

SOCIAL VULNERABILITY IN POST-CONFLICT MALUKU, INDONESIA: A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The Maluku region constitutes one of Indonesia's post-conflict areas that continues to experience long-term social consequences. The conflict not only resulted in physical destruction but also generated enduring social vulnerability manifested in fragmented social relations, weakened intergroup trust, and limited access to social and educational resources. This article aims to analyse the dynamics of post-conflict social vulnerability in Maluku from a sociological perspective, emphasizing how local communities interpret, experience, and respond to these conditions in their everyday social lives. The study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design, drawing on in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation of community-based social and customary practices. Data were analysed through thematic and narrative approaches to capture the interconnections between conflict memory, social structure, and community-based recovery mechanisms. The findings indicate that post-conflict social vulnerability in Maluku is structural, relational, and historical in nature; however, it does not entirely incapacitate the community's social capacity. Customary institutions and community relations play a significant role in rebuilding social cohesion, facilitating social inclusion, and transmitting intergenerational peace values. These findings underscore that post-conflict recovery does not rely solely on formal state interventions, but

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also on the strength of local social and cultural practices and historical consciousness. This study contributes to the development of post-conflict sociology and the sociology of social inclusion by highlighting the importance of community-based approaches in understanding and managing social vulnerability.

Keywords: Maluku, Post-Conflict, Social Vulnerability, & Sociological Perspective.

Discipline: cultural anthropology

Absztrakt

TÁRSADALMI SÉRÜLÉKENYSÉG AZ INDONÉZIAI POSZTKONFLIKTUSOS MALUKUBAN: SZOCIOLÓGIAI PERSPEKTÍVA

A malukui régió Indonézia egyik olyan posztkonfliktusos térsége, amely továbbra is hosszú távú társadalmi következményekkel szembesül. A konfliktus nem csupán fizikai pusztítást eredményezett, hanem tartós társadalmi sérülékenységet is létrehozott, amely a társadalmi kapcsolatok fragmentáltságában, a csoportok közötti bizalom meggyengülésében, valamint a társadalmi és oktatási erőforrásokhoz való korlátozott hozzáférésben nyilvánul meg. Jelen tanulmány célja a posztkonfliktusos társadalmi sérülékenység dinamikájának elemzése Malukuban szociológiai megközelítésben, különös tekintettel arra, hogy a helyi közösségek miként értelmezik, tapasztalják és kezelik e feltételeket mindennapi társadalmi életük során. A kutatás kvalitatív megközelítést alkalmaz esettanulmányi kutatási terv keretében, mélyinterjúkra, résztvevő megfigyelésre, valamint közösségi alapú társadalmi és szokásjogi gyakorlatok dokumentációjára támaszkodva. Az adatok elemzése tematikus és narratív módszerekkel történt annak érdekében, hogy feltárhatóak legyenek a konfliktusemlékezet, a társadalmi struktúra és a közösségi alapú helyreállítási mechanizmusok közötti összefüggések. Az eredmények arra utalnak, hogy a posztkonfliktusos társadalmi sérülékenység Malukuban strukturális, relációs és történeti természetű; ugyanakkor nem eredményezi a közösségek társadalmi kapacitásának teljes ellehetetlenülését. A szokásjogi intézmények és a közösségi kapcsolatok jelentős szerepet játszanak a társadalmi kohézió újjáépítésében, a társadalmi inklúzió elősegítésében, valamint a béke intergenerációs értékeinek közvetítésében. E megállapítások rámutatnak arra, hogy a posztkonfliktusos helyreállítás nem kizárólag formális állami beavatkozásokon alapul, hanem nagymértékben függ a helyi társadalmi és kulturális gyakorlatok erejétől, valamint a történeti tudatosságtól is. A tanulmány hozzájárul a posztkonfliktusos szociológia és a társadalmi inklúzió szociológiájának fejlődéséhez azáltal, hogy hangsúlyozza a közösségalapú megközelítések jelentőségét a társadalmi sérülékenység megértésében és kezelésében.

