

The Past in The Present: Segregation and Relational Peacebuilding in Ambon

Abstract

This dissertation is a study of segregation and the peace processes in Ambon in the aftermath of the 1999-2004 wars. Here I argue that (religious) segregation in Ambon that was put in place under the Dutch colonial administration and is sustained-maintained throughout the (post)colonial history of Ambon to the present time is coloniality of power manifested. Nonetheless, relational peacebuilding-cultivating as practised by grassroots peace initiatives in Ambon has been their (our) way to recover what was erased by coloniality. In other words, relational peacebuilding in Ambon is decoloniality in praxis.

In the first part of this dissertation, I take a closer look at religious segregation as one of the key elements of the wars. The already existing segregation in Ambon laid the ground for the 1999-2004 wars, and in turn, was reinforced and exacerbated by the wars. Using a decolonial lens I argue that a study about segregation requires to be positioned in an understanding of modernity/coloniality projects in different stages of Ambon history since European colonial time to the present-day Indonesian (post)colonial politics. This sheds light on the plural experiences of being Muslim and being Christian in Ambon.

To empirically substantiate this argument, in the second part of this dissertation, I look closely into peacebuilding initiatives that navigated the inherited segregation while aiming to restore peaceful coexistence after the devastating wars. This research draws upon extensive fieldwork that involves several visits to Ambon and continuous conversations with those contributing to this research; conversations that span the whole length of this research. Consistent with its (feminist) decolonial lens, this research also draws upon an approach that includes personal-bodily experience(s) of wars, visits to Ambon, encounters with fellow Malukuans during and beyond those visits, conversations — formal and informal, sharing of stories and (re)memories with those contributing to this research, as well as dialogues with literature(s).

The research finds that at the centre of the explored peacebuilding practices in Ambon throughout and following the 1999-2004 wars, is to bring back to life the relationality of *Orang Basudara* — a deeply rooted cosmology and everyday practice of being related to one another despite differences and tensions across history. While for some groups this relationality of *Orang Basudara* remains as a romanticisation of ‘unity in diversity’, for some others this cosmology-practice incorporates decolonising power relations in politics and in everyday life as part and parcel of peacebuilding-cultivating. This relational strategy for conviviality, mainly understood here as coexistence, is a praxical concept of decolonial peacebuilding.

This dissertation thus contributes to the current scholarship on conflict and peace by first analysing segregation through a decolonial lens in order to understand it as part and parcel of the social formation of modernity/coloniality. Secondly, it theorises peace as a relational process that requires decolonial actions/options as exemplified by grassroots peace actors in Ambon. Last but not least, this dissertation also contributes to growing scholarship on Ambon by incorporating decolonial critique/analysis that is absent so far.

Key Words:

Segregation, modernity/coloniality, relationality, conviviality, *Orang Basudara*, decolonial peacebuilding, Ambon/Maluku