

Becoming Red and White:
The Legacy of New Order Nationalism on Interfaith Relations in Ambon

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Abstract

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This paper analyzes the roles of the nationalistic policies and rhetoric of the New Order in facilitating a wave of sectarian violence that plagued the island of Ambon in Indonesia's Maluku Province from 1999 to 2002. While the sectarian violence in Ambon did not begin until almost a year after the resignation of Suharto in May 1998, this paper endorses the belief that the roots of Christian-Muslim anxiety, mistrust, and, eventually, violence in Ambon can be traced to government efforts to manipulate religious organizations, diminish local institutions, and suppress regional identities. Furthermore, the period of political liberalization that followed the resignation of Suharto, known as *Reformasi*, created the necessarily conditions for sectarian violence to occur as the different religious and ethnic groups living in Ambon became increasingly nervous about their political, social, and economic positions in a post-Suharto Indonesia. In this paper, newspapers, anthropological articles, and contemporary reports are utilized to examine the outbreak of the sectarian violence, the rhetoric surrounding the violence, and its origins in the policies of the New Order regime. As Ambon was only one of many places in Indonesia to experience violence in the *Reformasi* period, this paper strives to situate the sectarian conflict in Ambon in the context of national post-Suharto violence and unrest.

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Introduction

On May 21, 1998, after a series of pro-democracy demonstrations and one of the Asia-Pacific region's worst financial crises, Indonesia's President Suharto stepped down, ending the 31-year rule of the authoritarian New Order regime. For many Indonesian activists and international observers, the resignation of Suharto and the fall of the New Order government was seen as a golden opportunity to restructure Indonesia's government and civil society in order to ensure greater freedoms for Indonesians, establish a stronger democratic process, and limit corruption. The succeeding period of social and political reformation, known as *Reformasi* in Indonesia, brought about greater freedom of speech and heightened political, social, and cultural debate. Many groups which had been marginalized by the New Order regime were now able to join the political discussion, including former political dissidents and religious organizations. However, despite Indonesia's seemingly democratic trajectory, within one year of the fall of the New Order, violent riots and conflict erupted in regions across the archipelago, including the provinces of West Kalimantan, Central Sulawesi, North Maluku, and Maluku. In these places, the conflicts were sectarian in nature, with the various religious and ethnic communities competing for dominance in the power vacuums created in the uncertainty and anxiety caused by the collapse of the New Order. The sectarian conflicts in Maluku Province and its most populous island, Ambon, were especially violent, resulting in the deaths of thousands of the province's inhabitants, the displacement of much of its population, and an increased distrust between the Muslim and Christian populations. While this wave of sectarian violence did not occur until after the resignation of Suharto in 1998, I contend that much of the origins of ethnic and religious tension, in Indonesia and Ambon, lie in the religious and social policies of the New Order regime, specifically the emphasis on nationalism, and the suppression and elevation of religious

organizations and communities, which generated fear, anxiety, and socio-economic competition between the Christian and Muslim populations.¹

The causes and course of the sectarian violence in Ambon have been the subject of much scholarship, particularly because the intensity and spreading of the conflict was surprising to most government officials and observers. Prior to 1999, Ambon and Maluku had been upheld as examples of interreligious harmony to be emulated throughout Indonesia, especially in other regions that were experiencing sectarian violence.² Since the sectarian violence in Ambon first erupted, numerous scholars have examined the conflict from a variety of different angles and have highlighted and explained the many factors that ultimately intersected to provide the conditions for the eruption of conflict. Anthropologist Dieters Bartels, an authority on traditional Ambonese customs, hereafter referred as *adat*, noted and critiqued the popular belief that the sectarian conflict in Ambon can be attributed to a failure in adherence to *pela*, the traditional system of town alliances that joined various towns, regardless of religious affiliation, across Maluku.³ Political Scientist Gerry van Klinken aptly emphasized the nature of the conflict as a

¹ While this paper makes frequent references to Christian and Muslim populations, these populations can be further divided into smaller communities. The Muslim community is overwhelming Sunni and is divided roughly between indigenous Muslims and non-indigenous Muslims, whose backgrounds are in other islands or provinces of Indonesia. Different Islamic organizations also exist in the region as they do elsewhere in Indonesia. The Malukan Christian community can be further divided into Protestants, primarily following the Malukan Protestant Church (*Gereja Protestan Maluku*, GPM) and the Catholic Church. Most Ambonese Christians follow the former, though the latter does form a significant minority. There also exists the presence of Pentecostal groups in the region. While the Indonesian government categorizes Protestantism and Catholicism as different religions, in this paper the two communities will together be called Christians. However, in appropriate circumstances, the terms Catholic and Protestant will be used.

² In the mid-1990s, West Kalimantan and Flores were experiencing large-scale ethno-religious violence. The Minister of Religious Affairs, Tarmizi Taher, would often use Maluku, in his statements as model of what Christian-Muslim relations throughout Indonesia should look like. "Menag: Kerukunan Sesuai Adat 'Pela' di Maluku Perlu Ditumbuhkan", *Suara Pembaruan*, October 23, 1995. and "Menag Bertatap Muka Dengan Pemuda Agama di Ambon dan Denpasar", *Suara Pembaruan*, January 9, 1997. Once the violence broke out in Ambon, the island no longer functioned as a model of interfaith harmony, especially after West Kalimantan experienced more ethnic violence in 1999 and 2001.

³ For this position, see Dieter Bartels, "Your God is No Longer Mine" in *A State of Emergency: Violence, Society and the State in Eastern Indonesia*. Sandra Pannell, ed., pp. 128-153. (Darwin: Northern Territory University Press, 2003). *Pela* alliances occur between two villages (*negeri*) who may share an alleged common ancestor or have mutual interests. The existence of a *pela* alliance between two villages necessitates the adherence to numerous

sort of “turf war” where the Christian and Muslim communities sought to assert or reassert which geographical spaces and social positions were rightly theirs in response to the social uncertainties and anxiety created in the aftermath of the fall of the New Order.⁴ In her analysis of the conflicts, anthropologist Patricia Spyer explored the role of media and public imagination in contributing to the spreading of violence.⁵ Ambonese religious scholar and anthropologist Sumanto Al Qurtuby reminds scholars not to neglect the religious motivations and aspirations that inspired those militants to take up arms in participating in the sectarian conflicts.⁶ I contend that all of these explanations and analyses are valid, inasmuch as they accurately address certain aspects of the conflict. However, this paper is primarily concerned with the generation and hardening of Muslim and Christian identities during the latter part of the twentieth century, particularly during the New Order, and why these identities were triggered in the early months of 1999. In this paper, I assert that the pressures and shortcoming of New Order nationalism efforts, the manipulation of political parties and the civil service, the emergence of confident Islamic movements, and general anxiety from democratization play the main roles in explaining the origins of the initial violence.

obligations and rituals, such as the providing of aid in time of need from one *pela* ally to the other and the attendance of one village’s royalty during the coronation of a *raja* in the other village. During warfare, military assistance may also be requested.

⁴ For this position, see Gerry van Klinken, “What caused the Ambon violence?” *Inside Indonesia* no. 60 (December 1999) and “The Maluku Wars: Communal Contenders in a Failing State” in Charles A. Coppel (ed.), *Violence Conflicts in Indonesia: Analysis, Representation, Resolution*, pp. 129-143. (London: Routledge, 2006).

John T. Sidel holds a similar position, see John T. Sidel, “The Manifold Meaning of Displacement” in *Conflict, Violence, and Displacement in Indonesia*. Eva-Lotta E. Heman, ed., pp. 29-59. (Ithaca: NY, Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2008.)

⁵ This study is shown in Patricia Spyer, see Patricia Spyer, “Fire without Smoke and Other Phantoms of Ambon’s Violence: Media Effects, Agency, and the Work of Imagination.” In *Indonesia* no. 74 (October 2002).

⁶ For this position, Sumanto Al Qurtuby, “Ambonese Muslim Jihadists, Islamic Identity, and the History of Christian–Muslim Rivalry in the Moluccas, Eastern Indonesia” *International Journal of Asian Studies* 12, 1, (2015); Sumanto Al Qurtuby, “Christian Militancy in Eastern Indonesia: Revisiting the Maluku Violence” *Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2, (August 2015).

