8 Archaeology and heritage in the conflict zone

Lessons from the Moluccas

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Introduction

For over five years beginning in 1999, violent social conflict in the Maluku province in eastern Indonesia (also known as the Moluccas) affected archaeological research and to some extent reset the role of the past to the present in the region. Since the end of violence, contemporary residents of Maluku have been increasingly interested in exploring their unique identity through their history, culture and archaeological heritage. This paper reflects on the role of archaeology and material cultural heritage before, during and after Maluku's conflict period. We provide these reflections from two different perspectives: Marlon Ririmasse as a Maluku resident who has spent most of his career living and working in the region, and Peter Lape, as an American foreign to Maluku, who has had a more sporadic presence in Maluku in both pre- and post-conflict times.

Below, we provide background to the ancient and recent history of Maluku, particularly its period of violent conflict in the early 21st century. As we discuss, this period of factional conflict has had a major impact on the practice of archaeology and on related efforts in heritage management in the region, and has provided a new impetus for engaged archaeology based on the cultural framework and desires of the residents of Maluku. In many ways, archaeology in Maluku is now more than ever driven by community concerns. This situation has analogs in other parts of the world (c.f. Lightfoot 2008; Smith and Wobst 2005; Winter 2008), but we believe the unique history of Maluku and the trajectory of its archaeology provides other ways of thinking about the role of archaeology and the past in the present.

Background

Maluku is one of the 34 provinces of Indonesia, located in eastern Indonesia and bounded by Australia to the south and Philippines to the north (Figure 8.1). It is much less densely populated than other parts of Indonesia, with current population approximately 1.5 million compared to the 280 million total population of Indonesia. Maluku was historically known as

the Spice Islands, the only source for exotic commodities nutmeg and clove. These spices were a major attraction for the outside world to reach Maluku, bringing global religions of Islam and Christianity from other parts of Asia, the Arab world and Europe. Maluku was the first region in Indonesia colonized by the Portuguese, beginning in the early 16th century, then by the Dutch in the early 17th century lasting until the mid-20th century. Not surprisingly, the Moluccas archipelago is the region with the largest number of European forts in Indonesia.

Contact and interaction with the outside world has contributed to the pluralistic and culturally diverse characteristic of these islands. Maluku