Kulcsszavak: Maluku, posztkonfliktus, társadalmi sérülékenység, szociológiai perspektíva

Diszciplína: kulturális antropológia

Introduction

Social vulnerability, from a sociological perspective, is understood as a condition shaped through complex social processes involving structures of inequality, power relations, and historical dynamics that frame community life. Vulnerability is not merely inherent to individuals; rather, it emerges from the social position of groups within unequal systems, limited access to resources, and weakened

social networks that sustain everyday life. In archipelagic regions characterized by infrastructural and connectivity constraints, such conditions may become increasingly complex and layered.

The Province of Maluku, as an archipelagic region in eastern Indonesia, possesses a geographically fragmented character, consisting of islands dispersed and separated by considerable maritime distances. This spatial fragmentation has implications for

the distribution of public services, economic access, and the intensity of social interaction among communities. Limited inter-island connectivity and dependence on sea transportation routes place certain areas in structurally vulnerable positions, particularly small islands and remote regions. Maluku is one of the regions in Indonesia that experienced large-scale communal conflict in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The conflict, which erupted in 1999, evolved into widespread communal violence marked by religious polarization and social identity divisions, resulting in significant loss of life and mass displacement (van Klinken, 2001). These events not only damaged physical infrastructure but also triggered changes in settlement patterns, social segregation, and demographic shifts in several areas.

Although overt violence has ceased and a formal peace process was undertaken through the Malino II Agreement in 2002, numerous studies indicate that post-conflict communities continue to experience long-term social consequences. These impacts include fragmented social relations, intergroup distrust, and unequal access to social and educational resources (Justino, 2021).

This condition underscores that the end of violence does not automatically eliminate the social repercussions of conflict, as its historical traces continue to shape the dynamics of community life. In this context, social vulnerability in post-conflict Maluku must be understood as a structural, relational, and historical phenomenon. Structurally, vulnerability is associated with development disparities, infrastructural limitations, and weak institutional capacity across several island regions. Relationally, vulnerability is reflected in low levels of social trust and limited cross-community interaction resulting from prior conflict experiences.

Historically, collective memories of violence and social segregation continue to influence how communities construct social relations and interpret shared life.

At the same time, Maluku society possesses social

capital rooted in customary institutions, deliberative practices, and local solidarity networks. Various community-based initiatives have played an important role in rebuilding trust and strengthening post-conflict social cohesion. The community thus becomes a strategic arena in the process of social recovery, where everyday interactions contribute to the reconstruction of previously fragmented social relations.

Accordingly, Maluku may be understood as an archipelagic social space situated at the intersection of geographic fragmentation, structural inequality, and the historical legacy of conflict. The interaction of these three dimensions shapes a distinctive pattern of social vulnerability in the post-conflict context, while simultaneously opening analytical space to examine how communities collectively manage the impacts of conflict and rebuild social cohesion within a fragmented island environment.

General about Maluku

The Province of Maluku is an archipelagic region in eastern Indonesia that, administratively, consists of several regencies and municipalities distributed across hundreds of large and small islands (Figure 1). The provincial capital is Ambon City, which functions as the administrative hub and a centre of regional mobility. This archipelagic character renders governance in Maluku highly dependent on interisland connectivity and crossadministrative coordination. Geographically, Maluku is dominated by marine areas (Kissiya & Biczó, 2022), with islands unevenly dispersed and separated by vast stretches of sea. This condition is clearly illustrated on the map of Maluku, which demonstrates the region's spatial fragmentation and the considerable distances between islands. Such a map is essential for understanding constraints related to transportation access, the distribution of public services, and the dynamics of social interaction among communities (BPS, 2024).

Figure 1. Maluku map in Indonesia map.



