local level through which to respond to them. Too often denied accessible channels to voice their concerns and deliberate their differences through the formal legal system because of corruption within or isolation from this system, but without the civic spaces within which to debate problems, villagers seeking justice in the cases we covered—and this is true elsewhere in Indonesia—find themselves locked into frustrating cycles of conflict. In these situations, inadequate or overwhelmed traditional dispute resolution mechanisms frequently do not cohere with one another, nor capably address even those cases which unambiguously fall into their jurisdiction. Where formerly these customary mechanisms may have coped with resolving local conflict because they had legitimacy among the local population, or because community leaders had the willingness, knowledge, and capacity to deal with the problem, in contemporary circumstances this is frequently not the case. This is not to say that traditional or customary leaders could never have the capacity to tackle local conflicts—in many cases they still hold power and respect within their community—but rather that the mechanisms they use, and the legitimacy they have, no longer always map coherently onto the nature and extent of the problems they find themselves having to address. In similar ways, the formal legal framework in Indonesia—a system largely based on antiquated Dutch laws, and historical *adat* law—also fails to reflect contemporary realities (Evers 2002, Stephens 2003). In such settings, well-intentioned calls by donors and activists for top-down “legal and judicial reform” as the policy response of choice to local conflict are destined to miss the mark. Top-down reform does not reflect local level realities, where multiple and often contradictory legal systems co-exist.

As such, we argue that it is crucial for policymakers to understand “policy responses” to local level conflict in ways that transcend orthodox technocratic assumptions and procedures. This is not to suggest that the formal legal system in Indonesia is not in need of reform (it clearly is), or that responsibility should be ascribed or devolved in wholesale ways to traditional conflict resolution systems (it clearly should not), but rather that attention should be directed at improving the intersection between the two. This task requires skills sets and a modus operandi not usually associated with development elites or the programs they fund. As Heifetz (1994) and others<sup>70</sup> have argued, the resolutions to these types of (and many other) policy problems (and/or parts of conventional policy issues) are “adaptive” rather than “technical” in nature. Solutions require contextually and locally specific negotiation between the concerned parties of a type that cannot be determined *ex ante* by outside technocrats. It is our contention that local level conflict resolution falls largely (though by no means exclusively, as we show below) into the realm of adaptive problem solving. Spaces, incentives, procedures, and resources need to be created and sustained by a range of actors that make it possible for disputants to craft resolutions that all sides can own, uphold, and enforce.

---

<sup>70</sup> On this see also Pritchett and Woolcock (2004) and Fukuyama (2004).

Such approaches, though distinctive and challenging, need not be orthogonal to or dismissive of the organizational imperatives of ‘big development’. Creating effective spaces for deliberation and choice is, in essence, what participatory development projects, at their best, can help facilitate. The *Kecamatan* Development Project (KDP), for example, which is present in one-third of Indonesia’s 69,000 villages, is, on the one hand, a traditional development project in that its overt aim is to alleviate poverty, primarily through the provision of small-scale infrastructure (roads, wells, irrigation systems, etc) and a micro-finance revolving fund facility.<sup>71</sup> However, the mechanisms through which decisions are made in the project, at the village and the sub-district levels, offer new, relatively neutral inter-group forums within which villagers are potentially and sometimes able to more peacefully mediate conflicts of certain types.<sup>72</sup> The incentives for different groups and conflicting parties to work together in these forums is the end product of a development project—a savings and loan opportunity, a new road, or a new well. The role of project facilitators is also essential in aiding successful conflict mediation between rival or competing groups, as they effectively act as third party mediators, with a combination of neutrality, technical and local knowledge, willingness and financial resources to help mediate conflicts, which local officials, the police and other institutions may not necessarily possess.