Although the subject of this paper is primarily focused on Maluku and its primary island, Ambon, it is important to situate the sectarian violence in Maluku within the greater context of Christian-Muslim relations throughout Indonesia. Tensions between the two religious groups and tensions between each of these religious groups and the state were occurring across Indonesia before, during, and after the New Order. Discourse about the relationship between religion and the state taking place in the political centers and media of Indonesia, particularly in Jakarta, would certainly have had a significant impact on Muslim-Christian relations in Ambon and the surrounding islands. Seeing that the sectarian violence of the Post-Suharto era was not limited to Ambon, we can understand that many other regions of Indonesia were experiencing similar conditions, creating a strong point of comparison when researching the causes of violence in Ambon. As such, it is important to examine national policies and the rhetoric of national and local leaders, which can help us understand the wider concerns and fears of the Muslim and Christian populations of Maluku and the motivation of those from outside Ambon to participate in this sectarian conflict or attempt to influence its outcome.

While this paper is primarily concerned with the generation and hardening of communal identities in Maluku during the New Order era along religious lines, other historical events and social and demographic trends will be taken into consideration. The relationship between indigenous Ambonese communities, both Muslim and Christian, as well as migrant communities will be explored so as to provide a counterpoint to the generally-accepted Christian-Muslim narrative of the conflict. By analyzing the relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous communities, scholars can also develop a stronger understanding of the complexities that arose between different populations within the overarching religious communities. This is particularly important when analyzing the relationship between indigenous Muslims and non-indigenous

Muslims in Ambon. In addition, the legacies of the Dutch colonial period and Sukarno government also play a significant role in understanding the origins of regional violence. Many of the policies of the Dutch and Sukarno's Old Order government and the social and political trends that were established in those periods were continued or expanded upon during the New Order era. As such, this paper will note which of those policies or practices were continued under the Suharto regime, how they were implemented during the New Order, and how the continuation of those policies and practices impacted intercommunal relations in Ambon and the surrounding areas.

Setting and Overview of Sectarian Conflicts in Maluku

According to the report "The Violence in Ambon" by Human Rights Watch, fighting broke out on January 19, 1999, in the Batu Merah neighborhood of Ambon after an alleged altercation involving a Christian Ambonese bus driver and two Muslim Bugis youths.⁷ Within minutes of the altercation, Christian and Muslim groups began to coalesce in the area, culminating in clashes and the throwing of rocks. According to one Muslim resident, the throwing of rocks between indigenous Christian and non-indigenous Muslim groups did not seem out-of-the-ordinary as intercommunal tension and brief flashes of conflict were not uncommon; however, by the end of the day, this seemingly mundane quarrel evolved into a series of violent clashes that were occurring throughout the area of Kota Ambon.⁸ Shops in Ambon's Mardika marketplaces were burnt down, pedicabs were destroyed, and places of worship were targeted by angry mobs. By the end of the first day, many Muslims were handing

⁷ Human Rights Watch. *Indonesia : The Violence in Ambon*. (New York, N.Y.: Human Rights Watch, 1999), 2, 10. In some accounts, the altercation erupts between an Ambonese Christian bus driver and a Muslim Bugis conductor.

⁸ Human Rights Watch, *Indonesia: The Violence in Ambon*, 11-12.

out white armbands and headbands to identify each other in the chaos of these clashes. In the meantime, Ambonese Christians donned red headcloths. Ironic that the opposing sides would use the colors red and white, the colors of the Indonesian national flag, to distinguish themselves from one another.

News of this violence spread to other towns, neighborhoods, and islands in Maluku, intensifying tension and distrust between the Muslim and Christian communities and evolving into warfare amongst civilian groups. As a result of the conflict in Ambon, fighting occurred in other parts of Maluku Province, including the Lease Islands, the Banda Islands, Seram, Buru, and the Kei Islands. In August 1999, intense ethno-religious fighting also erupted in northern islands of Maluku Province, which was in the process of being separated from Maluku Province to become North Maluku Province. Furthermore, the arrival of militants affiliated with the Islamic terrorist organization *Laskar Jihad* throughout Maluku in May 2000 further escalated violence in the region.

The conflict officially ended on February 13, 2002 with the signing of the Malino II Accords by the leaders of the warring parties in the Maluku Sectarian Conflict. However, interreligious distrust and segregation had been firmly established in the cultural and religious landscape of Maluku. The scale of the violence was immense. Within the first two years, thousands had been killed, hundreds of thousand had been displaced, and thousands of homes and places of worship had been burned down.⁹ By 2002, the International Crisis Group estimated that 700,000 people were displaced during the four years of violence in Maluku.¹⁰ In

⁹ In 2000, the United Nations estimated that the death toll was 2,500, 400,000 people had been displaced, over 18,000 houses had been burned, and over 1,000 places of worship had been destroyed. United Nations Inter-Agency Appeal for the Maluku Crisis, 16 March - 30 September 2000. United Nations. Unpublished report. Obtained from OCHA website.

¹⁰ Spyer. "Fire without Smoke and Other Phantoms of Ambon's Violence: Media Effects, Agency, and the Work of Imagination.", 24.

addition, much of this violence resulted in the disruption of political and economic activities in the province.

Much of the population of Maluku suspected that the military and police were biased in the execution of their peace-keeping operations. Across Indonesia, Ambonese Christians, particularly Ambonese Protestants, were suspected of affiliation with the exiled government of the Republic of South Maluku (*Republik Maluku Selatan*, RMS) in the Netherlands, an accusation that had existed since a failed uprising in Ambon in 1950, calling into question Maluku Christian loyalty to the Republic of Indonesia. Meanwhile, Maluku Christians feared the Islamization of Indonesia resulting from the growing confidence of Islamic groups during the final years of Suharto's presidency and in the aftermath of the fall of the New Order. These concerns will be elaborated upon in the coming sections.

It should be noted that many people in Maluku and across Indonesia have come to believe that the conflicts were spread by *agents provocateurs*, such as pro-separatist forces, or instigated by people who formerly worked for ex-President Suharto, although these theories have little evidence to directly support them.¹¹ However, the proliferation of these sorts of conspiracy theories do illustrate the sense of marginality felt by those living in Maluku in that forces in Jakarta or elsewhere were widely believed to be manipulating communal relations and orchestrating violence. Yet, even if these *agent provocateurs* had provoked ethno-religious violence in the region, the conflict was only made possible by deeply held communal antagonisms that would have made the populations susceptible to such meddling by outside agents. Thus, we can presume that the primary focus of analysis on the Maluku sectarian

¹¹ Human Rights Watch. *Indonesia: The Violence in Ambon*, 7-10.

conflicts should be on the roots of these communal tensions and the triggering of communal identities, in this case religious identities, during the *Reformasi* period.

Nevertheless, the role of non-local players, specifically Indonesian security forces, must be acknowledged in order to better understand the ways in which the conflicts were protracted or, according to some scholars, exploited by national players. According to sociologist Muhammad Najib Azca, competition between and within the Indonesian military and police forces during the final years of the New Order and the *Reformasi* era prolonged and intensified the conflict, often resulting in the participation of those forces.¹² It has even been estimated that as much as eighty percent of all ammunition fired during the period were fired by the Indonesian military or police forces.¹³ Azca also asserts that tensions within the national government, notably the animosity between General Wiranto and President Abdurrahman Wahid, who took office in October 1999, also hindered decisive actions to end the violence in Maluku.¹⁴ These examples are not meant to indicate that the security forces or politicians in Jakarta engineered or wanted the conflicts in Maluku; however, their inclusion in this paper is to acknowledge evidence that competition between certain figures, namely national politicians and generals, obstructed peacekeeping operations and caused the conflict to be drawn out.

Conflict in the Context of *Reformasi*

¹² For this analysis, see Muhammad Najib Azca, "Security Forces in Ambon: From the National to the Local" in *Violence in Between: Conflict in Archipelagic Southeast Asia*, edited by Damien Kingsbury, pp. 231-254. (Singapore: ISEAS Publications, 2005).