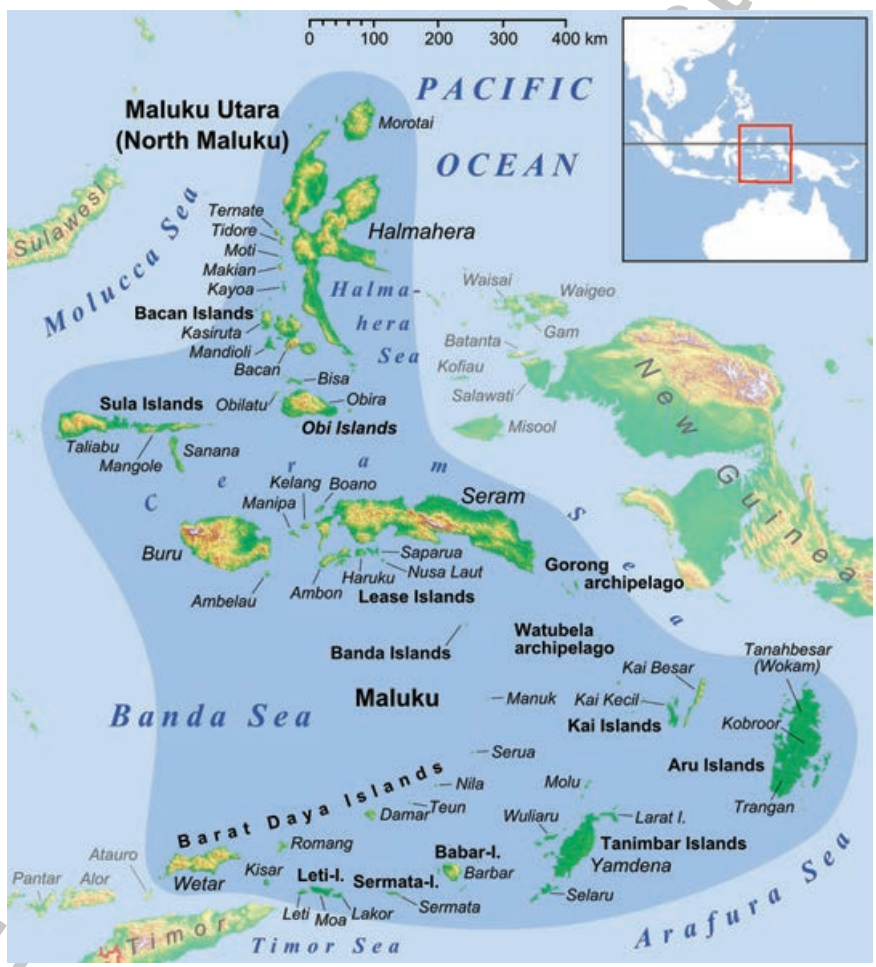

Figure 8.1 Figure 8.1 Maluku and North Maluku Provinces, Indonesia. Map credit, Sadalmelik, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Maluku_Islands_en.png.

is home to several major Islamic sultanates such as Ternate and Tidore. Islamic belief and culture have also influenced islands in central Maluku, as has Christianity in the central and southeast islands. Despite the role of Islam and Christianity as the main religions, local beliefs are still practiced as a part of daily life in many traditional communities in the region. It is also common to see interfaith relations in the region. Muslim and Christian communities often have kin relationships that refer to their historical setting. For centuries, this relationship has been expressed traditionally in the concept known as *pela gandong*. *Pela* is the form of inter-community alliance base on customary agreements in the past. *Gandong* is kinship based on genealogical history. The *pela gandong* concept is still actively practiced with ritual and ceremonies in many parts of Maluku today.

Commonly preserved through oral history traditions, *pela gandong* relationships are usually represented in the form of material culture as shared heritage. An example of this material embodiment is *Negeri lama* ("ancient towns/polities"). These places, which are identified by archaeologists as open sites that often include the remains of fortified structures and dolmens, have served as places of collective memories of communal unity in the past. At the interfaith level, traces of this relationship might be identified in the particular elements of religious buildings which symbolically represented as the contribution of different religious communities in the construction process. In southeast Maluku, a large area with hundreds of small islands, family and village heirlooms also serve as the representation of interfaith relationships in the past.

The violent conflict in Maluku

January 19, 1999, was a major turning point in the history of Maluku. On that day, a clash erupted between two groups at a bus station in Ambon, Maluku's capital city. In a matter of days, the conflict escalated and expanded to other places in the region, evolving from a minor social clash into a major bloody conflict with religious overtones. For the next five years, Maluku went through one of the darkest times in its history (Goss 2000).

The impact of this sectarian conflict was substantial. The death toll is estimated to have reached into the thousands, many more lost their homes and became refugees, and every Moluccan was touched in some way. This period coincided with a major economic crisis in Indonesia as well as the end of the 31-year-long Suharto regime and an abrupt transition to a more democratic political structure and relaxing of media restrictions. The Moluccan economy collapsed and was fundamentally changed. Public facilities were damaged as well as public services and governmental activities. Education activities were abandoned due to safety concerns. The harmonic pluralistic social configuration that has been a central part of Moluccan identity for centuries was fundamentally destroyed. Communities were segregated, separated according to religious background and guarded by soldiers. During

the period of highest tensions from 1999 to 2002, Maluku province was under military control. Civilian government carried out some functions, but was essentially under the supervision of the security troops.

In 2005, a peace agreement between Muslim and Christian communities was facilitated by the Indonesian central government in Jakarta. This marked the beginning of a rebuilding of trust between these communities, and since then, violence has mostly ceased and economic and social conditions have slowly recovered. Today, over two decades after the conflict began, Maluku has transformed into the one most socially and economically vibrant regions in Indonesia.