## 7.2 Creating Mediating Institutions and Meta-rules

To the extent that conventional policy levers can be pushed in directions that lead to more constructive local level conflict resolution procedures (and in certain aspects the extent is quite large), we suggest a number of ways in which this might be done. The first concerns endeavoring to establish mediating institutions to forge greater coherence between different or competing rules systems. Given the heterogeneity of these systems across Indonesia (and elsewhere), and the often fundamentally different ontological foundations on which they rest (e.g., land as personal property versus land as ancestral connection), it is hardly surprising that efforts to find “common ground” are frequently elusive. In many such instances, identifying even a “lowest common denominator” is wholly inadequate.

Commonality, of course, can and should be sought where possible and if it is mutually meaningful. However, based on our data, we suggest that donors and policymakers can chart a more fruitful course by seeking to craft and support mediating institutions that embody what we have called ‘meta-rules’, or coherent overarching agreements that make it possible for otherwise competing or incompatible systems of rules to co-exist. This is, in effect, the role played by the United Nations in making possible a (more or less) coordinated approach to the management of international relations. The spirit of that approach, we argue, should infuse the search by interested parties for new and existing frameworks that make it possible for otherwise diverse combinations of customary and formal laws to co-exist without engendering violence. These agreements will primarily need to be forged by the participants themselves (that is, it is not at all obvious, *ex ante*, what they will look like), though external actors—donors, government, etc.—can play a pivotal role, primarily through establishing and protecting the political or social spaces, incentives, simple interim rules, and the resources that make these processes, and the search for them, possible. External actors may also be able to play a role in setting minimum standards for a meta-rule which all parties could agree to.

## 7.3 Innovative Enforcement Mechanisms

The persistent problem with the idea and the practice of the “United Nations”, of course, is the enforceability of its agreements. Even if all parties sign up to an agreement, its inherent weakness lies in

---

<sup>71</sup> See Guggenheim (2004).

<sup>72</sup> Of course, conflicts involving the military, or conflicts on a much wider scale, would not be effectively mediated at the local inter-village level alone, and would require higher levels of political will and resources to resolve them. This is not to say that local level initiatives are not also essential in these kinds of conflicts, however.

the frequent lack of enforcement powers to accompany such agreements. If, as we have argued, the crafting of coherent meta-rules should be a key component of strategies by policymakers and donors for seeking effective local level conflict resolution, then serious attention also needs to be given to the issue of enforcement. As discussed above, enforcement needs to be understood and agreed to at both the formal and informal level. Enforcement by the formal sector of formal rules alone is insufficient in the context of rural life in Indonesia (and elsewhere). This is true because, on the one hand, the state is still a long way from having the human, administrative and financial resources necessary to do such a job well; on the other hand, it is true because state legislation (and state actors) often do not have the same legitimacy within rural communities as do informal rules and norms (and informal leaders), and hence enforcement will not “stick”. This, in large part, is why traditional rule-of-law approaches that seek to strengthen the central legal organs of the state have often failed in developing countries (Golub 2003).

Having said this, it would be unwise to simply turn to local and traditional leaders to enforce rules, for such an approach can all too easily reinforce and institutionalize power imbalances and the marginalization of certain groups—whether women, ethnic minorities, or the most poor—at the local level. As such, enforcement needs to be taken seriously, but innovative configurations of both the rules that are enforced, and the individuals and institutions that enforce them, must be sought, in particular by local governments and civil society. The needs and preferences of local communities, and the supportable sources of legitimacy and authority that already exist, must therefore be understood before financial and capacity-building support is given to a specific community. Given the extent to which these may vary at a very local level, this suggests a need for planning agencies and ‘experts’ at the national level to focus on the creation of instruments, processes, and fora through which community needs can be ascertained and through which enforcement mechanisms can be developed, rather than on technocratic solutions developed by those far removed from the local situation. Certainly, initial baseline rules would need to be created (by a combination of extra-local and local actors) and enforced (locally) through these instruments or fora. For example, violent solutions to a problem would need to be outlawed—an approach that would require intensive negotiation in some communities. Applying relevant (context-specific) incentives would need to be central to encourage different communities to participate in the process and agree to certain baseline rules.