¹³ John Braithwaite and Leah Dunn. *Anomie and Violence: Non-Truth and Reconciliation in Indonesian Peacebuilding*. (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2010), 166.

¹⁴ Azca, "Security Forces in Ambon: From the National to the Local", 244. Tensions between generals and politicians in the national government manifested themselves elsewhere in Indonesia during this time. Most notably, much of the violence in East Timor during its independence referendum has been attributed to competition between Wiranto and Prabowo Subianto as well as tensions with the national government. For a more in depth analysis of that conflict, see Geoffrey Robinson, *"If You Leave Us Here, We Will Die"*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

In much scholarship written on the post-Suharto Indonesian state, a significant amount of emphasis has been placed on the relationship between democratization and decentralization and their effect on intercommunal relations and conflict. Political scientists have long noted that periods of transition from an authoritarian state to a liberal democracy are often fraught with upheaval as many problems arise due to a lack of functioning or stable government and authority. Moreover, the early stages of democratization are most susceptible to instances of nationalist and ethnic conflict.¹⁵ As the sectarian conflicts in Ambon occurred within a year of the resignation of Suharto, we can contextualize the sectarian violence as an unfortunate side-effect of this difficult transition period that was made possible by the uncertainties that accompany the democratization process while having its roots in the policies of the New Order government and other social, economic, and cultural trends.

For many democracy theorists, the process of decentralization in a highly centralized state, like Suharto's Indonesia, is seen as necessary to ensure democratic empowerment of regional governments and local populations. However, as noted by Jamie Davidson in his study on violence in West Kalimantan, the darker sides of decentralization, such as a "heightened ethnocentrism and pernicious nativism", are hardly acknowledged by those scholars.¹⁶ During the *Reformasi* era, the Indonesian government embarked on an initiative to decentralize the state and provide greater autonomy to Indonesia's provinces. On the surface, this was done to dismantle the highly centralized and coercive system of administration that had been pursued by the Suharto government, which had been a demand from certain regional movements since Indonesian independence. However, a number of scholars have noted that this may also have

¹⁵ Jack Snyder. *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict*. (New York: WW Norton & Company, 2000), 310.

¹⁶ Jamie S. Davidson. *From Rebellion to Riots: Collective Violence on Indonesian Borneo*. (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 20.

been done to appease anti-Jakarta sentiments in separatist-prone, resource-rich provinces in Indonesia's Outer Islands.¹⁷ Unfortunately, in the view of Davidson, given the rise of ethnic and religious polarization in the late New Order, the decentralization of Indonesia's government enabled the ethnic cleansing and communal violence that had once been unimaginable to occur.¹⁸ In the case of Maluku, the creation of North Maluku province out of Maluku province in 1999 can be seen as an act of decentralization that directly contributed to the proliferation of violence in the region as this separation altered the ethnic and religious makeup of Maluku and, in the case of North Maluku, drew greater competition for new administrative positions.¹⁹

New Order Rhetoric on Nationalism

Considering that the violence in Ambon was occurring at roughly the same time as other ethno-religious conflicts in Indonesia, we must examine the national policies of the New Order that impacted Christian-Muslim relations across Indonesia. The nationalistic policies of the New Order regime were used to promote the idea of a unified Indonesian nation; however, the consequences of these policies were often the growing sense of oppression by many of Indonesia's ethnic and religious groups, and the breakdown of local institutions. After 1966, when General Suharto took charge as the new leader of Indonesia and proclaimed the establishment of a new regime, which he termed the "New Order" to contrast his rule from the "Old Order" of the Sukarno regime, the politics of Indonesia were defined by an increasingly centralized government, a stronger role for the military, and the repression of any potential

¹⁷ H. Schulte Nordholt. "Renegotiating Boundaries: Access, Agency, and Identity in Post-Soeharto Indonesia" in *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, land-, en Volkenkunde* 159, no. 4 pp. 550-589 (2003), 564.

¹⁸ Davidson, *From Rebellion to Riots*, 21.

¹⁹ Christopher Duncan. "The Other Maluku: Chronologies of Conflict in North Maluku" in *Indonesia* no. 80 pp. 53-80 (Oct. 2005), 80.

dissent, whether ethnic, religious, or ideological. As a result, the New Order regime concentrated extraordinary power in the Indonesian central government, often emphasizing national political and economic institutions over local ones. This process of centralizing political control included the appointment of local political leaders by the central government and the limitation or supervision of religious organizations, which Suharto feared would undermine his national model and prospects of a unified Indonesian nation. Thus, in order to promote this notion of a unified Indonesian nation, Suharto repressed any discussion on ethnicity, race, and religion in the public sphere and maintained the Indonesian government's adherence to his predecessor Sukarno's quasi-secular ideology, *Pancasila*, which was developed in the early months of the Republic of Indonesia in 1945.

In order to placate the demands of conservative Muslims and liberal Muslims/non-Muslims in Indonesia, in 1945, President Sukarno developed the concept of *Pancasila*, the five principles of the Republic of Indonesia, whose first principle was the belief in the one and only God.²⁰ Because many of Indonesia's first leaders feared that the declaration of Islam as the official state religion would cause rebellion amongst Indonesia's non-Muslim populations, particularly the Christians in Eastern Indonesia, they decided that the new Republic of Indonesia would not declare one official religion, but instead recognize the importance of religion among the people of Indonesia.²¹ In this way, Indonesia occupied a position between a secular state and a religious one. Furthermore, in the June 1945 speech in which he outlined *Pancasila*, Sukarno referenced Christianity more than the other recognized religions, aside from Islam, suggesting

²⁰ *Pancasila* is a Sanskrit term used to refer to the five principles of the Republic of Indonesia: Belief in the One and Only God, Just and civilized humanity, The unity of Indonesia, Democracy guided by the inner wisdom in the unanimity arising out of a deliberation amongst representatives, and Social justice for all people of Indonesia.

²¹ This position is articulated in Indonesian Vice-President Mohammad Hatta's writings. See Mohammad Hatta, *Sekitar Proklamasi 17 Agustus 1945* (Jakarta: Tintamas, 1970), 57-59.

that the position and aspirations of Christians in the newly independent Indonesia was a point of concern for Sukarno.²² However, many conservative Muslim Indonesians, noting that the newly independent nation would be a majority-Muslim one, strongly opposed the idea of a secular state and supported the establishment of an explicitly Islamic state. This opposition to the quasi-secularization of Indonesian government manifested itself in a series of armed Islamist conflicts that plagued Indonesia during the Sukarno era, most notably the *Darul Islam* rebellions in West Java and South Sulawesi, which last from the late 1940s to the early 1960s.²³

Like Sukarno, President Suharto regarded the adherence to *Pancasila* as necessary to maintain peace between Indonesia's religious communities. As a result of the numerous religious uprisings and the presence of continued Islamist resistance, which sought to reestablish Indonesia as an Islamic state such as the *Darul Islam* rebellions, Suharto was suspicious of religious organizations, in addition to being unwilling to allow regional autonomy in Indonesia. As such, the principles of *Pancasila* were promoted to counter the influence of religious organizations, including Indonesia's most prominent Islamic organizations, *Muhammadiyah* and *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU), despite their support of Suharto in the aftermath of the 1965 *coup* and 1965-1966 anti-Communist purges.

In addition, in 1965, Suharto introduced the policy of SARA (*Suku, Agama, Ras, Antargolongan*/Ethnicity, Religion, Race, and Inter-group relations), which limited the ability of Indonesians to openly talk about issues related towards ethnicity, race, and religion so as to help promote the New Order's nationalistic agenda. Suharto feared that the acknowledgement of

²² Wawan Tunggul Alam, ed. *Bung Karno Menggali Pancasila (Kumpulan Pidato)*. (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2001), 26-30. Specifically, Sukarno alludes to the teachings of Jesus Christ as a set of principles. Sukarno does not appear to make distinctions between Protestantism and Catholicism.