This geographic fragmentation also contributes to structural vulnerability, particularly for communities residing on small islands and in remote areas. The distribution of islands and the administrative position of Maluku within eastern Indonesia are presented in Figure 1, where the Maluku region is highlighted in red.

The economic character of Maluku, which is largely based on natural resources, not only reflects the ecological potential of an archipelagic region but also demonstrates the close interdependence between geographical conditions and local production patterns. The dominance of primary sectors particularly capture fisheries, marine aquaculture, and subsistence agriculture such as nutmeg, clove, coconut, and sago indicates that economic activities remain highly dependent on environmental dynamics (Andaya, 1993). This dependence renders the regional economy relatively sensitive to external environmental factors, including climate variability, seasonal wind patterns, ocean waves, and the degradation of coastal ecosystems. In addition, limitations in logistical infrastructure and supply chains increase distribution costs, resulting in higher commodity prices on small islands compared to central areas such as Ambon (Leirissa, 1975).

From the perspective of economic geography, the

fragmentation of islands produces decentralized and small-scale market structures. Each island or island cluster tends to develop a semi-autonomous local economic system supported by trade networks grounded in social relations, kinship ties, and customary institutions. This condition demonstrates that regional economic integration is not determined solely by state policies but is also shaped by traditional social networks functioning as informal distribution mechanisms. In this context, the sea does not merely act as a territorial divider but serves as a space of mobility, a route of exchange, and a medium of socio-economic interaction.

Meanwhile, in the socio-cultural dimension, the ethnic and religious diversity of Maluku forms a complex mosaic of collective identities that remain interconnected through local value systems such as *pela-gandong*, *sasi*, and other customary institutions. These institutions function as mechanisms of social regulation as well as community-based conflict resolution systems. Within island societies, customary structures frequently operate as institutions for natural resource governance, indicating that social, ecological, and economic dimensions cannot be analytically separated in a rigid manner (Abdurachman, 2008).

In a post-conflict context, spatial mapping of the

Maluku region constitutes an important analytical tool for understanding demographic distribution, patterns of settlement segregation, and networks of community mobility. Spatial analysis enables the identification of areas with higher levels of social vulnerability, particularly remote islands with limited access to education, healthcare, and economic services. At the same time, spatial approaches offer opportunities for regionally grounded development planning that is more responsive to archipelagic conditions, such as strengthening inter-island connectivity, promoting integrated maritime economies, and revitalizing local social institutions as forms of social capital for reconciliation.

Thus, understanding Maluku cannot be separated from the interrelation among its archipelagic geographical structure, natural resource based economic system, and socio-cultural networks that bind communities across islands. These three dimensions collectively form a distinctive social configuration that shapes development trajectories, regional resilience, and the sustainability of life in eastern Indonesia's island regions.

Theoretical Framework

In contemporary sociological perspectives, social vulnerability is understood not as an individual condition standing in isolation, but as a phenomenon shaped by social relations, power structures, and the broader social history that frames community life. The concept of *social vulnerability* refers to situations in which individuals or groups occupy disadvantaged positions due to limited access to resources, weak social protection mechanisms, and fragile social networks that sustain everyday life (Hickey & du Toit, 2007). Accordingly, social vulnerability is the outcome of structural and relational social processes rather than merely the result of personal choices or individual capacities.

Recent sociological literature emphasizes the multilayered nature of social vulnerability. Structural vulnerability relates to the social positioning of

groups within unequal social systems, encompassing economic disparities, limited access to public services, and territorial marginalization. In post-conflict settings, structural vulnerability is often reinforced by weakened institutions and unresolved development inequalities (Justino, 2021).

At the same time, relational vulnerability emerges when conflict erodes trust, disrupts social networks, and produces forms of social segregation within community life. This relational perspective underscores that social well-being is fundamentally dependent on the quality of social relationships and the availability of social capital within society (Krause & Jütersonke, 2022).

