CHAPTER VI

Violence in Waikabubak

What is written in Indonesian history about the dramatic period from 1997 to 1998 all seems to focus on what happened in Jakarta, or at least on Java.¹ For Indonesians in other regions the change in regime was perhaps not the most significant event of 1998. How people, for example, in Ambon or West Timor or Sulawesi experienced the transition in the national capital only became matter of wide scholarly interest after large incidences of communal violence in those regions attracted attention. Consequences of national regime change created the circumstances under which local tensions became salient and evolved into mass violence.

The student demonstrations in Java set the example for people elsewhere in Indonesia to demonstrate against the violations of their interests and rights. In West Sumba people protested publicly against the corrupt and nepotistic practices of the *bupati*, who allegedly gave priority to his own ethnic group in hiring civil service. What was new was that open criticism of the head of (regional) government was allowed, and that issues of ethnicity, race, class or religion (SARA)² were no longer taboo and could therefore be used in articulating grievances. Tensions in Waikabubak over local issues increased within the national atmosphere of uncertainty culminated into a day of severe violence in the streets of Waikabubak.³

¹ All contributions in Arief Budiman, Barbara Hatley and Damien Kingsbury (1999) focus on what happened in Java and more specifically in Jakarta.

² SARA is the abbreviation of *suku, agama, ras dan antar golongan*.

³ This chapter is a modified version of the article 'Tribal battle in a remote island; Crisis and violence in Sumba (Eastern Indonesia),' (Vel 2001) originally published in the journal *Indonesia*. I thank the editors of *Indonesia* for their permission to reprint.

Bloody Thursday according to CNN

On 6 November 1998 CNN reported: 'Tribal battle in Eastern Indonesia kills 19, police say'. This news message followed:

'Thousands of rival tribesmen fought a pitched battle with spears and knives on a remote eastern Indonesian island, killing at least 19 people, police said on Friday.

The fighting on Thursday in the western part of Sumba, a barren and inhospitable island southeast of Bali, had been brought under control with police reinforcements, Colonel Engkesman Ehilep, the chief of East Nusa Tenggara province, said.

He told Reuters that 19 people were killed in the fighting between members of the Loli and Wewewa tribes but had no word how many were injured. Ehilep said about 3,000-4,000 people were involved in the battle attacking each other with rocks, knives and spears. Tension amounted in the area on Wednesday after rumours spread that one tribe was planning an attack, he said. Ehilep said about 150 policemen were usually posted on the island and they had been supported by reinforcement of about 60 more troops. Some 100 more troops were on their way to Sumba.

The Jawa Pos newspaper reported on Friday that 100 people were believed to have been killed.

Sumba is renowned for its ikat textiles and was once a rich source of sandalwood before over-cutting brought down its stocks. But it is a hot, dry island and has few of the tourist attractions which mark other islands in eastern Indonesia.⁴

In this chapter I describe and analyse what happened on the day of mass violence in Waikabubak, which was afterwards named 'Bloody Thursday' (Kamis Berdarah). Contrary to what the CNN news lines suggest, this was not a mere isolated incident, but it was one of the first cases in a long series of acts of political violence in Indonesia's regions. After the violent riots in Waikabubak on 6 November, there was the 'Ketapang Tragedy' in Jakarta on the 22 November, followed by the 'Kupang Tragedy' on 30 November and 1 December, which was followed up by communal riots in Sulawesi on 6 December. Violence on Ambon only started in January 1999 and lasted much longer than just a few days. Each violent riot in this period had a local and a national component, a short-term reason why violence was provoked and a history of tensions in which this particular event was embedded. In the last section of this chapter I will discuss how 'Bloody Thursday' in West Sumba relates to other cases of mass violence in Indonesia from the period between 1998 and 2001.

In this chapter I examine the Waikabubak violence as a phase in Sumbanese political history. This means that I do not regard it as a 'spontaneous incident'

⁴ <http://cnn.com/WORLD/asiapcf/9811/06/RB002826.reut.html> (accessed on 9-11-1998).

that could only happen in 1998 because of the turmoil nationally in Indonesia. Bloody Thursday fits into a long history of elite struggle in West Sumba. Paul Brass (2003) had developed an approach which views violence as a process, in which one can distinguish phases in riot production, based on his research on Hindu-Muslim riots in India over 30 years. Applied to 'Bloody Thursday', it enables a sophisticated and long-term analysis of the violent events in Waikabubak in November 1998.

Explaining communal violence

Brass's approach, as described in *The production of Hindu-Muslim violence in contemporary India* focuses the attention on the role of politicians who encourage violence along religious or ethnic lines. These politicians translate local, more general conflicts in communal terms, thereby enforcing boundaries between social groups and transforming those groups into political constituencies. A central point of attention in his analysis of riots is the question: when a local incident, involving individuals with potentially multiple identities, is converted into communal conflict, implicating larger collectivities, is the shift caste, ethnic or religious based in nature (Hedman 2005:134-50)? Brass (2003:32) considers communal violence, where riots are endemic, as functional part of an 'institutionalized riot system, in which known persons and groups occupy specific roles in the rehearsal for and the production of communal violence'. The phases follow a sequential pattern in which planned steps in the production of violence are combined with spontaneous actions.

The third phase which Brass distinguishes, after preparation or rehearsal, and activation, is the explanation or interpretation of the violence. Ordinary people, the media, police and the civil authorities all have their own explanations of the occurrences of riots, and what evolves is a struggle for control of the meaning of riots in their aftermath (Brass 2003:24).

The multiple functions served by capturing the meaning [...] of an inter-communal, interethnic or inter-religious riot include legitimising illegitimate violence, concealing the extent of preplanning and organization that preceded it, and maintaining intact the persons, groups, and organizations most deeply implicated in the violence by preventing punishment of the principal perpetrators (Brass 2003:14).

Discourse analysis is the most appropriate method to distinguish the different stories constructed to explain the violence. Brass points at the connections of these small stories to a 'master narrative': a large, nation- or even worldwide discourse in which a particular incident of communal violence fits. Bloody Thursday according to CNN is an example of such a discourse. It situates

Motorcyclists are the champions of spreading rumour that will inflict mass violence

violence in Waikabubak in an image of Indonesia as a beautiful tourist destination, apart from a few islands where indigenous tribes fight their primitive wars. It suggests that the army and police restore order at short notice, so that stability is not threatened. There seems to be no historical background, nor a connection to national developments or politics, and the violence is just an incident. This image of Indonesia is in accordance with New Order state propaganda which wants to attract foreign tourism.