Maluku's experience in recovering from conflict has become a model at the national level and also has been adopted as a reference for other community-based peace approaches. One essential aspect of this process was how communities in Maluku embraced a cultural approach to facilitating the peace process. Culture, as the foundation of Moluccan history and the identity of its people for centuries, proved to be an effective vehicle in reconciling conflict and rebuilding communal trust and unity.

Cultural heritage in war and peace

During the period of most intense violent conflict in Maluku, many cultural heritage sites that were viewed as the reflection of religion were damaged or destroyed. These losses included numerous iconic heritage and archaeological sites. The wisdom of customary relationships that united culturally diverse communities was questioned and with that, sites that related to materialization of communal identity were targeted for attack. Nevertheless, the traditional concept of communal kinship is one of the fundamentals that has served as the buffer to avoid the expansion of the conflict to an even wider scale in the region (Thorburn 2008).

During the times of highest tension during conflict, these collective communal kinship memories served as a reminder of a uniquely Moluccan tradition of cross-religious ties and unity, and as a voice of resistance to non-Moluccan outside provocateurs who were documented as inciting some of the violence. It is interesting that in the process of peacemaking and social recovery in Maluku, cultural heritage has been adopted as a vehicle of identity and communal bonds, used as a medium to share collective memories of Maluku as a pluralistic and harmonious region. While cultural diversity was blamed as the trigger for the conflict, cultural diversity was also adopted as the key for conflict resolution. The common understanding of *pela gandong* became a theme to build support for peace. This theme included the commemorative practices about this tradition along with all related material heritage. In the era of post-conflict recovery, the intensity of ceremonies related to the *pela gandong* concept was increased (Braithwaite and Dunn 2010). There, we can see what has been lost during conflict. Communities with different religion and beliefs are united by custom.

As of 2020, although scars remain, the Maluku region has recovered its cultural identity as a place of interfaith connections and pluralism. This is supported by observing the number of religious heritage sites which were destroyed during the conflict that have now been restored. That these sites are viewed as shared heritage across lines of faith further supports our view of recovery. Most telling is that many people who had to leave their homes and land during the conflict have now returned.

Archaeological practice in Maluku

It is in this historical dynamic of conflict that the past few decades of archaeological research in Maluku is situated. Below, we discuss the research activities of the Balai Arkeologi Maluku (originally called Balai Arkeologi Ambon), the government institution responsible for the archaeology in the region as well as the activities of other Indonesian and foreign researchers, situated in the wider context of Indonesian archaeology We believe that these experiences can suggest how archaeology as a discipline might contribute its knowledge for promoting peace, and how archaeologists can engage their research practice with contemporary, socially relevant issues.

The history of archaeology in Indonesia is often believed to have its origins in the collecting and documenting work of European visitors, such as Rumphius or Raffles in the 18th and early 19th centuries. However, people in the territory that became the Dutch East Indies and later the Republic of Indonesia have a long tradition of historical scholarship, while the commemoration and management of material cultural heritage predates the colonial period (Tanudirjo 1995). After independence in the 1940s, the Indonesian government built on colonial administrative and education structures to create the various centers of archaeological study in place today, including several university departments, a national research center, museums and government heritage management agencies (Simanjuntak 2017). Today, Indonesia's long and unique archaeological record is included in international scholarly debates, and Indonesian archaeologists are increasingly taking the lead on new research and publications.

Although the work of Rumphius and other early European scholars highlighted the archaeology of Maluku, more intensive archaeological study in the region was very limited before the 1990s. Some Indonesian scholars conducted surveys and other work was done by British archaeologists. However, research results were published in restricted academic journals (in English) or in inaccessible government reports and was not known by the vast majority of Moluccans. Beginning in the 1990s, archaeological research activities in Maluku became more common. The contribution of foreign researchers was still significant, as reflected by a number of collaborative research projects involving foreign institutions with Indonesian national research institution and local universities. The area of focus was Seram Island, the Aru Islands and the Banda Islands (Lape 2000; Ririmasse 2005; Spriggs 1998).