In addition, historical vulnerability refers to forms of vulnerability rooted in past experiences particularly collective conflict and violence that continue to be reproduced through social memory and collective narratives (Alexander et al., 2004). Within this framework, post-conflict societies are not understood as communities that have simply “moved beyond” conflict, but rather as societies still engaged in a prolonged and non-linear process of social recovery. Post-conflict sociology conceptualizes the aftermath of conflict as an ongoing arena of social negotiation, in which social relations, group identities, and structures of trust are continuously reconstructed (Mac Ginty, 2010). Conflict leaves social traces that are not only material in nature but also symbolic and emotional, shaping how individuals and groups interact in everyday life.

One significant dimension of post-conflict societies concerns the persistence of collective memory and social trauma. Memories of conflict influence how communities interpret the past and shape attitudes toward other groups, both explicitly and implicitly. Assmann, (2006) argue that collective memory is not confined to personal recollection; it is embedded in social practices, community narratives, and cultural symbols. Social trauma, in this sense, extends beyond individual psychological experience and constitutes a collective condition that affects

social cohesion and relational patterns within society (Pihkala, 2024). Consequently, post-conflict recovery cannot be reduced to physical reconstruction or political stabilization alone; it must also encompass the reconstruction of social relationships and shared meanings.

In this recovery process, community plays a central role. Community sociology positions community as a social space in which norms, solidarity, and a sense of belonging are produced and reproduced (Delanty, 2018). In post-conflict contexts, communities often serve as the primary arenas where individuals access social support, rebuild trust, and renegotiate their social identities. Post-conflict social cohesion does not automatically emerge from formal policies; rather, it develops through everyday social interactions that unfold within community life.

Non-formal social mechanisms, such as customary practices, community deliberation forums, and informal solidarity networks, constitute important instruments in processes of social recovery. Recent studies indicate that community-based mechanisms tend to be more adaptive and context-sensitive than top-down approaches that rely solely on formal institutions (Mac Ginty, 2010).

These mechanisms enable communities to manage residual tensions, rebuild social relationships, and gradually restore a sense of collective security. Within this perspective, community is not viewed as a passive object of policy intervention, but as an active social actor capable of managing vulnerability and fostering postconflict social resilience. Accordingly, the theoretical framework of this study conceptualizes post-conflict social vulnerability as a structural, relational, and historical phenomenon, while emphasizing the central role of community and social relations in recovery processes. This sociological approach facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of post-conflict dynamics by highlighting how communities collectively confront and manage vulnerability through

social practices rooted in lived experience and local contexts.

Post-Conflict Maluku as a Space of Social Vulnerability: A Sociological Interpretation of the Findings

Structurally, the findings indicate that the archipelagic geographical configuration, limited access to social and economic services, and the weakened institutional capacity in the aftermath of conflict have collectively produced objective conditions that intensify social vulnerability. Within the sociology of inequality and conflict, such conditions are conceptualized as structural vulnerability that is, vulnerability arising from unequal social positioning within broader social, economic, and political systems (Justino, 2021). In post-conflict Maluku, structural vulnerability is tangibly reflected in the limited access of island communities to basic services. Communities residing on small and remote islands encounter significant geographic barriers in accessing secondary education, referral health services, and economic markets. Dependence on irregular maritime transportation and high logistical costs further exacerbates disparities in comparison to populations living in larger island urban centres.

In the post-conflict context, these structural constraints are compounded by institutional capacities that have not fully recovered, including the limited presence of public service providers and the delayed distribution of social programs to peripheral regions. Consequently, structural vulnerability manifests not only in economic deprivation but also in heightened uncertainty and diminished trust toward formal state institutions, as emphasized in the literature on inequality and conflict (Justino, 2021). Such structural vulnerability affects not only material well-being but also shapes perceptions of social security and levels of public confidence in state institutions.