#### **7.4 Supporting Intermediaries**

Another central feature of our framework with direct policy implications concerns the capacity and legitimacy of intermediaries, those agencies and/or actors who typically occupy two crucial social spaces. The first is between the parties to a dispute, in which case their core task is to act as a *broker*, helping both sides reach an agreement that they (for whatever reason) could not or would not on their own. The second space (for our purposes) is between this institutional entity called “the project” (and/or “the state”) and this other entity called “the community”, providing a personal line of information and resource flows, and a potential basis for ensuring mutual accountability; here their core tasks are that of *translator* and *bridge-builder*. It is these intermediaries who will most likely be charged with facilitating the crafting and enforcement of mediating institutions and their attendant meta-rules. The effectiveness of brokers, translators, and bridge-builders, as our evidence revealed, was a direct function of two things: first, their capacity—that is, their combined local knowledge and technical skill, and the quality and quantity of human, financial, administrative resources at their disposal; and second, their legitimacy was also crucial—that is, the perceived professional competence and integrity of the individual and the organization (s)he represents, and the extent to which both are seen as occupying an appropriate jurisdictional role.

The corresponding “policy implications” should be clear. Capacity-wise, enough time and resources must be allocated to recruit, train, and retain appropriately skilled intermediaries, and to give them the incentives, autonomy, and resources they need to their job. Legitimacy-wise, it is important to recognize

the importance of building on (and working with) existing sources of local legitimate authority within communities and appreciating that when external intervention is deemed necessary or desirable, legitimacy is largely earned over time through demonstrated evidence of incrementally more significant accomplishments. Small victories—early, often and repeated over time—are vital as a basis for making wider, longer-term successes possible in conflict-ridden and isolated areas. Such measures are vital for helping to prevent small conflicts from evolving into larger ones.

## 7.5 Negotiating Difference

A final policy implication drawn from our study is the importance of finding ways and means to make difference less divisive. This can be achieved in two ways: through reducing the potency of initial grievances within groups, and/or building more effective bridging mechanisms between groups. To this point our arguments have stressed the importance of the latter approach, but (logically and empirically) it is also the case that attention needs to be paid to the former, especially in the early or most heated phases of a conflict. This is so because ‘honor’ and ‘saving face’ are such crucial elements of community life in Indonesia, and therefore it is important for those in the development business, including (most crucially) government, to find ways to help communities address their concerns internally, even as they prepare for engagement with other parties. ‘Solutions’ to a given conflict that wittingly or unwittingly humiliate a particular party by denying them ownership of the nature and extent of their involvement in the resolution only sow the seeds for future conflict.

The broad policy challenge is to recognize the salience, complexity, and multi-faceted nature of twenty-first century identities, even (or especially) in communities which are in some ways ‘pre-modern’, yet with highly modern elements co-existing in these communities. At the same time, it is essential to minimize the extent to which those sources of identity are also grounded in vastly unequal material circumstances and differential political statuses. Where people are actively considered by their various leaders (from the local to the national level) to be valued and equal members of “the same moral universe” (Skocpol 1990), a virtuous cycle can be created in which a broad plurality from different identity groups has a stake in the public good, while also ensuring that there are wide coalitions of support (from government and various elements of civil society) for policies needed to reach and sustain it. So long as communities lack actual or meaningful citizenship, and find themselves living in material circumstances that deny them the hope for better prospects, it is unlikely that they will have an abiding interest in seeking constructive resolutions to conflicts, or the capacity to meaningfully do so. Indeed, such conditions are likely to both increase the likelihood of conflict and undermine the possibility of redressing it.

## 8. Conclusions

Even the most cursory reading of today’s newspaper headlines quickly reveals a world experiencing multiple and severe conflicts, a world journalist Michael Hirsh (2003) argues has now entered an age of “the permanent quagmire”. Where previously the most conspicuous and deadly conflicts were between states, since 1989 the collapse of the “fearful symmetries of the postwar era” (Geertz 2001, p. 220) has led to new and more intense forms of intra-state violence. As the old Cold War powers have withdrawn from client states (or, in some cases, re-entered them forcefully), and as authoritarian governments have collapsed, institutions left behind have too often been unable or unwilling to contain disaffected or criminal elements, let alone to build a vibrant and inclusive economy. The legacy of divide-and-rule strategies, and the empowerment of ethnic militias to fight against the common ideological enemy, has heightened the cognition of, and helped militarize, identity-based difference. With the withdrawal of two-sided superpower largesse and political balancing, in environments where viable democratic mechanisms for peacefully allocating resources and smoothly managing power relations were absent, many parts of