²³ Fatimah Hussein. *Muslim-Christian Relations in the New Order Indonesia: The Exclusivist and Inclusive Muslims' Perspectives*, (Bandung, Indonesia: Mizan Pustaka, 2005), 79.

ethnic or religious tensions would increase the possibility of conflict in Indonesia. As a result, local organizations were often limited in their ability to explicitly affiliate themselves with a particular ethnic, linguistic, or religious groups due to concerns about promoting exclusionist positions that harmed national identity. This particular form of censorship can easily be seen in the media of the New Order, which rarely examined the roots of ethno-religious violence in Indonesia and always encouraged the people of Indonesia to remember the unifying principles of *Pancasila*. However, the SARA policy was not without its detractors. Numerous dissidents accused the SARA policy of being used to target critics or potential opponents of the New Order regime. Specifically, according to scholars, such as Ariel Heryanto, the SARA policy was a tool used to oppress certain groups in Indonesian society, especially the Chinese and the fundamentalist Islamists.²⁴

After the resignation of Suharto in 1998, organizations and discourse that would have been prevented through the implementation of SARA began to emerge. For decades, discussions on ethnicity and religious difference had been politicized and, consequentially, suppressed by the New Order government. However, the weakening of the Indonesian state provided an opportunity for ethnic and religious communities to bring their specific concerns and aspirations to the forefront of public debate.²⁵ Oftentimes, communities were concerned with what they perceived to be their rights to territory and political positions.²⁶ Disastrously, the opening of discussion on ethnicity and religion revealed deep-seated tensions between ethno-religious communities across Indonesia and precipitated a series of conflicts, including the conflicts in

²⁴ For more information on the Chinese experience in the New Order, see Ariel Heryanto, "Ethnic Identities and Erasure: Chinese Indonesians in Public Culture", in *Southeast Asian Identities*, edited by J.S. Kahn, pp. 95-114. (Singapore: ISEAS, 1998).

²⁵ Henk Schulte Nordholt. "A Genealogy of Violence" in *Roots of Violence in Indonesia: Contemporary Violence in Historical Perspective*, edited by Freek Colombijn and J. Thomas Lindblad, pp. 33-62 (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2000), 50.

²⁶ Davidson. *From Rebellion to Riots*. 143.

Maluku, that were accompanied by the cleansing of competing ethno-religious communities in certain geographic, political, and economic spaces.

Suharto's Manipulation of Political Parties and Its Impact on Local Politics

The nationalistic policies of the New Order regime were not limited to social programs concerning the promotion of *Pancasila* as a unifying concept or SARA, although the government reforms of the New Order regime would greatly impact Indonesian society. In the early 1970s, the Suharto government began to reorganize the political parties of Indonesia in order to integrate many of Indonesia's pre-New Order political parties and the various religious organizations into the new regime's heavily centralized political structure. As such, Suharto elevated the role of his chosen party *Golongan Karya* (Golkar) and banned all but two parties the United Development Party (*Partai Persatuan Pembangunan*, PPP) and the Indonesian Democratic Party (*Partai Demokrasi Indonesia*, PDI). The former nationalists of Sukarno's Indonesian Nationalist Party (*Partai Nasionalis Indonesia*, PNI) and two Christian parties were merged into the PDI, while the major Islamic organizations, including *Muhammadiyah* and NU, were coalesced into the PPP. Opponents of this arrangement argued that the momentum for political Islam was slowed down and controlled, because the Islamic organizations within the PPP did not necessarily hold the same objectives.²⁷

On the surface, the reorganization of political parties in Indonesia seemed to achieve the results that Suharto had wanted. In 1955, the religious communities in Maluku had largely voted along sectarian lines with Protestants voting for the Indonesian Christian Party (*Partai Kristen Indonesia*, Parkindo) and Muslims voting for Masyumi, the dominant Islamic party of the period

²⁷ Jacques Bertrand. *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict in Indonesia*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 75.

that included Muhammadiyah and NU. Yet, by 1999, the success of the non-religious PDI-P²⁸ and Golkar suggested that religious identities were no longer the basis for electoral politics. However, in reality, these parties and their local leadership did not reflect the overall population of Maluku province. In practice, Parkindo, which had been merged in PDI, had come to dominate the local branch of the party during the New Order, convincing many Muslims in Ambon that PDI and its successor PDI-P would make Maluku a Christian stronghold.²⁹ In addition, members of Golkar were traditionally drawn from the bureaucratic class, which in Ambon was historically dominated by Christians. Thus, throughout much of the New Order period, the local Golkar branch in Ambon was dominated by Christians and its leaders were generally Christian.³⁰ Up until the 1990s, Muslim participation in local political parties was limited and would come to be a major point of discontent leading to the development of organizations, such as the Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals (*Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia*, ICMI), which advocated for greater Muslim representation in politics and bureaucracy and became an important player in politics in Maluku during the 1990s.

New Order Politicization and Centralization of Religious and Cultural Institutions

This period also saw the creation of government-sponsored national religious organizations, which were given the authority on religious matters throughout the country,

²⁸ PDI-P (*Partai Demokrasi Indonesia-Perjuangan*) is the rebranding of PDI. Since 1993, Megawati Sukarnoputri, daughter of Sukarno, had been chairperson of PDI. Yet, by 1996, PDI began to split into two main factions with Megawati leading one faction and former chairperson of PDI Suryadi leading the other. In 1997, the Suharto government recognized the Suryadi faction as the official PDI; however, once the New Order regime fell and the limits placed on political parties were lifted, Megawati declared the formation of PDI-P with the “P”, standing for *perjuangan*, or “struggle”, added to distinguish her party from the government-aligned PDI and to signify her struggles during the Suharto era.

²⁹ Adam Jeroen. “How Ordinary Folk Became Involved in the Ambonese Conflict: Understanding Private Opportunities During Communal Violence” in *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde*, vol. 166, no. 1 (2010), 31.

³⁰ Azca. “Security Forces in Ambon”. 238.

significantly undermining indigenous institutions and practices. One such organization that emerged in Indonesia was the Indonesian Ulema Council (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia*, MUI), which was created in 1975 to advise the Muslim community on national issues, but was often guided by the Suharto government to advance nationalistic agendas. In its capacity as the national Islamic council made up of clerics from numerous Muslim organizations, such as Muhammadiyah and NU, MUI produced *fatwa*, legal opinions or interpretations on issues pertaining to Islamic law, and advice for the greater Muslim community on religious practices. In some cases, a *fatwa* issued by MUI impacted not only Muslim communities but also non-Muslim communities. This can be seen in a 1981 *fatwa*, which banned non-Muslims from participating in Muslim holidays and Muslims from participating in non-Muslim holidays, declaring it *haram*, meaning “forbidden”, for Muslims to take part in Christian holidays.³¹ For much of Maluku’s modern history, it was not uncommon for Christians in to participate in Lebaran celebrations and for Muslim to participate in Christmas celebrations. Unfortunately, this particular proclamation was one of many decrees that contributed to greater segregation between Muslims and Christians in places like Ambon.

For many Christian communities in Indonesia, particularly those living in Maluku and North Maluku, the 1981 *fatwa* was perceived by some to be a product of a growing less-tolerant strand within reform Islam as many reformist Muslim leaders sought to purge Islam of local *adat*.³² For many Ambonese, because adherence to *adat* and participation in interfaith ceremonies and celebrations were valued, this proclamation by MUI was believed to undermine interfaith relations in Ambon and elsewhere. As such, the 1981 *fatwa* should be regarded as an important event in the growing gap that existed between the Christian and Muslim communities

³¹ Majelis Ulama Indonesia, *Kumpulan Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (Jakarta: Pustaka Panjimas, 1984) 81-89.

³² Duncan. “The Other Maluku”. 58.

in Maluku. However, many Christians and Muslims did, and still do, continue to maintain traditional participation in both religion's events. Nevertheless, the actions of the MUI should be seen in the context of solidifying Muslim and non-Muslim identities across Indonesia by its attempts to limit interaction between the two faiths.