An important moment during this period was the establishment of Balai Arkeologi Ambon in 1995 (recently renamed as Balai Arkeologi Maluku). This new research center was an effort by the central government in Jakarta to develop permanent research infrastructure in regions with high research potential, such as Maluku. In the beginning, Balai Arkeologi Ambon only had two archaeologists on staff. With this limited number of trained personnel, most of the research conducted was preliminary, with relatively small scope, focus and results. Similarly, there was not sufficient staff to carry out public outreach programs. As a result, archaeology was still virtually unknown to most people living in Maluku.

Three years after the Balai Arkeologi Ambon was established, the conflict period began in Maluku. The conflict had a large impact on the archaeological studies carried out by Balai staff, as research activities were severely constrained due to safety concerns. During period 1999–2003 almost no research was conducted in the region. The activities of the Balai staff were limited to bureaucratic matters and the entire province of Maluku was closed to foreign researchers.

As conditions improved after 2003, archaeological research activities also slowly recovered. In 2006, the institution hired new archaeologists to expand research activities. In the same year, a peer-reviewed journal of the institution, *Kapata Arkeologi*,[1] was first published, and collaborative research with foreign institutions was reinitiated. A 2007 collaborative project on Pulau Ay in the Banda Islands involving the Balai, Universitas Gadjah Mada and the University of Washington was the first international collaborative research in Maluku after the conflict, and it included a public outreach program to share the results of the field work with local students and community members (Figure 8.2). These efforts were expanded to other Banda Islands in a 2009 collaborative field school with the same group of institutional partners. Since then, archaeological research activities in Maluku have continually increased in pace and impact, particularly in the number, frequency and coverage of research projects conducted by the Balai Arkeologi Maluku or the Pusat Penelitian Arkeologi Nasional (Indonesian National Archaeology Research Center) based in Jakarta. International collaborative research projects have increased and contributed significantly to our knowledge on Maluku archaeology as represented in a growing number of publications.

In recent years, Balai Arkeologi Maluku staff have developed new public outreach programs on the theme of pluralism and identity. These programs are presented in the form of seminars, exhibitions and site visits to historical churches and mosques in order to share pluralism experience for participants. The aim is simply that by recognizing this shared heritage, younger generations can learn that they came from the same roots of identity. Other programs like the *Archaeology Goes to School* help share archaeological knowledge with younger generations and enrich their perspectives on local culture history. Balai staff are also working to develop new ways of sharing

Figure 8.2 Elementary school students visited a post-research exhibition conducted in the small island of Pulau Ay in the Banda Islands 2007, during the first international collaboration research after the Maluku conflict. Photo: Emily Peterson.

knowledge with Maluku's widespread communities. The *Kapata Arkeologi* journal has articles in both Indonesian and English language and is available free online. Websites and social media are now being used to promote archaeological studies in the region and Balai staff are engaged in collaborations with partners in the local young creative community (such as artists and filmmakers) who are popular in social media with a large number of followers (Ririmasse 2015; 2018).

Perspectives of a foreign archaeologist

Given the historical context and perspectives provided above by a Moluccan archaeologist who has spent much of his professional career in Maluku (Ririmasse), below we reflect on perspectives on engagement by an American archaeologist trained in the US (Lape) who has worked sporadically in Maluku in the pre- and post-conflict times:

As an American archaeologist trained in the 1990s in an American university, working in Indonesia presented many contrasts to the situation at home. In the US, the discipline was experiencing the waning days of conflict between processual and post-processual theory, and the early days of an increasingly prominent place for American indigenous voices. The passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA)

in 1990 and subsequent conflicts over its implementation seeped into nearly every aspect of archaeological practice in the US. High-profile cases like the lawsuit over the Ancient One (aka Kennewick Man) were at the center of attention amongst my graduate school cohort (cf. Thomas 2001; Watkins 2001). Many of us felt a generational divide between old ways of practice and increasingly prominent calls for equity and real consultation with descendant communities (e.g. Atalay 2012; Gonzalez et al. 2020). This focus, just emergent in the late 1990s, has now become a central set of issues in American archaeology and in many other world regions, encompassing a suite of perspectives such as indigenous archaeology and decolonizing actions (e.g. Acabado and Martin 2020; Altschul et al. 2018; Atalay et al. 2016; Lydon and Rizvi 2016; Oland et al. 2012).