The main questions to be answered for any case of communal violence, and here specifically for 'Bloody Thursday' in Waikabubak, are (a) what happened in each successive phase from the 'triggering accident' up to the large scale violence? (b) why did this violence occur in Waikabubak, at that particular moment? (c) how is the violence explained by different actors or sources?, and (d) whose interests were served? To answer these questions I will follow Brass' phases of riot production.

Preparation: master narratives, previous antagonisms and crisis discourse

What preceded the violent events in November 1998? How can 'Bloody Thursday' be regarded as an escalation of previously existing tensions? How did national discourses encourage local violence? First, there is the local master narrative of perpetual enmity between the sub-ethnic groups in West Sumba, of which Loli and Wewewa are two examples. Second, violence has always been part of Sumbanese culture and if applied in a functional and regulated way it is not regarded illegitimate. Third, the main back-stage actors in Waikabubak's violence have a longer history of rivalry. Fourth, the national crisis discourse in 1998 inflated feelings of insecurity among West Sumba's population. Lastly, the reports on wide spread corruption, collusion and nepotism – addressed with the acronym KKN – reached Sumba and supported suspicion towards the bureaucracy and encouraged civil protest.

Narrative one: clan rivalries

One of the 'master narratives' in which the antagonism between the fighting parties on 'Bloody Thursday' was framed was the discourse of perpetual clan-rivalries in West Sumba.

The people of West Sumba describe the enmity between domains as timeless, an opposition that came before history and could never be mediated or resolved. People who did not share a common language or ancestor were 'strangers' [...] and the cycle of revenge killing between traditional enemies was compared by the West Sumbanese to the slow-burning coals of ironwood and tamarind trees [...], which are never extinguished. In contrast, feuding between people related by descent or marriage was said to be intense but short-lived, like flames in tall grass or bushes [...], which flare up fiercely but just as quickly burn out. The societies of west Sumba have few piece-making rituals, since the territories themselves were said to be 'at odds' with each other. (Hoskins 1996:233-4.)

In the nineteenth century neighbouring domains were unsafe territories, where a stranger could easily get caught and be sold as a slave. In her article 'The heritage of headhunting; History, ideology and violence on Sumba, 1890-1990', Hoskins (1996:232) argues that in the pre-colonial age feuding in West Sumba was not so much aimed at control over land as it was in East Sumba; rather it concerned control over people. She explains the difference by the relatively greater rainfall in West Sumba that made arable land available in abundance:

There was a shortage of people to work the land, and of pigs, horses and buffalo to raise on it. Stealing livestock was a prime motivation to raiding a neighbouring

region, as was capturing slaves to keep or sell to Endehnese pirates who operated along the north coast (Hoskins 1996:233).

Although interregional warfare is regarded as a part of the past, its heritage in the present appears in hostile discourse and in the inclination of leaders to legitimise their authority by mobilising visible crowds of their ethnic fellow-men as followers.

Even in twenty first century Sumba one can often hear Sumbanese speak of others in terms of these sub-ethnic categories, referring to the traditional domains. In this generalising type of daily conversation, *orang Loli*, for example, have a reputation as notorious thieves and thugs.⁵ In the recent past there were several clashes between orang Loli and orang Wewewa. The last major one was in 1991, it was about a land dispute. Population density in Wewewa and Loli is relatively high and land has become scarcer than it was in the past. Additionally, members of the Loli clan have seen their land increasingly occupied by Waikabubak's town expansion. 'Strangers' employed in government administration, schools or businesses have taken over their original village territory. The 1991 conflict was settled with a peace-making ceremony in which each side swore an oath, using traditional ritual speech, to never again invade the territory of the other. At that peace-making ceremony, the *bupati* of West Sumba who was in office at that time, Umbu Djima, was prominently in attendance, as were leaders of the Christian Church. In daily life there was antagonism between the two groups in town, because many people from Wewewa work in town as petty traders and small shop keepers and are more successful in business than the Loli clan members in Waikabubak. Many members of both groups are Christians. The Loli group who adheres strongly to the Marapu beliefs are very prominent and visible because their dwellings are located on the hill top in the centre of Waikabubak, in the old kampong Lai Tarung, the Mother Village of Loli.

Narrative two: violence, warfare and violent rituals in West Sumba

Another ideological framework into which the violent riots in Waikabubak fit concerns the perception of violence in West Sumba. Traditionally violence is regarded as a legitimate means to certain ends. Since there was no central state in Sumba before 1900, local rules are used to decide which type of violence was functional, appropriate and legitimate. Head hunting and preda-

⁵ Especially in Anakalang and Lawonda. In the *pilkada* election campaigns of June 2005 one of East Sumba's candidates hired *preman*-like campaign workers, for intimidation and rioting if necessary. They were commonly referred to as *orang Loli*.

tory raids were common practices between regions, like Loli and Wewewa. At the individual level performing violence is a way to prove masculinity. Concerning this, Hoskins (1996:227) quoted an old proverb from Kodi: 'a fierce youth becomes a wise old man': a successful warrior was considered to have earned a position of social importance and respect.

Violence is also incorporated in rituals. When people are gathering, feuding parties have to reconcile with each other before a ritual can be performed, and the ritual itself presents an occasion for dealing with emotions.

A series of rituals which is important for the analysis of 'Bloody Thursday' is called Podu.⁶ Podu is the festival that marks the start of the new agricultural year, when celebrants call for the first rains. The stars and constellations indicate the time for Podu rituals, and the rituals start three days after the full moon. In the Western calendar this takes place by the end of October. All the successive rituals of Podu⁷ facilitate a clean social start of the new year, by getting rid of 'bitterness and heat',⁸ and by renewing and strengthening social bonds. Some of the rituals of the Podu festival are very violent, such as the ritual hunting of wild pig. The hunt refers to part of the Sumbanese origin myth in which the wild pig represents evil. Apart from the ritual meaning, hunting wild boar in this period of the year is also very important for agriculture. At the end of the dry season when the fields are clear of crops and the least overgrown, the wild boars are relatively unprotected, and hunters can easily detect them. The crops will suffer less damage from the boars if their population is reduced at this time, just before the start of the annual rains. Catching a wild boar and the ritual consumption of its meat is very important for social purification at the start of the new year.