However, perhaps the nationalistic policy with the greatest impact on Ambonese society was the Village Law of 1979 (*Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia No. 5 Tahun 1979 tentang Pemerintahan Desa*), which attempted to standardize the procedures of village government throughout Indonesia. The purpose of the Village Law was to integrate all Indonesian localities into the centralized government of the New Order regime by creating the position of a village head who would be appointed by the central government. This was not unusual in Indonesia, as regional leaders were regularly appointed by the national government. In the case of Maluku Province, the first indigenous Malukan governor was not appointed until 1992. However, in the case of the Village Law, this policy greatly diminished the relationship between village leaders and the traditional village elite. Traditionally, the leader of the Malukan village was the *raja*, a hereditary position which had strong relations with the religious and spiritual leaders of the village. However, with establishment of a government-appointed village head position, the traditional village political structure in Maluku was significantly weakened.³³

³³ Historically, villages in the Ambon area were led by a *raja*, which was a hereditary position. The *raja* would work closely with the *tuan tanah*, who would manage the sanctity of the village and mediate between the people and their ancestors. The *raja* would also work with a religious leader. In the case of Christian villages, this was a minister who was appointed by the Maluku Protestant Church. In the case of Muslim villages, this was an imam, who was a member of the local elite. The Village Law of 1979 disrupted this series of relationships by replacing the *raja* with an appointed village head (*Kepala Desa*). This law was enacted to replicate, at the local levels of governance, the structures of power at the national level. This meant that power was concentrated in the hands of an individual who formally worked in cooperation with a popular representative, but in reality answer to the superiors in a chain-of-command. More on this law can be read in Juliet Lee's "The Changing Face of the Village in Ambon", in *Cakalele* vol. 8 (1997), pp 59-77.

In the view of many in Maluku, the Village Law, due to its reorganization of traditional village structures and weakening of traditional leaders, resulted in the impaired ability of Malukans to observe traditional *adat*, most importantly the observance of *pela* alliances, which had long been utilized to preserve peaceful relations between Ambonese villages.³⁴ This is evident in the calls to repeal the Village Law and reinstate the traditional structure of the Malukan village as outlined in the “Recommendations of Langgur” (*Seran Langgur*), a document composed by the Catholic Crisis Centre of the Diocese of Amboina (CCDA) in Langgur in Southeast Maluku in 2001.³⁵ In their view and the views of other observers, the reapplication of traditional village structures and adherence to *adat*, such as *pela*, were essential to promoting peace in the region. However, because *pela* only concerns inter-village relations, a new system would have had to been developed along the principles of *pela* that could be applied across the province and agreed upon by the communities, whether Protestant, Catholic, Muslim, indigenous, or non-indigenous for it to function. Nevertheless, the implementation of the Village Law and the concerns of local leaders for the lack-of adherence to *adat* in Maluku do suggest that the reorganization of village structures did affect local identities in those local institutions which may have demanded the attention of indigenous Ambonese. With these local affiliations weakened, identities based on broader categories, such as religion, may have taken precedence over more localized identities.

³⁴ Oftentimes, *pela* and *adat* are jointly mentioned in discussions on the utilization of Malukan traditions to decrease violence and conflict. As previously mentioned, *pela* is a system of village alliances, which are based on alleged shared ancestry or mutual interests between two villages (*negeri*). These *pela* alliances are accompanied by a set of *adat* that are used to acknowledge, renew, or celebrate the relationship between two villages. This may include the assisting of one village by another during times of war or famine, the participation in local rituals, the construction of places of worship, etc. Opponents of the 1979 Village Law allege that the weakening of local institutions prevented local leaders from fulfilling these obligations.

³⁵ “Recommendations of Langgur”. Ambon, Indonesia: CCDA, 2001.

Historical Perceptions of Discrimination and their Continuation during the New Order

While this paper is primarily focused on the impact of New Order-era policies and social, economic, and political trends on the hardening of ethnoreligious identities in Maluku and the sectarian conflicts, it is important to consider some of the historical trends that pre-date Suharto's consolidation of power. Importantly, a number of the institutions in place in Indonesia and the socio-economic positions of Ambon's various ethnoreligious communities can be traced to the Dutch colonial period and, as noted in previous sections, the Sukarno era. In particular, fears of Islamization or Christianization, access to education and civil service positions, and dominance of commerce were issues that affected the Ambonese population both during the colonial period and the *Reformasi* era. As such, this thesis analyzes the ways in which colonial or Sukarno era policies or trends were continued in the New Order or how the New Order government tried to correct what it perceived to be flawed or discriminatory policies from those eras in order to understand how entrenched certain points of intercommunal tension were in the cultural and social landscape of Maluku.

The sense of oppression that occurred within the conservative Muslim population of Indonesia as a result of the heavy restrictions on Islamic organizations was not a recent perception that developed solely in the New Order regime. Since the colonial era, the threat of Christianization and the perceived preferential treatment of Christians had been a primary concern for many Muslims, particularly religious Muslims, in Indonesia. During both the Sukarno and Suharto regimes, government posts and offices were filled by more secular Muslims and Christians than conservative Muslims. In addition, while the Dutch colonial authorities had restricted the growth of the Islamic community, they also limited Christian missions amongst the Muslim population. However, the Indonesian Constitution of Sukarno, which guaranteed the

legal equality of the recognized religions of Indonesia, effectively lifted that restriction.³⁶ In the 1960s, rumors of a Christian conspiracy to convert all Indonesians began to spread across Indonesia. This could be seen in the spread of anti-Christian pamphlets across Java, such as a 1967 pamphlet published in the *Panji Masyarakat* journal, which stated that Christian groups had already outlined detailed plans to Christianize the people of Indonesia.³⁷ Many Indonesian Muslims perceived these activities to be an effort of recolonization through religion.

These perceptions of Christianization and preferential treatment of Christians was especially prevalent in Maluku. Because the Dutch occupation of Maluku occurred earlier and lasted longer than the Dutch occupation of other regions in the East Indies, including Java, the impact of Dutch colonial policy could be felt stronger in Maluku, particularly Ambon, than most other regions of Indonesia. Ambon has had a large Muslim population since the early 16th century, when traders from North Maluku's prosperous clove-producing sultanates, namely Ternate and Tidore, brought clove production and Islam to Ambon, initiating a process of state formation and Islamization similar to what had happened in North Maluku. However, Maluku's lucrative spice trade also attracted European mercantile kingdoms, most importantly the Portuguese, who began the process of Christianization, particularly amongst those Ambonese who had not yet converted to Islam. In 1609, the Dutch overtook the Portuguese as the colonizers of Ambon, subsequently expanding their own clove-producing operations and efforts to convert the population to Protestant Christianity, rather than Roman Catholicism which had been promoted by the Portuguese.³⁸

³⁶ Husein, *Muslim-Christian Relations in the New Order Indonesia*, 81-82.

³⁷ *Panji Masyarakat* 17, 1967, 4.

³⁸ Richard Chauvel. *Nationalists, Soldiers, and Separatists*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: KITLV Press, 1990), 16-23

In the cases of both the Portuguese and the Dutch, efforts to Christianize the native population of Maluku were supported by the colonial authorities, especially in the case of the Portuguese. In addition, both colonial powers attempted to undermine Muslim and pagan rulers and elevate their own local allies, who were generally Christian, so as to consolidate control in the region. As noted by historian Leonard Andaya, the Portuguese often characterized their interventions in Maluku, in this case the north Malukan sultanates, and local resistance as a form of religious struggle. Moreover, they portrayed conflicts between local populations as a struggle between Christianity and Islam.³⁹

For much of the Dutch colonial period, there existed the perception that the Ambonese Christians were favored over the Ambonese Muslims, whose religious and political activities were marginalized by the colonial authorities. During this period, the Christians, particularly Protestants, were frequently employed in the colonial administration in Ambon and elsewhere in the Dutch East Indies; however, more importantly, after a drop in the price of cloves worldwide and the abolishment of the Dutch monopoly on clove-production on Ambon in 1863, Ambonese Christians were heavily recruited into the Royal Netherlands Indies Army (*Koninklijk Nederlands Indisch Leger*, KNIL). As a result of the Ambonese Christians' participation in the Dutch colonial project, those Ambonese who were recruited into KNIL began to develop an identity as partners of the Dutch, superior to other peoples in the Dutch East Indies. Furthermore, the decrease in the spice trade in Ambon also had the effect of encouraging many Muslim Ambonese to leave for other parts of the Dutch East Indies. As sailors, traders, and pilgrims, these Muslim Ambonese facilitated greater interaction between themselves and other Muslims in