post-colonial states have descended into a spiral of civil war and chaos, in the process generating and sustaining rippling waves of insecurity and instability elsewhere.<sup>73</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the growth in the number of conflicts has been closely matched by a substantive increase in interest in conflict and its impacts from both the policy and academic communities. In recent years, the examination of conflict's impacts on development—and, conversely, development's impacts on conflict—has received increasing attention.<sup>74</sup> While much has been learned, many of the data sources used have been secondary, static, or focused on the most spectacular episodes of conflict. We have argued that this has led to the articulation of conceptual frameworks that struggle to account for variation across time and space in the frequency, intensity, and duration of conflict, and which have ignored the local level evolution of conflicts, thus limiting their explanatory power as to how and why conflicts evolve over time, whether towards resolution, stalemate, or escalation. They have also lent themselves towards largely top-down technocratic solutions driven by external 'experts', in which conflict resolution (and legal-judicial reform more broadly) is construed as an exercise in building stronger courts, training more judges, writing better constitutions, etc. Such initiatives clearly have an important role to play, but they will not alone prevent the rise and escalation of violent conflict.

Drawing on a comparative empirical study in rural Indonesia of the conditions under which various types of initial local level conflicts follow particular trajectories, we have sought in this paper to provide an alternative perspective on the dynamics of conflict pathways in developing countries, and thereby to help lay a richer foundation on which to identify more tangible and coherent responses at the local level (mindful always of the broader political economy within which these are embedded). The key elements of this foundation are the importance of coherent and enforceable rules and overarching meta-rules ('the rules of the game'), the malleability and political salience of different identity group claims ('the dynamics of difference'), and the willingness, capacity and legitimacy of mediators ('the efficacy of intermediaries'). Individually and collectively, these elements can help to inform a corresponding set of policy recommendations for various actors focused on providing incentives, resources, and spaces for crafting viable mediating institutions that enable otherwise weak, competing, or incompatible rules systems to co-exist.

Finally, these elements also provide a possible challenge to the idea of what constitutes a "policy recommendation", if by that term we mean a top-down instrument solely or primarily designed and implemented by technocrats or other external political elites. The early and effective resolution of local level conflict, we argue, is in large part an "adaptive" rather than "technical" problem, one requiring an emphasis on the role of many different parties (government, donors, academia, and civil society), at different levels, in establishing a basis for effective dialogue, evidence-based decision making, and enforceable agreements, the final specification of which is not always likely to be known at the outset. Draining Hirsh's "permanent quagmire" will entail directing more and better resources, not only financial but also human, from governments and donors to the initial sources of conflicts, but doing so in ways that give disputants a tangible basis for both committing to a shared negotiation procedure and upholding agreements, and ensuring that all parties are held accountable for their actions. This is the challenge ahead.

---

<sup>73</sup> Bates (2001, pp. 97-99) cites the example of the spread of violence in Somalia. During the 1980s, U.S. aid provided patronage to clan heads with only basic economic motivations ensuring their adherence to the idea of a Somali state. The withdrawal of the sponsor's funds resulted in military force being used by clan groups in competition over increasingly scarce resources. The arming of the Taliban in Afghanistan to fight the Soviets is another example of this process.

<sup>74</sup> These linkages were sparked initially by the work of Anderson (1999), amongst others. For a discussion of the integration of notions of conflict and insecurity into development discourse and practice, see Uvin (2002).