The second violent ritual relevant as a background for 'Bloody Thursday' is the *pasola*. The *pasola* is a ritual of warfare, a contest during which men riding horses throw wooden poles at one another. The participants in the *pasola* prepare themselves very thoroughly, making offerings to placate the angry spirits, dressing in their best cloths, decorating their horses with coloured ribbons. Roughly, the combating parties in the *pasola* are men from mountainous regions and men from communities living near the sea. Although the *pasola* looks like real warfare, it is domesticated violence. Violence occurs among the riders only and not among the onlookers who share and exchange food. The fighting is intense, but limited in space and time. The *ratu* are the super

⁶ Geirnaert-Martin (1992). The description of the Podu festival in this section is largely based on Geirnaert-Martin's book.

⁷ 'Ashes of life; The annual rituals of Lamboya, Sumba 1996', an ethnographic film by Erik de Maaker, Dirk Nijland and Danielle Geirnaert-Martin. Leiden: CNWS, 2000.

⁸ Traditionally the Sumbanese believe that 'bitterness and heat' – which cause people to fall ill and prevent animals and plants from thriving – are caused by human transgressions, such as incest and violent behaviour.

visors of the combat, and they sometimes verify the weight of the wooden poles, and indicate both the start and the end of the combat. Geirnaert-Martin reports that in Lamboya, the police, and also sometimes the army, have taken over some of the traditional role of the *ratu* as supervisors (Geirnaert-Martin 1992:293). This can perhaps be explained by the fact that the *pasola* has grown to be a major tourist attraction on Sumba, and every year there are thousands of spectators, both indigenous and foreign.

What is important about the two Podu rituals for understanding what happened on 'Bloody Thursday' is that these are clear examples of domesticated violence. The acts of violence are completely bounded by rules, and all parties involved accept the authority of the *ratu* to set the rules and indicate the end of the fight. Both rituals are firmly connected to natural occurrences: the position of stars and moon, the start of the rainy season and practices in agriculture. These connections are very important because they set the preconditions for the ritual. Successful performance of Podu rituals depends on continuity in preconditions. The latter include the availability of all material requirements for the rituals (like food, wild boar, pigs, horses), the continuity and predictability of the climate and more specifically the actual start of the rains by the end of October, and the social acceptance of the authority of the traditional ritual leaders. In 1998, these preconditions were not fulfilled. In October 1998 there was a 'ritual crisis' which forced the ritual leaders to find a new and creative ways of pursuing their interests.

Narrative three: local political rivalry

The October 1998 protest was not the first occasion on which the *bupati* of West Sumba, Rudolf Malo, was severely criticized. Since he was first assigned to the office in 1996, he had often been accused of making poor decisions, failing to secure enough food aid, and distributing funds inefficiently. Although he has a Sumbanese ethnic background (born as member of the Wewewa clan), he was generally regarded as an outsider during those times when people were dissatisfied with him, since he had lived most of his life in other parts of Indonesia and was married to a woman from another island. Rudolf Malo did not belong to nobility, nor were his parents in any other way famous leaders on Sumba. He owed his appointment as *bupati* to his status as officer (Colonel) in the Indonesian Armed Forces. His main rivals for *bupati* position were from Anakalang and Loli in 1996. His strongest opponent was the chairman of the parliament of West Sumba, Toda Lero Ora, a member of the Loli clan,⁹

⁹ Loli is the name of the clan residing in the area of Waikabubak and its surroundings. This

descendant of the raja Loli. Pak Lero¹⁰ was chairman of Golkar in 1996 and remained so at the time of writing this book in 2006. Throughout this period he has been the chairman of the regional assembly (DPRD) in Waikabubak. Pak Lero is affiliated through marriage alliance with the elite of Anakalang. Umbu Djima, who was *bupati* before Rudolf Malo for ten years, is married to Pak Lero's sister. Pak Lero agreed to act as Umbu Bintang's wife's family,¹¹ solving the problem that she was actually Javanese. When the couple returned from Java and sought a proper and complete kinship identity in Sumbanese society, this fictive kinship arrangement rendered Umbu Bintang into the position of Pak Lero's bride taking party, and thus slightly subordinate to Pak Lero. All these important men play their own role in processes that produced the violence in Waikabubak. Both marriage alliance and violence are strategies in West Sumba's elite rivalries.

Narrative four: national crisis discourse

In 1997-1998 *krisis* was the shorthand expression in Indonesia pertaining to a wide variety of problems. The *krismon* was the local expression for the financial crisis that hit the country in August 1997, leading to a dramatic devaluation of the Indonesian currency, rising consumer prices and loss of employment. Crisis was a vague national phenomenon that could be blamed for any adverse development such as illness or locust plague or rising prices, and it seemed that no one was able to turn the tide. It was *kristal*, a total crisis, or in the words of Arjun Appadurai (1999:305), 'a growing sense of radical social uncertainty about people, situations, events, norms and even cosmologies'. In such a situation ethnic violence can restore some clear social boundaries and reduce the feeling of uncertainty (Appadurai 1999:307).

The period of extreme weather conditions, with long droughts that alternated with shorter periods of abundant rainfall and floods generated the strongest 'crisis' for most Sumbanese in 1998. A major warming of the equatorial waters in the Pacific Ocean that caused shifts in 'normal' weather patterns, referred to as 'El Nino' was blamed for these phenomena. Most agriculture on Sumba, even the paddy cultivation is rain-fed. In this sense people are to some extent used to uncertainty. Yet in 1997-1998, the normal rain pattern was completely disturbed. On average, the rainy season starts in October or November and lasts until April. During the rainy season the rain falls regularly: every day a

geographical area is also referred to as Loli or Lauili. Wewewa is also referring to a clan, and to the area of this clan, west of Loli.

¹⁰ Toda Lero Ora is usually referred to as *Pak Lero* (mister Lero).