In 1997, I began my first archaeological fieldwork in Indonesia. On the one hand, it was refreshing to experience my positionality as an archaeologist as simply unknown rather than as an embodiment of a colonialist, extractive and racist science. Archaeology was not something most people in eastern rural Indonesia had heard of, and for the few who did, it did not come with the negative associations typically held by many people in Native communities in the US. It was wonderful for me to begin with a relatively blank slate. While every step of my work in Indonesia required asking for permission and for collaboration with Indonesian colleagues, in the 1990s US, non-Native archaeologists could work almost anywhere without even talking with people in Native communities. Although this is rapidly changing now, full collaboration with indigenous and/or descendant communities is still unusual in many archaeological projects in the US.

On the other hand, different challenges emerged for which I was less prepared with my American attitudes and framing. In the waning days of the Suharto dictatorship in Indonesia (which ended in mid-1998), the struggle between central government control and local powers was simmering just under the surface. Even though my research permits from Jakarta ostensibly gave me the right to conduct my research, of course I still had to ask for local permission, from political and spiritual leaders at the village or town level as well as landowners. In one case, I was denied permission to excavate at a potentially very interesting site on Banda Naira island, which triggered a diverse range of responses from other people, some of whom questioned that leader's authority to deny my request, and his knowledge of the history that was at the basis of his reasons for denial (see Lape 2000 for details). The fact was that an authoritarian central government had repressed the development of regional and local power structures. Archaeology could be caught in the middle of these rapidly changing and contested lines of authority.

Other issues also arose. In the absence of previous knowledge of archaeology, some people in the Banda Islands community explained the activities of our team in terms they were familiar with. For example, many assumed that we were hunting for buried treasure, as markets for antique tradeware

ceramics and precious metals were just expanding in those days. I tried to counter these rumors with increased public outreach activities. But even with a relatively extensive program of open house days at the excavation pits and intensive work with a group of high school students culminating in an exhibit (Lape 2003), many people could not get accurate information about our objectives, and I did not have the tools or skills (nor had I reserved sufficient time) to reach everyone who was interested in our work.

In 1999, just as I was planning to return to Indonesia for a third field season, the Maluku region began a period of violent conflict described above. I was unable to obtain permission for further field work (and I'm not sure I would have been brave enough to return even if I would have been granted a permit). I subsequently shifted my focus to Timor Leste, which was emerging from its own period of violent conflict, only recently open to foreign archaeologists. The realities of contemporary life in these conflict zones had a major impact on my own archaeological research questions, resulting in many years of work focused on questions of the origins and expressions of group conflict and warfare, particularly in Timor Leste (Field and Lape 2010; Lape 2016; 2006; Lape and Chao 2008; Lape and Hert 2011; Lape et al. 2020).

In 2007, I was finally able to return to Maluku, and have since experienced several field seasons there, in the Banda Islands, Seram, and the Watubela archipelago as have several of my US-based graduate student advisees. I have found post-conflict Maluku to be very different from the Maluku of the late 1990s. Not only has the conflict itself transformed the social and physical landscape of the region, so has the democratic revolution of Indonesia after the downfall of Suharto. Not to be downplayed has been the transformation brought by economic development, greatly expanded internet access, mobile phones, media and social media, transportation, education and health systems etc.

There are several ways Indonesia's and Maluku's transformation has impacted my own field projects. Along with democratic reforms, Indonesia has been rapidly decentralizing political and administrative power to the provincial and lower levels. I am now required to obtain a provincial permit in addition to my national research permit, and permission requirements at lower levels of government are now more clearly spelled out. This has had the effect primarily of better information transfer about my work to lower levels of government. Sub-province government officials at the regency (*kabupatan*) and district (*kecamatan*) officials are normally notified about our fieldwork before we arrive, and as a result are readier to work with us to communicate project goals to town-level (*desa*) officials.