## References

---

- Anderson, B. 1991. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (revised edition). London: Verso.
- Anderson, M.B. 1999. *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace-or War*. Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner.
- Auerbach, J. 1985. *Justice Without Law? Resolving Disputes Without Lawyers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Avruch, K. 1998. *Culture and Conflict Resolution*. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press.
- Ayittey, G.B.N. 1991. *Indigenous African Institutions*. Ardsley-on-Hudson, NY: Transaction Publishers.
- Baker, J. 2000. *Evaluating the Impact of Development Projects on Poverty*. Washington D.C.: World Bank.
- Bateson, G. 1979. *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity*. Glasgow: Fontana.
- Barron, P., R. Diprose, D. Madden, C. Smith, and M. Woolcock. 2004. "Do Participatory Development Projects Help Villagers Manage Local Level Conflicts? A Mixed Methods Approach to Assessing the Kecamatan Development Project, Indonesia." *Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Working Paper No. 9* (revised edition). Washington D.C.: World Bank, Social Development Department.
- Barron, P., and D. Madden. 2004. "Violent Conflict in 'Non-Conflict' Regions: The Case of Lampung, Indonesia." *Indonesian Social Development Paper No. 2*. Jakarta: World Bank.
- Bates, R. 2001. *Prosperity and Violence: The Political Economy of Development*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.
- Benedict, R. 1934. *Patterns of Culture*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- Bennett, A., and A. George. 1997. "Process Tracing in Case Study Research." Paper presented to MacArthur Foundation Workshop on Case Study Methods.
- Bertrand, J. 2004. *Nationalism and Ethnic Violence in Indonesia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bjorkqvist, K. 1997. "The Inevitability of Conflict, But Not of Violence: Theoretical Considerations on Conflict and Aggression", in Douglas P. Fry and Kaj Bjorkqvist (eds.), *Cultural Variation in Conflict Resolution: Alternatives to Violence*. Lawrence Erlbaum, Mahwah, N.J.
- Black, D. 1976. *The Behavior of Law*. Academic Press.
- Bowen, J. 2003. *Islam, Law and Equality in Indonesia: An Anthropology of Public Reasoning*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Brass, P. 1991. *Ethnicity and Nationalism*. New Delhi, Newbury Park, London: Sage Publications.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1997. *Theft of an Idol: Text and Context in the Representation of Collective Violence*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Burton, J. 1990. *Conflict: Resolution and Prevention*. New York: St Martin's Press.
- Carlston, K. 1968. *Social Theory and African Tribal Organization*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

- Collier, P., and A. Hoeffler. 2000. "Greed and Grievance in Civil War." *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 2355*. Washington D.C.: World Bank.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2004. "The Challenge of Reducing the Incidence of Global Civil War." Copenhagen: Copenhagen Consensus Paper.
- Colombijn, F. 2002. "Maling, Maling! The Lynching of Petty Criminals," in F. Colombijn and J. Thomas Lindblad (eds.) *Roots of Violence in Indonesia*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Coser, L. 1956. *The Functions of Social Conflict*. New York: Free Press.
- Diprose, R. 2003. "The Dynamics of Difference: Contested Identity at the Local Level." World Bank Jakarta Office, Mimeo.
- Doyle, M., and N. Sambanis. 2003. "Alternative Measures and Estimates of Peacebuilding Success." Department of Political Science, Yale University, Mimeo.
- Easterly, W., and R. Levine. 1997. "Africa's Growth Tragedy: Policies and Ethnic Divisions." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 112 (November): 1203-1250.
- Ellickson, R. 1991. *Order Without Law: How Neighbors Settle Disputes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Erb, M. 1999. *The Manggarians: A Guide to Traditional Lifestyles*. Singapore: Times Editions.
- Esping-Anderson, G. 1990. *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*. London: Blackwell.
- Evers, P. 2002. "Indonesian Land Policy: Requirements and Challenges." Mimeo, World Bank Jakarta. (13 September).
- Fox, J. 2002. *Ethnoreligious Conflict in the Late 20th Century: A General Theory*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Friend, T. 2003. *Indonesian Destinies*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.
- Fukuyama, F. (2004). *State-Building: Governance and World Order in the Twenty-First Century*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Galtung, Johan. (1969). "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research." *Journal of Peace Research* 6(3): 167-191.
- Geertz, C. 1963. "The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States", in Clifford Geertz (ed.) *Old Societies and New States*. New York: Free Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2001. *Available Light: Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical Topics*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Glazier, J. 1985. *Land and the Uses of Tradition Among the Mbeere of Kenya*. Lanham: University Press of America.
- Golub, S. 2003. "Beyond Rule of Law Orthodoxy: The Legal Empowerment Alternative." *Rule of Law Series, Working Paper Number 41*. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Guggenheim, S. 2004. "The Kecamatan Development Project, Indonesia", in Anthony Bebbington, Scott Guggenheim, Elizabeth Olson and Michael Woolcock (eds.) *The Search for Empowerment: Social Capital as Idea and Practice at the World Bank*. Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press, forthcoming.