¹¹ See Chapter IX, where Umbu Bintang is one of the main candidates for *bupati* in the June 2005 elections.

shower that lasts for an hour or two, and in January there is usually a week in which it rains all day. In 1997, the first rains did not come until December and after a few weeks they stopped again. Like in other parts of Indonesia, El Nino brought long periods of drought. On Sumba two successive maize harvests failed, yielding only a quarter to half of the usual amount. The first months of 1998 were therefore hard for the population on Sumba; they had little income due to bad harvests, but prices were rising due to the *krismon*. The total volume of the paddy harvest on Sumba in 1998 was much less than usual.

In July, when it should be the heart of the dry season, it rained on Sumba. This occurrence of rainfall in the dry season prevented villagers from burning wastelands. Usually in August the villagers burn the fields to get rid of the old and dry grasses and shrubs so that fresh grasses can grow and livestock will have good fodder again. In 1998, the fields were so wet due to the July and August rains that they could not be set afire. The grasses, weeds and shrubs would not die and instead grew thick and tall.

When the time to celebrate Podu arrived, the ritual hunting of wild boar was to be part of it. Wild boars live in the wastelands, and hunters run over the hills and chase these boars with spears and knives. In November 1998, there could be no hunting, because the wastelands were overgrown with weeds, blocking the paths and the view and giving shelter to the wild boars. The cancellation of the ritual hunt caused problems for farmers whose dry land gardens are located adjacent to the wastelands, because the increased population of wild boars proved destructive, as they scavenged in the gardens, ruining the crops. The cancellation of the ritual hunt also posed serious problems for the *ratu*, because the hunt is an essential part of the annual cycle of rituals.

The *ratu* also faced another threatening effect of El Nino. Their type of knowledge and authority is partly based on reading the stars and constellations as points of reference in the local calendar to indicate the start and end of seasonal periods. The periods in this calendar are associated with specific local activities. Every ecological area has its own variant of the calendar, relating to plants that grow in that area or local activities that the inhabitants usually perform. The start of the planting season, and other moments in the agricultural cycle are connected to the phases of stars and constellations. Now that the pattern of rainfall was so radically different from usual, the local calendar lost its meaning as a guideline for agricultural practices. The old knowledge of the *ratu* could not give appropriate guidance for agriculture. Farmers on Sumba had to get used to listening to weather forecasts on radio or television, and make individual decisions in planning their activities.

When, in the first months of 1998, the drought continued, and there were real food shortages on Sumba, many programs for food aid were designed for the province of NTT. In November, during my visit, I heard that some of the funds meant to help the victims of the early 1998 drought had still not been

distributed in the villages. In general, the substantial aid-funds designated to assist the victims of drought in Sumba did not, for the most part, reach the villagers, but were pocketed by corrupt officials. The allegation of corruption was one of the main motivation for the national protests against KKN. Reformasi demonstrations demanded the end of these corrupt practices and prosecution of its perpetrators. In 1998, the anti-KKN discourse motivated individuals all over Indonesia to address these crimes. District government officials in Waikabubak were criticized for their inept management of successive food aid programs.

The financial crisis, *krismon*, hit Indonesia in August 1997. The Rupiah was devaluated. Prices of imported products rose precipitously, and consumer prices of basic household needs increased every day. In industry, many businesses had to be closed, and their employees were laid off from their jobs. These negative consequences by themselves were good reasons for protest. They intensified the frustrations that may have eventually lead to violence.

On Sumba, the effect of *krismon* was not as comprehensively negative. Most people in the rural area are self-employed and produce their own food. The farmers are producers, and especially paddy farmers, benefited from rising prices of the crops they sold. During my visit in November 1998, I noticed that the farmers were continuing to build new houses, which can be taken as evidence of relative prosperity. A man who earned his income from selling candlenuts and edible bird's nests built the most amazingly large house. Since both are export commodities, his earnings were comparatively good and he could afford to build a large house with a zinc roof.

In town the situation was worse. Those who depended on salaries faced difficult times because of rising prices. Local businessmen found that the government commissions for construction of buildings and roads were decreasing. Job opportunities were dwindling in the towns as well. One of the consequences of the *krismon* on Sumba was that the position of people from the rural area, as it related to their land, food, and economy, was improving relative to the position of people in town, who received salaries in money and now faced uncertain employment prospects.

Trigger incident

Many people in Sumba are convinced that the best strategy for avoiding worry about income and food and other material requirements, and for gaining respect, is to become a government official. Therefore, when the results of the selection tests for candidate government officials (CPNS)¹² were announced

¹² Calon pegawai negeri sipil.

on 24 October 1998, it disappointed many people who had applied and were rejected. In the Province NTT there were 27,000 candidates who competed for 1400 assignments as *pegawai negeri* (civil servants).¹³ The number of candidates eventually selected in Waikabubak turned out to be very low.

When it became clear that some candidates who had not even entered the test were selected, whereas others who had a sufficient score were not accepted, participants became furious.¹⁴ On 26 October 1998, 30 university graduates demonstrated in Waikabubak in front of the parliament building, protesting the systematic corruption of the civil service examinations that cheated them out of the jobs for which they had trained. There was no response from government side, and another demonstration followed on the 29 October. The protest became increasingly directed against the abuse of power by those office-holders who had used their influence to secure jobs for their relatives. When the *bupati* of West Sumba, Rudolf Malo, declared that solving the corruption problem at provincial level was not within his capacity and accused the demonstrators of being politically suspect, the demonstrators heckled *bupati* Malo and accused him personally of practising KKN (corruption, collusion and nepotism). By 29 October, the ongoing demonstration had grown to 200 participants, who demanded that the *bupati* accept responsibility for corruption and step down from office. In other parts of the province Nusa Tenggara Timur (in Alor, Flores and Kupang) there were similar demonstrations.