At the relational level, the findings demonstrate that past conflict has left enduring traces in the form

of fragmented social relations and low levels of intergroup trust. Patterns of social interaction that remain characterized by caution, subtle forms of social segregation, and weakened solidarity networks reflect relational vulnerability. From a relational sociological perspective, social well-being is fundamentally dependent upon the quality of social relationships and the availability of social capital within communities (Hickey & du Toit, 2007). When social networks are disrupted by conflict, individuals and groups become more susceptible to social exclusion, marginalization, and social insecurity.

In post-conflict Maluku, relational vulnerability is evident in the continued cautiousness of intergroup interactions. In everyday life, for instance, communities tend to confine cross-group relations to public spaces perceived as “safe,” while more intimate forms of interaction such as economic cooperation, intergroup marriage, or cross-community social networks develop at a slower pace compared to the pre-conflict period. Furthermore, the weakening of intercommunity solidarity networks becomes apparent during periods of social or economic crisis, when social support circulates predominantly within homogeneous group boundaries. This condition reflects limited intergroup trust and illustrates how past conflict continues to shape the quality of social relations. From a relational sociological standpoint, the restricted development of cross-group networks heightens the risk of social exclusion and deepens the vulnerability of post-conflict communities (Varshney, 2017).

Moreover, the historical dimension emerges as a key factor in shaping post-conflict social vulnerability in Maluku. The findings indicate that collective memories of conflict and social trauma remain embedded in community narratives and everyday social practices. From the perspective of cultural sociology and memory studies, experiences of collective violence do not cease as historical events; rather, they are continuously reproduced through collective

memory, symbolic representations, and intergenerational social attitudes (Assmann, 2011). This historical dimension helps explain why social vulnerability tends to persist despite the relative maintenance of security stability. In post-conflict Maluku, historical vulnerability can be observed through the enduring presence of conflict memory in community narratives and cross-generational social practices. For example, past experiences of violence frequently surface in family stories, informal commemorations, or protective parental attitudes toward children’s interactions with members of other groups. Such narratives shape how younger generations interpret social space and intergroup relations, even when they have not directly experienced the conflict.

Additionally, intergenerational social trauma is reflected in the tendency to avoid certain topics, territories, or social symbols associated with the conflict period. From a cultural-sociological and memory-based perspective, the reproduction of such memories elucidates why social vulnerability may endure over the long term, even under conditions of relative security stability (Alexander et al., 2004). This dynamic is illustrated in Figure 2.

The three dimensions, supported by empirical illustrations, demonstrate that social vulnerability in post-conflict Maluku is not an abstract construct but is embedded in everyday social practices. Structural vulnerability constrains life opportunities; relational vulnerability shapes the quality of social interactions; and historical vulnerability influences how communities interpret both their past and their anticipated futures. These examples reinforce the argument that post-conflict social vulnerability should be understood as a multidimensional social process requiring a community-based sociological approach.

These dimensions are mutually interconnected and collectively constitute post-conflict Maluku as a space of social vulnerability.

Figure 2. *Post-Conflict Social Vulnerability in Maluku. Source: Author.*



This space is not solely geographical in character but also social and symbolic, wherein social boundaries, group identities, and power relations are continuously negotiated through everyday interactions. Such an interpretation aligns with post-conflict sociological perspectives that conceptualize vulnerability as a circular social process, continuously produced and reproduced through the interplay of structural conditions, social relations, and conflict memory (Gery & Beim, 2007). Nevertheless, the findings of this study also indicate that social vulnerability in Maluku is neither absolute nor incapacitating. Community-based customary practices and networks of social solidarity function as important mechanisms for managing and mitigating vulnerability. Through customary deliberation processes, informal solidarity networks, and value-based socialization within communities, local actors actively

seek to restore social relations and renegotiate conflict memories. From the perspective of community sociology, these practices demonstrate the social agency of communities in responding to post-conflict conditions, while also illustrating how non-formal mechanisms can complement the limitations of formal institutional interventions (Hickey & du Toit, 2007).