³⁹ Leonard Andaya. *The World of Maluku: Eastern Indonesia in the Early Modern Period*. (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), 146

the archipelago, leading many to develop an identification with other Muslims across the Dutch East Indies.⁴⁰

During the Dutch colonial period, aside from being highly represented in KNIL, the Christian community and, in particular, the Protestant community in Ambon had greater access to Western-style education in Ambon when compared to the Muslim communities. The Dutch had established a system of governmental schools primarily in Kota Ambon and predominantly-Christian towns, neglecting the predominantly-Muslim towns in the north of Ambon. The Dutch would not build European style schools in Ambon's Muslim areas until the 1920s, where they were underfunded compared to their Christian counterparts and met with mixed-success. By the 20th century, Ambon had one of the highest rates of literacy in the Dutch East Indies, although this was due to incredibly high literacy rates among Christians. The literacy rate among Muslim Ambonese was still quite low. As a result of their higher levels of education, Ambonese Christians were disproportionally represented amongst civil servants and professionals across the Dutch East Indies.⁴¹ These higher rates of education would continue to influence the high rates of recruitment amongst Christians, across Indonesia, into the Indonesian military and civil service through the Sukarno era and the New Order regime.

The continued recruitment of educated Christians into the bureaucracy of the New Order did little to mitigate Muslim fears of marginalization. In fact, the bureaucracy and armed forces were constantly accused of having an anti-Muslim bias. Among countless accusations concerning this issue, Muslim and former Member of Parliament, Hartono Mardjono, accused the military of holding the recruitment test for the officers of the army's elite troops during

⁴⁰ Chauvel, *Nationalists, Soldiers, and Separatists*, 40-49.

⁴¹ Chauvel, *Nationalists, Soldiers, and Separatists*, 25-38.

Friday prayers, when Muslims had to be in the Mosque.⁴² This sort of perceived discrimination further verified in the minds of many conservative Muslims the need to elevate the role of Islamic organizations in order to ensure their rights in a seemingly un-democratic anti-Islamic regime.

As briefly mentioned above, one of the ways in which Muslims in Ambon and across Indonesia attempted to rectify what they perceived to be discriminatory elements in politics and bureaucracy was by joining ICMI, which was founded in 1990 by future President B.J. Habibie who was Indonesian Secretary of Research and Technology at the time. Not soon after its foundation, after Suharto began to shift his identity and government towards Islam, ICMI would become an influential organization in the Suharto government and Golkar, in particular. As a result, the 1990s would see greater Muslim representation in Indonesian and Malukan bureaucracy.

Another way the Suharto government attempted to influence Islam was through the development of a network of schools that supported and taught the government's teachings on Islam through outreach programs with Islamic organizations, such as Muhammadiyah and Al Khaira'at.⁴³ In Maluku, these sorts of initiatives enabled the Muslim population to develop their own networks of power and bureaucracy that was quite similar to that of their Protestant counterparts. This did not significantly contribute to the division that was occurring between Muslim and Christian communities in Ambon, as the networks sometimes intertwined. In fact, by the end of the twentieth century, more Muslims had access to privileged positions through their networks that enabled them to attend the same schools and state universities as their

⁴² "Suharto's Armed Forces", *Republika*, January 3, 1997.

⁴³ Both Muhammadiyah and Al Khaira'at run Islamic school across Indonesia.

Christian counterparts, while competing for the same bureaucratic positions.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, the occurrence of the sectarian conflicts of the *Reformasi* period suggest that full integration of both Muslims and Christians into the bureaucracy and acceptance by both communities had yet to be achieved.

While Muslims throughout Indonesia were feeling the pressure of New Order era nationalistic policies, Christians in Ambon often experienced mistrust on the part of the national government and their neighbors. Christians throughout Muslim-majority Indonesia had long considered themselves to be in an extremely precarious and vulnerable situation as their loyalty to the Indonesian state was constantly in question, despite the participation of many Christians in the Indonesian independence movement. Even as late as 1993, one major general of the Indonesian National Army stated that only the Islamic community could maintain the independence of Indonesia, implying that non-Muslims, including Christians, were not as loyal or capable as their Muslim counterparts.⁴⁵ Furthermore, throughout most of the colonial era, the notion of the Ambonese Christian as a collaborator with Dutch colonial authorities would become prevalent amongst many other inhabitants of the Dutch East Indies as seen in the Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Buru Quartet* in which many of the anti-Dutch uprisings are quelled by Ambonese soldiers, sometimes referred to as "Black Dutch".⁴⁶ This sort of distrust would continue through the Sukarno era and New Order regime, although the idea of the Ambonese Christians as being disloyal to the Republic of Indonesia would largely be the result of the failed Republic of South Maluku (*Republik Maluku Selatan*, RMS) uprising of 1950, when former

⁴⁴ Sidel, "The Manifold Meanings of Displacement", 44-45.

⁴⁵ "Pangdam Jaya: Islam Tak Akan Hancur oleh Kekuatan Apa Pun", *Pelita*, July 3, 1993.

⁴⁶ The term *Belanda Hitam* could also be used to refer to soldiers of African descent, such as those from Suriname or Aruba, who were in the Dutch East Indies. The event I am referring to occurs in Pramoedya's *Child of All Nations*. Pramoedya Ananta Toer. *Child of All Nations*. Translated by Max Lane. (New York: W. Morrow, 1993.).

KNIL soldiers rejected the inclusion of Ambon and its surrounding islands into the newly-recognized Republic of Indonesia. Nevertheless, considering that the broader Christian and Muslim communities suspected continued preferences for the other community and alleged discrimination on the part of their neighbors and the government, the continued mutual mistrust between the communities can be regarded as the result of these policies and forms of rhetoric.

Understanding Suharto's aversion to regionalism in Indonesia's territory, the memory of the RMS uprising was frequently used to justify a strong military presence in Maluku province. As such, Ambonese opponents and critics of the New Order regime were frequently accused of being supporters of the RMS movement, now exiled in the Netherlands. Furthermore, because the majority of rebels in the RMS uprising were Christian former KNIL soldiers, Ambonese Christians were generally the target of these accusations. Since the RMS uprising was defeated, the Ambonese Christian community was unable to escape this accusation, which was often used to fuel anti-Christian sentiment during the sectarian violence. Some Anti-Christian rhetoric went as far as to refer to RMS as the "*Republik Maluku Serani*", *Serani* being a word for "Christian". In actuality, the RMS movement did try to recruit some Muslim leaders into their movement and found some, albeit limited, success.⁴⁷ However, this did not matter to some anti-Christian actors, such as Ambonese Muslim Brigadier General Rustam Kastor, who believed that the RMS attempts to attract Muslim supporters in 1950 were insincere and that the sectarian conflict was, in reality, caused by an RMS-led anti-Islamic conspiracy.⁴⁸ Accusations of support from RMS leaders and the Maluku Sovereignty Front (*Front Kedaulatan Maluku*, FKM), a small pro-secessionist movement, were used to discredit Ambonese Christian actions and concerns, while

⁴⁷ It can also be noted that RMS declaration of independence did not declare RMS to be a Christian state.

⁴⁸ For this view, see Rustam Kastor. *Konspirasi Politik RMS dan Kristen Menghancurkan Ummat Islam di Ambon-Maluku*, (Yogyakarta: Widhah, 2000). This book was used as a recruiting tool for Muslim militants across Indonesia to join Laskar Jihad and fight to protect Muslim communities in Ambon.

galvanizing the greater Indonesian population against Ambonese Christians.⁴⁹ This charge of an overtly-Christian anti-Islamic separatist conspiracy eventually enabled the Islamist *Laskar Jihad* militants to position themselves as nationalist defenders of Muslims, when they began entering Maluku in 2000.