Transformation into communal conflict

On 29 October, the *bupati* felt seriously threatened by the demonstrators and by the parliamentary faction controlled by T.L. Ora, who could have used this disturbance to his political advantage. On 31 October, there was another demonstration in Waikabubak, and this time the demands of the demonstrators were even stronger. They insulted the *bupati* by calling him by his ancestor's name, an action considered to be extremely rude, since it tends to highlight and ridicule a person's ethnic background. The demonstration had evolved from a protest against KKN in regards to the civil service examinations to a protest specifically against *bupati* Malo and his supporters and relatives. The first demonstrators did not predominantly consist of *orang Loli*, but they were united by their shared experience as victims of corruption. As the demonstrations grew, more Loli participants from town and neighbouring villages

¹³ Source of the data for this section: *Pos Kupang*, 13-11-1998 and 15-11-1998, and personal interviews.

¹⁴ See also David Mitchell 1999.

joined. This Loli mob stoned and burned houses of many Wewewa people in town (Mitchell 1999:2). After this, the conflict subsumed the two parties along ethnic lines. The position of individuals with multiple identities in this inter-ethnic battle, became increasingly polarized.

On Monday, 2 November 1998, 500 people from Wewewa came to Waikabubak on trucks to stage a counter demonstration. In town they stayed at the homes of relatives of the *bupati*, and this raised suspicion that the *bupati* himself had invited the *orang* Wewewa to come and protect him. This would have been an unusual action, since it is the police's responsibility to guard the safety of people and the *bupati* in town. The rumour quickly circulated that 500 hostile *orang* Wewewa had entered town, and that the police had confiscated all their knives and other weapons. Such rumours are strong mobilization tools. Since the parliamentary chairman, T.L. Ora, maintained strong ties with the Police Commander, rumour also predicted that the police would protect Waikabubak's inhabitants (especially Loli) from attacks by Wewewa raiding parties. Tension in town grew.

On 4 November, report reached Waikabubak that one of its own residents, an *orang* Loli, had been murdered at the market of Ombarade in Wewewa. This was the last straw for the *orang* Loli, and they decided to get ready for action.

Elevation into a wider discourse

That night they gathered in the old *kampong* in the centre of town, where they held a *marapu* ritual. As explained above, November is the month of Podu. It is a holy month (*karamat*). It is the month for hunting wild boar. At the ritual in *kampong* Lai Tarung the *ratu* asked their *marapu*'s permission to substitute *orang* Wewewa for the wild boar. The *ratu* took a long leaf of a palm tree and split it in two. If the right part of the leaf broke off first, this would be taken as a sign that the *marapu* agreed to the substitution; if the left part broke off first, this meant 'not agreed'. Thrice, the right part was first. Strengthened by this clear approval of the *marapu*, *orang* Loli prepared for a battle. This added an abstract and more elevated level to the violence, making it more than revenge and enlisting the warriors to protect their whole ethnic group.

The Loli fighters also felt strengthened because they heard that T.L. Ora had said that the police would not harm them. To distinguish them from others, *orang* Loli had to wear a white headband or a string of palm leaf around their heads. On the same day, 4 November, report reached Wewewa saying that one of their clan members was murdered at the market in Waikabubak.

Early on the morning of 5 November, some 2000 Wewewa men arrived at the outskirts of Waikabubak. According to their version of events, they

came 'to protect their relatives in town'; according to the Loli interpretation of events that day, they came 'to raid and burn Loli houses and finally attack Lai Tarung'.¹⁵ Loli men went out and started to burn houses of *orang Wewewa* along one of the main roads from town. Fighting soon intensified, centred on the market place (*Pasar Inpres*), where a large number of people were killed. According to eyewitnesses, groups of *orang Loli* left their *kampung* in intervals to go to the area in town where *orang Wewewa* reside; these groups entered the houses of Wewewa, smashed up everything inside, and killed the inhabitants who had not yet escaped.

According to official reports, 'Bloody Thursday' resulted in the destruction of 891 houses and the deaths of 26 people.¹⁶ The number of casualties was probably much larger.¹⁷ The worst damaged in *kecamatan* (sub-district) Loli was the Sobawawi neighbourhood, where 84 houses were totally destroyed, including those owned by Daud Pekereng, the Head of Civil Service in West Sumba, who was directly responsible for nepotistic practices at the admission exams for new civil servants.¹⁸ Many bodies could not be identified, were hidden, or taken home immediately by relatives.¹⁹

The aftermath

After 'Bloody Thursday' many inhabitants of Waikabubak left town because they were afraid. There were strong rumours that *orang Wewewa* would take revenge and burn the whole town. The consequences of this chain of events were felt for a long time.²⁰ The town's economy suffered, since many traders no longer visited Waikabubak. The prices of food rose. *Orang Wewewa* did not feel safe going into town anymore and therefore had no access to services that were only provided in town, such as hospital and postal services. Among the refugees who fled Waikabubak were many government officials, so that their offices were unoccupied as well. Government personnel did not receive salaries for several weeks, because the money from Waikabubak was transferred to Waingapu for safety. Worst off were the families who lost their

¹⁵ *Pos Kupang*, 15-11-1998, pp. 4-5.

¹⁶ *Pos Kupang*, 15-11-1998.

¹⁷ See <http://www.hamline.edu/apakabar/basisdata/1998/11/07/0004.html>, where a number of 50 is mentioned.

¹⁸ *Pos Kupang*, 20-11-1998, p. 8; and interview with Daniel Umbu Ledy and Paulus Saga Anakaka on 20-6-2005 in Anakalang.

¹⁹ The problem with identifying the casualties was also said to be due to the fact that the victims were decapitated. Sumbanese have a tradition of head hunting, and the *marapu* belief that when the corpse of a deceased person is decapitated, it is impossible for the deceased person to enter the world of the *marapu*.

²⁰ *Pos Kupang*, 15-11-1998, p. 3.

fathers and husbands. A hundred policemen (*brimob*) were transferred from Kupang and stationed in Waikabubak to guard the safety of the citizens.²¹ By the end of November, the people in West Sumba had become frustrated by the extent of devastation. Moreover, they feared that a similar 'incident' could easily happen again. Still, at that time, life turned back to normal in town at least in the markets, and transport and other services were resumed.

Bupati Malo did not step down. There were impeachment proposals in the DPRD from former Golkar *bupati* Umbu Djima and also later from four Golkar party boards in the Wewewa district,²² arguing that *bupati* Malo should resign because he could not prevent the violence on 5 November. Governor Piet Tallo in Kupang decided that *bupati* Malo could remain in office, since he considered impeachment would only increase political tensions in Waikabubak. Rudolf Malo's reputation had been badly damaged, in such a way that he could not count on much support in the next *bupati* succession procedure that was due in April 2000.