The Role of Community in Managing Vulnerability: Customary Institutions, Solidarity, and Value-Based Education

Within the setting of post conflict Maluku, local communities play a central role in managing and mitigating social vulnerability across its structural, relational, and historical dimensions. The findings indicate that communities function not merely as

social spaces in which vulnerability is experienced, but also as collective actors that actively construct mechanisms of recovery and social resilience. From the perspective of community sociology, this role is manifested through customary institutions, networks of social solidarity, and value-based education processes that operate in non-formal and sustained ways.

Customary institutions constitute one of the principal social mechanisms through which post-conflict vulnerability is managed. In contemporary sociological and anthropological scholarship, *adat* is conceptualized as a social institution that regulates social relations, establishes shared norms, and provides community-based mechanisms for conflict resolution and reconciliation (Mac Ginty, 2010). In Maluku, customary practices such as community deliberation forums and value-based regulation of social relations grounded in collective cohesion play a significant role in restoring trust that was eroded by conflict. Through *adat*, communities create socially legitimate spaces for dialogue that enable the renegotiation of social identities and group boundaries in relatively secure and culturally accepted ways.

Beyond customary institutions, social solidarity functions as a critical buffer in addressing post-conflict vulnerability. The findings indicate that informal solidarity networks manifested in interfamily assistance, community-based support, and collective labour practices serve as social protection mechanisms in contexts where formal state interventions have not fully reached affected populations. From a relational sociological perspective, the quality of social relationships and the availability of social capital significantly shape a community's capacity to cope with risk and uncertainty (Hickey & du Toit, 2007). Social solidarity enables individuals and groups to provide mutual support, mitigate feelings of isolation, and gradually reconstruct a sense of social security in everyday life.

Another equally significant dimension concerns value-based education embedded within family and

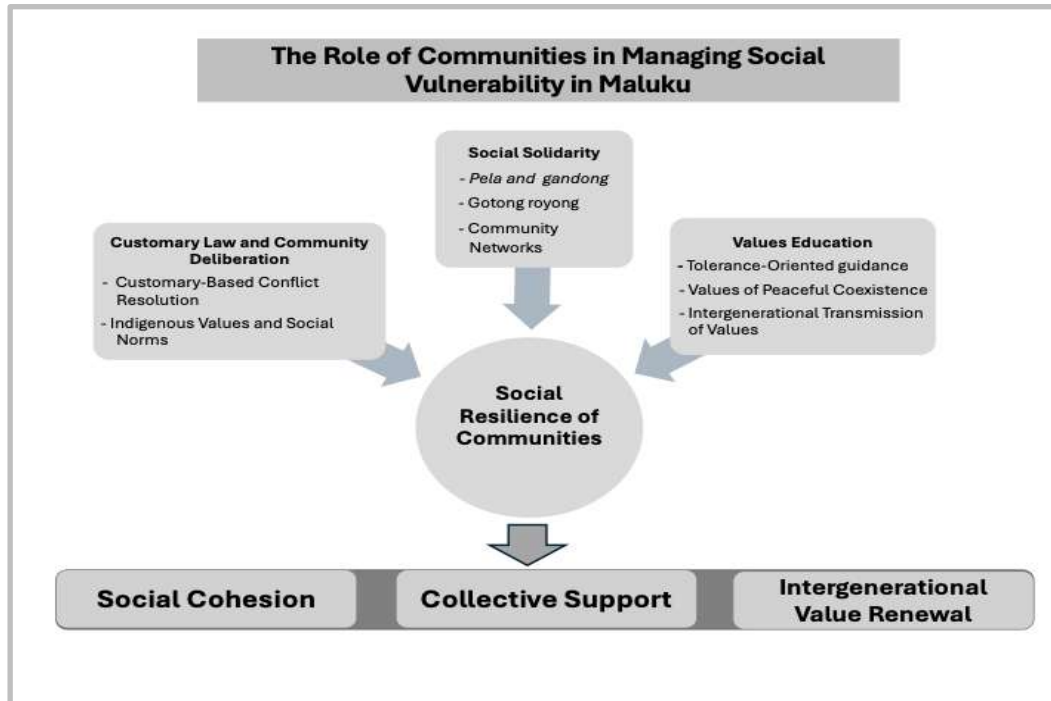
community life. In post-conflict contexts, value education is not confined to formal schooling institutions; rather, it is integrated into everyday social practices, caregiving patterns, and intergenerational interactions. The findings indicate that values such as tolerance, coexistence, and collective responsibility are transmitted through community narratives, exemplary conduct, and routine social practices. Within contemporary sociology of education, such forms of value-based education are conceptualized as part of broader processes of social learning that contribute to the formation of social cohesion and the prevention of conflict reproduction in the future (Biesta, 2021).