Another area of Christian concern was the continuation and expansion of the population relocation program of *Transmigrasi*, which moved people from densely-populated, predominantly-Muslim regions of Indonesia to less populous areas of the country. While commonly associated with the New Order regime, *Transmigrasi* had been started by the Dutch colonial government and sustained by the Sukarno government in post-independence Indonesia, but the numbers of *transmigran* moving to the less populous regions of Indonesia peaked in the early 1980s. Across Indonesia's marginalized regions, this was frequently perceived to be a means of Islamizing and Javanizing many of Indonesia's native populations. This resulted in notable conflicts that arose in West Kalimantan, Papua, and East Timor. In response to concerns about the perceived Islamization and Javanization⁵⁰ of Indonesia's Christian regions, the Indonesian government argued that opponents of *Transmigrasi* were simply anti-integrationists who were unthankful to the central government for bringing economic and political development to these regions.⁵¹

Like other regions of Indonesia, Maluku Province was selected by the central government for the placement of *transmigran*. Many Christians in the province believed this to be evidence

⁴⁹ These accusations are expressed or noted in "Maluku Moslems Against FKM's Move", *Jakarta Post*, January 11, 2001; "Aparat Diminta Tindak Front Kedaulatan Maluku", *Republika*, January 11, 2001; "Muslim Maluku Desak Tindak FMS-RMS", *Republika*, February 14, 2001.

⁵⁰As stated before, the Javanese were not the only ethnic group involved in *Transmigrasi*; however, because of the perception of the Javanese as the most powerful ethnic group in Indonesia and significant component of the transmigration scheme, the term "Javanization" became used to define the incorporation of marginalized regions into Indonesia's dominant political structure and culture.

⁵¹ This view was articulated by Minister of Religious Affairs Tarmizi Taher. See "Isu Islamisasi Atau Kristenisasi Banyak Dilatar Belakangi Kepentingan Politik", *Suara Karya*, November 8, 1994.

of the Indonesian government's desire to turn Maluku into a Muslim-majority province and diminish the influence of Maluku's Christian population. However, instead of being sent to Ambon, the majority of *transmigran* were sent to less densely-populated islands in Maluku, such as Buru or Seram. In reality, most migration to Ambon was from Sulawesi, home to the Bugis and Butonese who came to Ambon in order to set up commercial enterprises and find employment as laborers. These two migrant predominantly-Muslim groups, which had a long history of migration to Ambon, quickly carved out influential positions in Maluku's commercial economy, although Christian fears of a near-complete Muslim control of the economy were greatly exaggerated.⁵² Early in the sectarian conflict, Ambonese Christians would identify these groups of outsiders, both *transmigran* and economic migrants, as the sources of violence.

Aside from concerns raised by migration from other parts of predominantly-Muslim Indonesia, Christian fears of Islamization were also focused on the amount of financial support that both communities were receiving from the government or abroad. For many Christian churches, aid from the West represented a significant part of their funding. However, in 1978, a ministerial decree that gave the Ministry of Religion control over foreign aid to religious institutions was passed.⁵³ Many Christians across Indonesia believed that this particular decree was passed to specifically appropriate the aid that they received from the West. At the same time, many Muslims were wary of the amount of funding that the churches had received from overseas, along with the presence of Christian missionaries, viewing them as a threat to Islam.⁵⁴ In this regard, the rhetoric surrounding the passage of that 1978 decree was defined by

⁵² These views can be seen in the interviews conducted by Jacques Bertrand in Ambon in 1996. Bertrand, *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict in Indonesia*, 121-123.

⁵³ Keputusan Menteri Agama No. 77 Tahun 1978 Tentang Bantuan Luar Negeri Kepada Lembaga Keagamaan di Indonesia.

⁵⁴ Duncan, "The Other Maluku", 58.

simultaneous accusations of Christianization and Islamization by Indonesia's two largest religious communities.

Nevertheless, despite the national government's careful monitoring of the Christian population, especially in Ambon as noted above, and the presence of Muslim migrants in predominantly-Christian regions, many Indonesian Christians, unlike their more conservative Muslim counterparts, embraced Sukarno and Suharto's insistence on *Pancasila*, feeling that it ensured the rights of religious minorities. Since the establishment of the Republic of Indonesia, there had a widely-held belief that politically, Islam would only offer limited political and religious tolerance to non-Muslims.⁵⁵ The establishment of the quasi-secular Republic of Indonesia in the constitution was instrumental in gaining support of non-Muslims in Indonesians, especially Christians.

Islamization of the New Order and Growing Christian Anxiety

In the 1980s and 1990s, Indonesian politics and society witnessed an Islamic revival, which saw greater representation of Islamic organizations in national government. Around this time, Suharto also began to exhibit more religious behavior, which included performing the *Hajj* in 1991. Suharto also increased the presence of members from Islamic organizations, such as *Muhammadiyah* and NU, in the New Order regime and agreed to the establishment of the ICMI. Nevertheless, while Suharto's increased tolerance of Muslim organizations was welcomed by many conservative Indonesian Muslims, others were suspicious of Suharto's intentions, believing he was simply trying to increase support from the Muslim population or facilitating

⁵⁵ Waler Bonar Sidjobat. *Religious Tolerance and the Christian Faith*. (Jakarta: Badan Penerbit Kristen, 1965), 117.

sectarianism, which he could use to pin Islam and the other religious groups in Indonesia against one another.

As mentioned before, during the New Order, the Islamic organizations of *Muhammadiyah* and NU felt their contributions to the transition of the New Order had been neglected by the Suharto government. This sense of neglect and discrimination was especially felt during the early 1970s, when these Islamic organizations were forced to join the PPP, a party whose name made no reference to the Islam's role in the party. However, by the late 1970s, the PPP began to more openly oppose Suharto's authoritarian government and call for the introduction of Islamic values in the New Order government. Yet, despite the increased presence of Islam in the Suharto government in the 1990s, Islamic groups were largely still limited, albeit significantly less than before, in their ability to influence the policies of the state. Until the fall of the New Order in 1998, Suharto and his government consistently insisted on the importance of *Pancasila* as the state ideology. Vice President Try Sutrisno was particularly vocal in his emphasis on *Pancasila* over the elevation of a specific religion, often targeting calls for greater Islamic representation in politics, claiming that adherence to *Pancasila* was necessary for maintaining national unity.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, this belief was not shared by all Indonesians, who believed that the government's preventing of Islam from having a major role in the government has been un-democratic.⁵⁷ As a result, when the fall of the New Order occurred, many Islamic organizations felt that the promise of liberal democracy would result in more opportunities to expand their influence.

⁵⁶ "Sekali Lagi, Indonesia Bukan Negara Agama", *Kompas*, November 4, 1994. Sutrisno state, "We can be stable because of our adherence to the 1945 Constitution and Pancasila. We live in a country that believes in God, not a religious country."

⁵⁷ These sentiments can be seen in articles from the 1990s. Examples include: "Umat Islam di Indonesia Perul Tingkatan Peran", *Media Indonesia*, February 15, 1995, and Mohammad, Karto, "Islam di Indonesia, Baru Sebatas 'Political Power'?", *Republikka*, April 20, 1998.

The growing Islamization of the New Order and emergence of organization like ICMI in the 1990s significantly worried the Christian community in Ambon, who had been actively employed in bureaucratic positions during the New Order. The 1992 appointment of an Ambonese Muslim, Akib Latuconsina, as governor of Maluku and the 1997 election of Saleh Latuconsina, another Ambonese Muslim, caused quite a bit of unease among Ambon's Christian population, who had until then held most bureaucratic positions in Ambon. The election of Saleh Latuconsina in 1997 was particularly contentious for a number of reasons. Saleh Latuconsina, a member of ICMI and Golkar, was supported by the national Golkar party, while his chief rival was Freddy Latumahina, an Ambonese Christian and member of Golkar whose chief support came from the local Golkar branch made up primarily of Ambonese Christians.⁵⁸ This election highlighted a major division between the national Golkar organization and its predominantly-Christian affiliate in Ambon, verifying some of the fears that many Ambonese Christians held regarding possible political marginalization.