Local elite and Christian leaders from Kupang tried actively to restore peace. There were several meetings between the government district leaders (Muspida) and civil society leaders from both feuding factions. In their peace-making efforts, they both used adat ceremonies to try and effect reconciliation, and they appealed to the Christian brotherhood. Several names popped up prominently in the newspaper reports besides *bupati* Malo and DPRD chairman T.L. Ora. These were reverend Yoshua Bili, general secretary of the Christian Church of Sumba in 1998; Dr. Andreas Yewangoe, who represented the Union of Sumbanese living in Kupang (Ikatan Keluarga Besar Asal Sumba) in a fact finding mission shortly after the November 6, and who is a national Christian leader in Indonesia; and Umbu Bintang,²³ who was at that time Head of the Planning Board (Bappeda). The latter was 'mediator' in a meeting with the Wewewa clan in Elopada on 18 November. When people in Elopada questioned him about his role in the meeting he answered 'I was born and raised here. That's why I feel the moral responsibility to contribute to West Sumba', implicitly referring to his status as son of his famous father Umbu Remu Samapati who was *bupati* in the 1960s.²⁴ According to an interview in Pos Kupang not all people who were directly involved in the violence felt at ease with the elite's peace declarations and ceremonies, stating that they could not identify with any of the representatives performing the peace ceremonies.

²¹ The transfer of this brigade of *brimob* in turn facilitated the violence which occurred in Kupang on 30 November and 1 December 1998.

²² *Pos Kupang*, 25-12-1998, 'Komcat Golkar desak FPK cabut dukungan kepada Malo'.

²³ In Chapter IX Umbu Bintang's performance in the 2005 *bupati* elections is discussed in detail.

²⁴ *Pos Kupang*, 20-11-1998, p. 8.

Explanation and interpretation

The way events are explained in their aftermath is crucial for how they will be remembered. The more the analysis is framed in terms of broader discourses, the better it can be used as an argument or basis for sequel events. Brass (2003:24) focuses attention to the fact that 'ordinary people, the media, police and the civil authorities all have their own explanations of the occurrences of riots, and what evolves is a the struggle for control of the meaning of riots in their aftermath'. In data dealing with the aftermath that are available to me, I have noticed three different narratives for explaining 'Bloody Thursday' in Waikabubak. First is the incident version that explains the events as criminal acts between two fighting parties. Second is the political explanation, which puts the events into the framework of local power struggles and connects it to the upcoming *bupati* succession. Third is the long-term local explanation that puts the events into a longer series of inter-ethnic warfare that continued after 'Bloody Thursday'. After these three explanations the question remains why this event in Waikabubak left out of the 'post-Suharto violence in Indonesia' discourse. I argue that some of its features are inconvenient for generalizations that are often made in this context.

Explanation one: criminal incident

The CNN report portrayed the events in Waikabubak on 5 November 1998 as an incident. The image that CNN depicts is one of an isolated event, where no connection with political tensions on national scale seems to be involved. The report reveals many of the caricatures that are prevalent with regard to peripheral regions in Indonesia: remote, isolated, tribal, backward, traditional, and uninteresting for foreigners. The headline suggests that primordial characteristics of these Eastern Indonesian peoples are at stake, by calling the events a 'tribal battle'. The only source of information is a police report, and one line from the national newspaper. A second actor that used this perspective to explain 'Bloody Thursday' in Public was mayor-general Adam Damiri of the TNI. He said there was no evidence whatsoever for the rumour that 'Bloody Thursday' was caused by a struggle amongst the political elite, and that he regarded it as a purely criminal event.²⁵ In this perspective the violence is just a problem of law and order and as soon as the police restore

²⁵ *Pos Kupang*, 15-11-1998, p. 6. Pangdam IX /Udayana Mayjen TNI Adam Damiri commented on 7 November to a reporter of *Pos Kupang*, who wrote 'Damiri belum menemukan adanya muatan politik di balik peristiwa "Kamis Berdarah" itu. Peristiwa itu masih dilihatnya sebagai kriminal murni'.

peace the problems are solved. There is no attention paid to the historical, cultural or political context of the violence.

Explanation two: part of local elite's political struggle

Nearly all newspaper articles about 'Bloody Thursday' suggested political motives behind the violent events. Pos Kupang reported the apparently common opinion that a power struggle between the chairman of the parliament (DPRD) and *bupati* Malo inflamed the anti-corruption and nepotism demonstrations into mass violence. The two politicians were never openly accused by anyone quoted in the newspapers, and when asked in an interview they both praised their good cooperation. Yet, the rumour of their involvement was the talk of the day in West Sumba after 5 November. Pos Kupang dealt with the lack of open accusations by analysing what may have led to the rumour. In one article on 15 November, the struggle was connected to the process of choosing a parliament chairman in 1997. In this struggle, one faction supported candidacy of an Indonesian Army candidate, whereas the other faction supported the Golkar candidate T. L. Ora. The army candidate won, but Pak Lero has frequently locked horns with him afterwards.

An article two weeks later, in the 29 November issue of Pos Kupang, connected this power struggle to the process of *bupati* successions that were due begin in all the districts of the Province NTT between 12 November 1998 and 25 April 2001.²⁶ *Bupati* Malo's term ended on 18 April 2000. In 1998, the procedures leading to the election of a new *bupati* started with letters of support, sent by groups of private persons and civil society organizations to the district parliament's factions. These fractions would then put forward candidates for the *bupati* position, and the Governor of the Province would select three names from those candidates to propose to the Minister of Home Affairs, who eventually would decide and appoint one of them as *bupati*. Pos Kupang stated that apparently the number of support letters had become the most important factor determining whether a person would be nominated as candidate.²⁷

The campaign to get letters of support started significantly in advance of actual nomination. Successful public performances generate support. An impressive event like 'Bloody Thursday' offered ample opportunity to present oneself as a successful leader, or to cause a competitor to lose face. After 'Bloody Thursday' *bupati* Malo saw the number of his critics rise. By the end of December 1998, four sub-district branches of Golkar sent a letter

²⁶ Pos Kupang, 29-11-1998, p. 5, 'Bercermin pada kasus unjuk rasa'.