These three elements customary institutions, social solidarity, and value-based education operate in an interconnected manner in managing post-conflict social vulnerability. Customary institutions provide a normative framework; social solidarity strengthens networks of mutual support; and value-based education ensures the intergenerational continuity of social cohesion. From a community sociological perspective, these mechanisms demonstrate the social agency of communities in responding to post-conflict conditions, while also underscoring that social recovery does not depend solely on formal policy interventions but is equally grounded in community-based social practice.

Accordingly, the role of community in managing vulnerability in post-conflict Maluku affirms that vulnerability and social capacity coexist simultaneously. Communities are not merely spaces where vulnerability is experienced, but also arenas in which social resilience is actively constructed through customary practices, solidarity networks, and value-based education.

This understanding is essential to avoid approaches that reduce post-conflict recovery to structural interventions alone, and to emphasize the importance of a community-based sociological perspective in interpreting and responding to post-conflict dynamics. See Figure 3.

Figure 3. *The Role of Community in Managing Social Vulnerability in Maluku* Source: Author, 2026.



Conclusion

This article argues that post-conflict social vulnerability in Maluku, Indonesia, cannot be understood as a temporary condition or merely as a residual effect of past violence. Rather, it constitutes an ongoing social process produced through the interaction of structural, relational, and historical dimensions. From a sociological perspective, the post-conflict context represents an arena in which structural inequalities, damaged social relations, and collective memory and trauma continue to shape everyday social experiences. The findings demonstrate that structural vulnerability in Maluku is rooted in its archipelagic geographical configuration, limited access to socio-economic services, and the weakened institutional capacity that persists in the aftermath of conflict. These conditions systematically constrain life opportunities for local communities. Relational vulnerability is reflected in low levels

of intergroup trust, fragmented social networks, and segregated patterns of interaction, all of which weaken social capital and heighten the risk of social exclusion. Meanwhile, historical vulnerability emerges through the enduring presence of conflict memory and intergenerational social trauma, shaping how communities interpret social relations, collective identities, and perceptions of security.

Nevertheless, this article also shows that social vulnerability in Maluku is neither total nor deterministic. Community-based customary practices, social solidarity, and value-oriented education function as significant social mechanisms for managing and mitigating vulnerability. Through these practices, local communities demonstrate social agency in rebuilding relationships, renegotiating conflict memory, and generating contextually grounded forms of social resilience. These findings underscore that post-conflict recovery depends not only on structural and

institutional interventions, but also on the vitality of non-formal social mechanisms embedded within community life.

Theoretically, this study contributes to post-conflict sociology by emphasizing the importance of a relational historical approach to social vulnerability in understanding the dynamics of post-conflict societies. Such an approach enables a more comprehensive interpretation of social vulnerability as a multidimensional process, while avoiding its reduction to purely economic or security-related dimensions. In this sense, post-conflict Maluku can be understood not only as a space of social vulnerability, but also as a space in which social capacity and community resilience are continuously constructed through everyday social practices.

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