- Gurr, T. 2000. *People Versus States: Minorities at Risk in the New Century*. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press.
- Gurr, T., M. Marshall, and D. Khosla. 2001. *Peace and Conflict 2001: A Global Survey of Armed Conflicts, Self-Determination Movements, and Democracy*. Maryland: Center for International Development and Conflict Management, University of Maryland.
- Habermas, J. 1975. *Legitimation Crisis*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Hefner, R. 2000. *Civil Islam: Muslims and Democratization in Indonesia*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Heifetz, R. 1994. *Leadership Without Easy Answers*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hirsh, M. 2003. *At War With Ourselves: Why America is Squandering Its Chance to Build a Better World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hofman, B., and K. Kaiser. 2002. "The Making of the Big Bang and its Aftermath: A Political Economy Perspective." Paper presented at the conference, 'Can Decentralization Help Rebuild Indonesia?', Georgia State University, May 1-3.
- Homer-Dixon, T. 1999. *Environment, Scarcity and Violence*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Horowitz, D. 2000. *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.
- Huntington, S. 1993. "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72(3): 22-49.
- International Crisis Group. 2003. *Indonesia: Managing Decentralization and Conflict in Indonesia*. 44. Jakarta/Brussels: International Crisis Group.
- Isaacs, H. 1975. *Idols of the Tribe: Group Identity and Political Change*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Kakar, S. 1996. *The Colors of Violence: Cultural Identities, Religion, and Conflict*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Kaplan, R. 1997. *The Ends of the Earth: From Togo to Turkmenistan, from Iran to Cambodia, a Journey to the Frontiers of Anarchy*. New York: Vintage.
- Kanbur, R., ed. 2002. *Q-Squared: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods of Poverty Appraisal*. New Delhi: Permanent Black Publishers.
- Landes, D. 1999. *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some are Rich and Some so Poor*. W.W. Norton & Co.
- Lederach, J. 1995. *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation across Cultures*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.
- Levine, R. 1973. *Culture, Behavior, and Personality*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Li, T.M. 2002. "Two Tales and Three Silences: Critical Reflections on Indonesian Violence." Draft paper, Dalhousie University.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2004. "Adat in Central Sulawesi". Paper prepared for the Conference on Adat Revivalism in Indonesia's Democratic Transition. Batam, March 26-27, 2004.
- Lindert, P. 2004. *Growing Public*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Macauley, S. 1963. "Non-Contractual Relations in Business: A Preliminary Study." *American Sociological Review* 28(1): 55-69.