²⁷ Pos Kupang, 29-11-1998, p. 6, 'Institusi dadakan untuk kepentingan sesaat'.

to the parliament asking *bupati* Malo to step down, adding that if he would not follow up on their request, they would at least withhold their support for him in the next *bupati* election.

The anti-KKN demonstration, the issue that triggered the violence, thus lost importance in the media reports on 'Bloody Thursday'. It was generally regarded as only the tip of the iceberg, and subsequently reporters directed all attention to what was below the surface. Follow-up reports on investigations of corruption in the civil servants admission tests appeared separately from the articles on the violence.

Explanation three: part of long series of endemic riots

The third narrative is the long term local explanation that puts the events within a series of endemic riots that continued even after 'Bloody Thursday'. In June 2005 I interviewed two Sumbanese men from Anakalang, both about 35-years-old, who were close witnesses to the events in Waikabubak in November 1998 and sharp observers of what happened afterwards.²⁸ One of them, Paulus, took the disputed civil servants admission test of 1998 himself and could testify that his fellow participant who's name was on the desk beside him, was absent during the exam but was admitted afterwards, and he belonged to the Wewewa clan. The other, Daniel, is NGO activist in West Sumba, involved in informal adult education. They claimed that the violence on 'Bloody Thursday' was carefully planned, as is common in traditional endemic riots. These are referred to as *perang suku*, inter-ethnic war, in which one person from each side who is the *kepala perang*, head of war, decides the strategy, including a list of what is to be attacked and destroyed and whom is to be killed. The counter-demonstrators who came to defend the *bupati*'s honour, had their meal at *bupati* Malo's house, whereas the Loli party was invited at Pak Lero's home, giving both of them a position as *kepala perang*. Those people who are not on the black list are not the object of violence, and they are safe. They can watch the battle from a distance, some even enjoy the spectacle.²⁹ Both informants told that, a few years before 'Bloody Thursday', there was a war between Wewewa and Loli close to Waikabubak, called *perang Wone*. The reason for that fight was a dispute about land, and what escalated it was frustration of the Loli clan about continually losing their land to state officials and Chinese businessmen, who settled in the district's capital, on originally Loli land. At that occasion 17 people were killed, and

²⁸ Interview with Paulus Saga Anakaka SSos and Daniel Umbu Ledy.

²⁹ Daniel said in the interview enthusiastically that he would go and watch when there was a *perang suku* going on.

police stood by. 'Bloody Thursday' was also a sequel to *perang Wone*, an opportunity to settle debts. But warfare is not confined to Loli and Wewea. Daniel and Paulus said that even after 'Bloody Thursday' there had been four *perang suku*: Lamboya-Loli, Loura-Tanarighu, Laura-Wewewa Timur and one among the Loli themselves. The latter fact, that the Loli clan members could have such a war amongst themselves questions the ethnic character of these endemic riots. According to Daniel and Paulus, the reason for fighting in these cases was control over land. The other frequently occurring violence in West Sumba since 1998 relates to theft of livestock. Even now if horses are stolen and the owners catch the thieves, the thieves are instantly killed and no one, including the police, seems to object. Reflecting on this analysis of two local experts, it seems that *perang suku* is an important indigenous category of conflict, which is immediately associated with ethnic identities. *Perang suku* is a type of warfare that is carefully planned, has a clear division of tasks, clear traditional leaders, and a well known discourse of mutual hostility that refers back to a long history of inter-ethnic dispute, feeding emotions of grievance and revenge.

Waikabubak as case of 'post-Suharto violence in Indonesia'

'Bloody Thursday' was one of the first of a series of mass violence episodes that occurred in Indonesia after May 1998. On 22 November 1998, the 'Ketapang Tragedy' in Jakarta followed, which was reported in the media as a case of communal violence, in which Christians fought Muslims. Closer reading of a Human Rights Watch report on this event reveals that it was a street brawl between security personnel of a gambling house:

Most of the hundreds of security guards employed at the club were from Ambon, and most Ambonese are Christian. One of Jakarta's best-known thugs had been trying to extort a monthly protection fee from the owner, but the latter refused to pay. Beginning in late September, according to one report, groups of young people, allegedly belonging to a student group which no one had ever heard of before or since, began trying to rouse community sentiment against the club on religious grounds. (Human Rights Watch 1998.)

The fight turned into a communal riot in which rioters burnt Christian churches and killed 12 people. The images of burning churches were broadcasted all over Indonesia and also reached the capital of the province Nusa Tenggara Timur, Kupang. It inflamed the emotions of the Christian majority in town. On 30 November 1998, a peaceful protest in the form of an ecumenical mourning service in Kupang's sports stadium turned into another communal riot, afterwards called 'the Kupang Tragedy'. Rioters destroyed and

burned the houses of Muslim immigrants from Bugis or Makassar, several mosques and a market place. News spread to Sulawesi where on 5 December, a church was burnt in Makassar.

After January 1999, when communal violence on Ambon started on a much larger and relatively long lasting scale, discourse on violence in Indonesia centred around Christian-Muslim communal violence, or on violence between ethnic groups in which one claimed to be more indigenous and the other 'immigrant'. After a time lag of two years following these events, academics published their research on violence in Indonesia. Most studies describe and analyse one single event or region. The article on violence in Waikabubak I published in 2001 is one of those studies. By the end of 2006, many studies on post-Suharto violence had been published,³⁰ which makes comparison between them possible.

'Bloody Thursday' is in many respects an exception in such a comparative framework. It was not communal violence between Christians and Muslims, but between two groups of which many members on both sides were Christians. It was violence between two groups who belong to one ethnic group, namely, Sumbanese, but are only distinguished by sub-ethnic identity. Both groups are indigenous. If this case of communal violence from West Sumba is included in developing a theoretical framework on violence in Indonesia, it complicates matters, because the groups involved do not fit usual typology in religious, ethnic or immigrant-indigenous dichotomies.