In general, I have found post-conflict residents in Maluku considerably more likely to be aware of archaeology and the value of cultural heritage than during pre-conflict times. This is likely the result, in part, of better access to information via the education, mass media and internet revolution. Adding to this is the work of institutions like Balai Arkeologi Maluku,

which have made highly visible and effective efforts at public outreach and education across the region (as outlined above). I should note that while people in post-conflict Maluku have heightened awareness of the language and framework of archaeology and cultural heritage, people during pre-conflict times were very engaged in and concerned with history. Knowledge of history, by whatever means, has long been a signifier of wisdom and power in Maluku. Before widespread digital media availability, this knowledge was held and controlled by intellectual elites who shared their knowledge though traditional forms like storytelling and management of ceremonies (Ellen 1997; Lape 2002; 2004). This knowledge has quickly become decentralized, and in some ways, younger generations with better knowledge of internet and mobile phone technology have advantaged access to information over their elders.

Discussion

In our words above, we hope to have emphasized how objects and places of material cultural heritage have played a central role in Maluku as touchstones for history, symbols of interfaith cooperation, and symbols of the enemy. Archaeologists who want to engage contemporary communities with our research must work to understand these extra-archaeological aspects of our "sites". We must also recognize that these aspects are constantly shifting. For example, the meaning of *negeri lama* in many parts of Maluku dramatically changed in a very short time during the conflict period and have since shifted again. People in the living communities near places of archaeological interest may not use or even know the language and objectives of archaeological research, but they almost always have an interest in those places. Sometimes that interest is a matter of life and death. These observations closely match those of engaged archaeologists working in other parts of Southeast Asia and other regions (e.g. Brockwell et al. 2013; Heng et al. 2020; Shoocongdej 2007; 2017).

Archaeological knowledge can have a powerful impact on community values and concerns. The fact that our results are usually published in academic venues, out of reach of most non-academics, enhances its power (as elite knowledge), but often removes us as the primary communicators to public audiences. For example, our 2007 excavations of a Neolithic site (c. 3500 BP) were the subject of a local newspaper story in Ambon (Fofid 2007). We invited a respected and trusted reporter to interview us, and the story he produced emphasized a new angle: that Muslim and Christian Moluccans had a deep shared history that predated the relatively recent arrival of Islam and Christianity. By working directly with schools, religious leaders and through community exhibits and social media outlets, Balai staff have been able to communicate the shared heritage of *negeri lama* sites, their antiquity and global importance directly to public audiences. However, much

work remains to be done to better educate all levels of Moluccan society across the region about the value and history of archaeological sites and their potential to connect communities to different aspects of their history.

What does this mean for the archaeologist who values these community concerns? It is clear to us that getting to know community concerns, frameworks and meanings is not a side job. This knowledge is not obtainable on a day off from excavation. It requires true commitment, vigilance, language skills and open lines of communication. This is not part of the traditional job description of an archaeologist, who is expected to be highly mobile, moving from one high-profile site to the next, staying "above" village politics and active within academic and archaeological social spheres (c.f. Colwell 2016). There remains a tension between the demands of quantifiable impact scholarship and publication in the academy, and the equally important need for scholars to communicate their work outside these academic spheres. Without active participation in non-academic discussions, media industries quickly fill these spaces with pseudoscience and fantastic claims, which ultimately devalue the true meaning of heritage and history (Tanudirjo 2017).

In many ways, the skills and time required to become sufficiently knowledgeable about community relationships to material cultural heritage are only available to a member of that community or a closely related one. For the foreign archaeologist, for whom this kind of deeper community knowledge is virtually unattainable while still respecting commitments to jobs and family at home, there are many risks of misunderstanding community concerns and of unintentionally harming material cultural heritage through misguided public outreach efforts. However, the experiences with different communities that foreign archaeologists may have had can bring new insights into a local situation and may be illuminating in contrast. We believe that meaningful collaboration between foreign and local researchers, with all parties maintaining a commitment to community engagement, can be an excellent way to bring diverse perspectives to bear on the complexities of heritage.

Note

1 http://kapata-arkeologi.kemdikbud.go.id/index.php/kapata.

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