- Malley, M. 2001. "Class, Region, and Culture: The Sources of Social Conflict in Indonesia," in Nat J. Colleta et. al (eds.). *Social Cohesion and Conflict Prevention in Asia: Managing Diversity through Development*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.
- Mamdani, M. 1996. *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2001. *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Martin, J., and R. Rangaswamy, eds. 1994. *Twenty Five Human Rights Documents* (Revised Edition). New York: Center for the Study of Human Rights, Columbia University.
- McAdam, D., S. Tarrow, and C. Tilly. 2001. *Dynamics of Contention*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Mead, M. 1958. "Cultural Determinants of Behavior", in A. Roe and G. Simpsons (eds.) *Behavior and Evolution*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Merry, S.E. 1992. "Anthropology, Law, and Transnational Processes." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 21: 357-79.
- Moore, B. 1967. *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Moore, S., ed. 2004. *Law and Anthropology: A Reader*. Waltham, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Muda, H., and A. Satu. 2001. "Interelasi antara Sistem Kekerabatan dan Masalah Kepemilikan Tanah di Manggarai." Ruteng, Manggarai: Lembaga Studi van Bekkum-Verheijen.
- Mydans, S. 2001. "Indonesia's Identity Crisis." *New York Times* November 9.
- Nader, L. 1990. *Harmony, Ideology, Justice, and Control in Sapotic Mountain Village*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Nordholt, H.S. 2002. "A Genealogy of Violence." in F. Colombijn and J. Thomas Lindblad (eds.) *Roots of Violence in Indonesia*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- North, D. 1990. *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Polanyi, K. 1944. *The Great Transformation*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Prior, J.M. 2003. "The Church and Land Disputes: Sobering Thoughts from Flores." Maumere: Candraditya Research Centre for the Study of Religion and Culture. Mimeo.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2004. "Land, Church and State: Forestry Business Packaged in Ecological Concerns in Flores." *Inside Indonesia No. 78* (April - June).
- Pritchett, L., and M. Woolcock. 2004. "Solutions When the Solution is the Problem: Arraying the Disarray in Development." *World Development* 32(2): 191-212.
- Probo, E. 2003. "The Phenomenon of the Martial Arts Schools in Kabupaten Ponorogo." Mimeo. World Bank Office Jakarta.
- Ragin, C. 1987. *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Rao, V., and M. Woolcock. 2003. "Integrating Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches in Program Evaluation", in Francois J. Bourguignon and Luiz Pereira da Silva (eds.) *The Impact of Economic*

- Policies on Poverty and Income Distribution: Evaluation Techniques and Tools*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 165-90.
- Rosenbaum, P., and D. Rubin. 1985. "Constructing a Control Group Using Multivariate Matched Sampling Methods that Incorporate the Propensity Score." *The American Statistician* 39: 3338.
- Ross, M. 1993. *The Culture of Conflict: Interpretations and Interests in Comparative Perspective*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1999. *The Management of Conflict: Interpretations and Interests in Comparative Perspective*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2002. "Resources and Rebellion in Aceh, Indonesia." Paper prepared for the Yale University-World Bank Case Study Project on the Political Economy of Civil Wars.
- Rothchild, D. 1997. *Managing Ethnic Conflict in Africa: Pressures and Incentives for Cooperation*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.
- Sen, A. 1999. *Development as Freedom*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Scott, J. 1998. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Shils, E. 1957. "Primordial, Personal, Sacred and Civil Ties." *British Journal of Sociology* 7: 113-145.
- Singer, D. 1990. *Models, Methods, and Progress: A Peace Research Odyssey*. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Skocpol, T. 1990. "Sustainable Social Policy: Fighting Poverty Without Poverty Programs." *The American Prospect* 1(2): 58-70.
- Smith, C. 2004. "The Roots of Violence and Prospects for Reconciliation: A Case Study of Ethnic Conflict in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia." *Indonesian Social Development Paper No. 5*. Jakarta: World Bank.
- Steinmo, S., K. Thelen, and F. Longstreth, eds. 1992. *Structuring Politics: Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stephens, M. 2003. "Local-level Dispute Resolution in Post-Reformasi Indonesia: Lessons from the Philippines." *The Australian Journal of Asian Law* 5(3): 213-259.
- Stewart, F. 2002. "Horizontal Inequalities: A Neglected Dimension of Development." *QEH Working Paper No. 81*. Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford.
- Sunstein, C., and E. Ullmann-Margalit. 1999. "Second-order Decisions." *Ethics* 110(1): 5-31.
- Szczepanski, K. 2002. "Land Policy and Adat Law in Indonesia's Forests." *Pacific Rim Law & Policy Journal* (11) 231.
- Tilly, C. 1999. *Durable Inequality*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Uvin, P. 2002. "The Development/Peacebuilding Nexus: A Typology and History of Changing Paradigms." *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development* 1(1): 5-24.
- Van Klinken, G. 2003a. "Ethnicity in Indonesia". In Colin Mackerras (ed.) *Ethnicity in Asia*. Routledge Curzon: London.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2003b. "New Actors, New Identities. Post Suharto Ethnic Violence in Indonesia. Paper presented to the MOST-LIPI International Conference on Conflict in the Asia Pacific, Jakarta (22-23 October, 2003).
- Varshney, A. 2002. *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