Colombijn and Lindblad (2002) and Van Klinken (2005, 2007) undertook comparative studies on violence in Indonesia and reveal national patterns into which 'Bloody Thursday' can fit. The case of 'Bloody Thursday' supports Colombijn and Lindblad's conclusion regarding historical continuities. In West Sumba *perang suku*, wars between people from different traditional domains were reported in the pre-colonial era, and have continued to exist, albeit on much smaller scale, after the 'pacification' by the colonial army in 1912. During the New Order there was a similar battle between Loli and Wewewa in 1991. This does not mean that warfare should be understood in an essentialist way. There is no suggestion here that Sumbanese are a violent people and that their violence is an irrational and emotional feature. By contrast, *perang suku* have always been carefully planned and organized, directed at selective targets, specific interests and used to create a political following. 'Bloody Thursday' also seems to be a continuity of the model of *perang suku* in that way.

Colombijn and Lindblad also conclude that often the opposition group in the violence is dehumanized and under these circumstances, violence takes an exceptionally brutal form. The ritual that substituted orang Wewewa for

³⁰ A bibliography of studies in this field is composed by Glenn Smith and Hélène Bouvier (2004).

wild boar is an example of dehumanising, which facilitates warfare and equates it to hunting, turning the enemies into prey.

Yet, I would argue that 'Bloody Thursday' is not just another case of *perang suku* in West Sumba. Rethinking the local discourses and comparing them with the other cases described in literature, it appears that *perang suku* was always a powerful tool for mobilization. With hindsight, I would argue that, in November 1998, it was used to divert a class conflict into a more manageable ethnic conflict. 'Bloody Thursday' was the first case in West Sumba in which violence was directed at the state. The battle was fought in the streets of the district capital, which is the state domain *par excellence*, and not on a plain somewhere between the groups' territories. The groups involved in the original demonstrations against KKN could be characterized as representatives of the 'political public' demonstrating against the *bupati* and his clique as part of the 'political class'. It was a sign of reform in Indonesia, even in Waikabubak, with a growing political public consisting of 'persons outside the political elite who nevertheless saw themselves as capable of taking action which could affect national (district) government or politics' (Feith 1962:109). With increasing democratization, including fair and direct elections, it was not beneficial for the ruling elite to engage in a conflict so clearly drawn along these new political class lines. The old ethnic war model was much safer for their position, turning them from prominent members of the political class into leaders of ethnic groups that included many people who belong to the political public or to the *tani*-class. Colombijn and Lindblad (2002:6) connect this development to the democratic elections:

The competition for positions in the state bureaucracy, from clerk to mayor or governor, sharply increased at the end of the twentieth century, when the economic crisis simultaneously plunged many families into dire circumstances and forced the state to restrict the number of civil servants. At the same time, access to jobs changed from the established way which was recruitment through patronage, to access based on success in the 1999 general elections, the first free multi party election in decades. Under these circumstances the local elite found it expedient to mobilize mass support for party politics by playing up religion and ethnicity.

The focus on the role of elite in producing violence is also a central issue in Van Klinken's (2005:80) analysis of violence in Sulawesi, Maluku, and Kalimantan. He stresses the importance of seeing the production of violence as process that can only be understood if the agency involved in every step of the process is clearly identified. Democratization forces the local elite to find new strategies to stay in office and remain in power. West Sumba's political elite have multiple identities that they can use in composing new strategies. Chapters VIII and IX show how these strategies are shaped in two parts of the democratization process: decentralization and direct regional head elections.

Consequences for the 1999 bupati elections

From a local Sumbanese perspective the protests in Waikabubak in October 1998 were aimed at toppling the local dictator. The protesters had not foreseen that mass violence and a high death toll would be the consequence. Yet, their protests were a new phenomenon and afterwards *bupati* and district government knew their days of practicing KKN without any public criticism were over. However, the protesters did not succeed in bringing *bupati* Malo down. He remained in office until his term was over in 2000, because the governor, focusing on restoring order and protecting the dignity of the government, did not want to replace him (Mitchell and Gunawan 2000b:2), and in 1999 the Habibie government introduced many changes directly affecting the district governance system.

In 1999 there were free elections for the parliament from district to the national level. A total of 48 political parties participated nationally. In West Sumba, Megawati's PDI-P and the new Christian party PDKB (Party for Democracy and Love for the Nation) were the important new competitors for Golkar. In 1999 many people on Sumba had access to televisions, so national issues were important in the West Sumbanese elections. Although nearly all elite and civil servants were connected with Golkar, there was enormous support to vote for change, to get rid of KKN and to start a new democratic future.

The older generation remembered how PDI-P was the successor of parties that were historically strong in Eastern Indonesia, like the Christian party Parkindo and the nationalist PDI. Civil servants who had felt forced into the Golkar regiments were free to follow their own political preferences now. Many young people were attracted to the promise of change. PDI-P won the 1999 elections in West Sumba with 46 per cent of the votes, whereas Golkar received only 28 per cent. The third party was PDKB. It was the party of Professor Manasse Malo, son of Sumba's first reverend Herman Malo. Manasse Malo was a professor at the Universitas Indonesia in Jakarta. In his home area, West Waijewa, his party PDKB earned 31.2 per cent of the votes and in total 17,000 people in West Sumba voted for this party. Voting for him could be regarded as an ethnic vote for Christian network politics.

Another significant change in the laws regarding governance was that the new parliaments would choose the *bupati* and his deputy; this was no longer a matter of assignments from the centre. PDI-P, with 15 seats in parliament did not have a majority (the total number being 35 seats). They had to find a candidate for *bupati* that would attract votes from the other parties as well. Then the 75-year-old party leader in Waikabubak chose the candidate who in 1995 was selected as the most competent and clean candidate by Golkar: Thimotius Langgar (Mitchell and Gunawan 2000b:12). For his deputy they

asked Julianus Pote Leba who had similar characteristics: he was young, intelligent, a career bureaucrat and uncontaminated by any KKN. Umbu Bintang was their main opponent, supported by Golkar. Being the son of raja Anakalang and former *bupati* (1965-1975) Umbu Remu Samapati, as well as the Golkar candidate, he was a more traditional type of leader, but that was not an advantage in 1999. Thimotius Langgar and Julianus Pote Leba personified a new balance in areas of ethnic tension, bringing cooperation between Wewewa and Loli, the domains that had been opponents in Bloody Thursday.