- Wallensteen, P., and M. Sollenburg. 1998. "Armed Conflict and Regional Conflict Complexes: 1989-1997." *Journal of Peace Research* 35(5): 621-634.
- Watson-Gegeo, K., and G. White, eds. 1990. *Disentangling: Conflict Discourse in Pacific Societies*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Welsh, B. 2003. "Street Justice: Vigilantism in West Java." Paper prepared for the Workshop on Contentious Politics – Columbia University, February.
- Wolf, E. 1964. *Anthropology*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1999. *Envisioning Power: Ideologies of Dominance and Crisis*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- World Bank. 2003. *Breaking the Conflict Trap: Civil War and Development Policy*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 2004. *Village Justice in Indonesia: Case Studies on Access to Justice, Village Democracy and Governance*. Jakarta: World Bank.

CONFLICT PREVENTION AND RECONSTRUCTION UNIT – *WORKING PAPER SERIES*

<b>No.</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Authors</b>	<b>Date</b>
4	Central America: Education Reform in a Post-Conflict Setting, Opportunities and Challenges	José Marques Ian Bannon	April 2003
5	Using Case Studies to Expand the Theory of Civil War	Nicholas Sambanis	May 2003
6	Financing and Aid Management Arrangements in Post-Conflict Situations	Salvatore Schiavo-Campo	May 2003
7	Community-driven Reconstruction as an Instrument in War-to-Peace Transitions	Sarah Cliffe Scott Guggenheim Markus Kostner	August 2003
8	Gender Equality and Civil Wars	Mary Caprioli	September 2003
9	Do Participatory Development Projects Help Villagers Manage Local Conflicts?	Patrick Barron Et al.	September 2003
10	Landmine Clearance Projects: Task Manager's Guide	Jacques Buré Pierre Pont	November 2003
11	Timor-Leste: Independent Review of the Credit Component of the Community Empowerment Project	John D. Conroy	March 2004
12	Social Capital and Survival: Prospects for Community-Driven Development in Post-Conflict Sierra Leone	Paul Richards Khadija Bah James Vincent	April 2004
13	MIGA's Experience in Conflict-Affected Countries: The Case of Bosnia and Herzegovina	John Bray	June 2004
14	The Devil in the Demographics: The Effect of Youth Bulges on Domestic Armed Conflict, 1950-2000	Henrik Urdal	July 2004
15	Practical Guide to Multilateral Needs Assessments in Post-Conflict Situations	Uwe Kievelitz Et al.	August 2004
16	The Private Sector's Role in the Provision of Infrastructure in Post-Conflict Countries: Patterns and Policy Options	Jordan Schwartz Shelly Hahn Ian Bannon	August 2004
17	Within and Beyond Borders: An Independent Review of Post-Conflict Fund Support to Refugees and the Internally Displaced	Swarna Rajagopalan	October 2004
18	Drugs and Development in Afghanistan	William Byrd Christopher Ward	December 2004
19	Understanding Local Level Conflict Pathways in Developing Countries: Theory, Evidence and Implications from Indonesia	Patrick Barron Claire Q. Smith Michael Woolcock	December 2004



SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT  
ENVIRONMENTALLY AND SOCIALLY SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT  
The World Bank  
1818 H Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20433 USA  
Fax: 202-522-3247  
E-mail: [socialdev@worldbank.org](mailto:socialdev@worldbank.org)  
Website: <http://www.worldbank.org/socialdevelopment>

Also published as Social Development Paper No. 75