Furthermore, the governorships of Akib Latuconsina (1992-1998) and Saleh Latuconsina (1998-2003) witnessed the increasing presence of Muslims in traditionally Christian-held bureaucratic positions. In October 1998, a pamphlet began to circulate amongst the Christian community in Ambon that the governor of Maluku was planning on placing Muslims in "all thirty eight" top civil positions.⁵⁹ While such claims seemed to lack any foundation in data, the pamphlet does support the view that many Christians perceived the increasing representation of Muslim in the civil service to signal the increased Islamization of the regime, threatening their livelihoods. However, while Ambonese Christians complained that Muslims were taking

⁵⁸ Azca. "Security Forces in Ambon". 239.

⁵⁹ "Drs Ir Saleh Latuconsina, Gubernur Maluku: Sekarang sudah terjadi SARA," *Ummat*, 15 March, 1999.

traditionally Christian jobs, Muslims in Ambon accused the Christian population of unwillingness to give up their privileged positions.

The Position of Migrant Communities

While the role of religion and religious identities was quickly acknowledged by scholars, political analysts, journalists, and other observers as one of the primary characteristics of the conflicts in Maluku, the role of ethnicity and the tensions between indigenous and non-indigenous also play major roles in the conflict. In the time leading up to the communal violence, tension had been growing between the Ambonese and migrant communities, who had been increasing in relative size to the population for much of the 20th century. In a previous section, concerns over *transmigran* occupied a central part in local anxieties; however, the majority of non-indigenous communities living in Ambon were not *transmigran*, but rather migrants from Sulawesi seeking employment opportunities, generally as traders and laborers. The Butonese, Bugis, and Makassarese of Sulawesi were the largest of these migrants, although other non-indigenous groups were present. Furthermore, these groups were overwhelmingly Muslim and, thus, their presence created more concern for indigenous Ambonese Christians than for indigenous Ambonese Muslims, although tensions and mistrust did exist to some capacity between indigenous and non-indigenous Muslims.

This migration from Sulawesi together with migration from elsewhere in Indonesia had an enormous impact on the population of Ambon and the rest of Maluku. From 1971 to 1995, the percentage of non-indigenous Muslims, primarily from Sulawesi,⁶⁰ increased from five percent to fourteen percent. From a different perspective, as many as 100,000 people, predominantly

⁶⁰ There were also migrants from Java and elsewhere.

from Sulawesi, migrated to Maluku between 1969 and 1999. For many of these migrants, Ambon and the surrounding area were their primary destination.⁶¹ The second half of the twentieth century also witnessed an increase in the followers of Islam as a part of the populations of Maluku and North Maluku, which until 1999 were one province known as Maluku, from less than fifty percent in 1971 to almost sixty percent in 1990.⁶² Oftentimes, seeing the Butonese, Bugis, and Makassarese as a singular group, the Christian and Muslim Ambonese grew resentful and nervous about their growing presence in Ambon.⁶³ These shifts in the ethnic and religious makeup of Ambon and the surrounding area would be major sources of tension between the ethnic and religious populations in Ambon leading up to the outbreak of violence in 1999.

After riots and communal violence erupted in Ambon in January 1999, people throughout Maluku began to flee their homes with many of these displaced people, notably those of the migrant communities, fleeing to areas outside of Maluku. The conflict quickly became interpreted as a religious one as many of the participants of this conflict looked to their religious leaders for guidance and Muslim and Christian groups became pitted against one another. However, despite the role of religious institutions and the burnings of roughly one thousand places of worship, many of the migrants in Ambon perceived the conflict as initially being caused by the resentment of native Ambonese towards those migrant communities.⁶⁴ This belief

⁶¹ See, Samsu Rizal Panggabean. "Maluku: The Challenge of Peace." In *Searching for Peace in Asia Pacific: An Overview of Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Activities*, eds. Annelies Heijmans Nicola Simmonds, and Hans van de Veen, pp. 416–37. (London: Boulder, 2004).

⁶² It is estimated by Gerry Van Klinken, using data from the Biro Pusat Statistik, that the proportion of Muslims in Maluku Province, which at these times included present-day North Maluku Province, increased from 49.9% in 1971, to 54.8% in 1985, to 56.8% in 1990, although Christians remained the majority in Ambon and Southeast Maluku. Van Klinken. "The Maluku wars: 'Communal contenders' in a failing state", 136.

⁶³ Despite being grouped together, the Bugis, Butonese, and Makassarese did not necessarily occupy similar positions in Ambonese society. The Bugis and Makassarese often worked as merchants in Ambon's marketplaces, which was a source of resentment. The Butonese, however, oftentimes worked as day laborers and pedicab drivers. This often resulted with them being regarded as lower status when compared to the other groups in Ambon.

⁶⁴ Blair Palmer. "Memories of Migration: Butonese Migrants Returning to Buton after the Maluku Conflicts 1999-2002" *Antropologi Indonesia* Special Volume (2004), 89.

does, in a number of ways, neglect the participation of Muslim Ambonese groups participating in the conflict precisely because they felt that the Muslim community in Kota Ambon was under attack and there was a rumor that Masjid Al-Fatah, Ambon's main mosque, had been burned down by Christian militants. Nevertheless, this belief on the part of those migrant communities does suggest a more complicated relationship between the indigenous Ambonese population and Ambon's migrant communities than one that simply places Christian and Muslim populations in opposition to one another.

The fleeing of many people of the migrant communities from Ambon during the initial period of violence was poorly-received by those Ambonese Muslims who came to fight Ambonese Christian groups and defend their co-religionists' places of worship. Not long after the violence began, many of these non-Ambonese residents fled to their home regions, leaving those indigenous Muslims to carry on the struggle, despite the series of conflicts being initiated by an incident involving Bugis youths and the eventual issue of a *fatwa* of *jihad* struggle by numerous local Islamic organizations. This divergence in the experiences and perceptions of the Ambonese and migrant communities is best exemplified in the distinction made between *anak negeri*, or "children of the village", and *anak dagang*, or "children of trade," with Ambonese, regardless of religion, being the former and the migrant communities being the latter. Within this distinction, it is implied that it is only the Ambonese who are truly concerned with the affairs and conditions of Ambon, while the migrant communities are only in Ambon for economic reasons. According to Ambonese religious scholar Sumanto Al Qurtuby, this sentiment is still held by many Ambonese Muslims who feel that they were let down by their migrant co-believers.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Sumanto Al Qurtuby. "Ambonese Muslim Jihadists, Islamic Identity, and the History of Christian-Muslim Rivalry in the Moluccas, Eastern Indonesia," *International Journal of Asian Studies* 12, 1 (2015), 10.

However, it seems certain that these distinctions were already accepted by many indigenous Ambonese prior to the Maluku sectarian conflicts.

Religious Motivations and Imagery

Considering that the divisions that defined the opposing sides of the Maluku sectarian conflicts were ultimately based on religious identities, we must also examine the role of religion and religiosity in contributing to the tensions between the Muslim and Christian populations of Ambon and the surrounding areas. It is important to acknowledge that many of the local actors in the conflicts, both as militants and peacemakers, were guided or inspired by religion-based goals, aspirations, narratives, and imagery. The interpretation and spreading of religious discourse by both Christian and Muslim leaders frequently had the ability to influence, exacerbate, and mitigate violence during the sectarian conflicts. Thus, even though religion was not the immediate cause for violence in January 1999, the subsequent role of religious motivations and imagery must be understood if we are to understand the Maluku sectarian conflicts and the triggering of group identities as either generally Christian or Muslim. This is not to say that social, political, and economic competition between communities in Ambon and the surrounding area did not represent the primary causes of the conflict. Rather, it seems likely that those socio-economic concerns oftentimes intersected with deeply-held religious aspirations, enabling community leaders to utilize religious narratives to further their goals, including the mobilization of civilian militias.

As seen in the writings of numerous participants in the conflict, the notions of “holy war” and defending the faith are noticeably prominent. Numerous anti-Christian actors in the sectarian conflict, such as Rustam Kastor and M. Husni Putuhena, frequently described the conflict as a

holy war against the Christians who sought to drive Muslims out of what they believed to rightly be Muslim lands. In turn, they said their holy war was a response to the Christians' holy war against Muslims, which they described as crusades and even compared alleged Christian goals in the region to Zionism.⁶⁶ As one Muslim man told anthropologist Christopher Duncan, "I personally think the conflict was definitely about religion... If it was a political problem I would not have gotten involved... we opposed Christians and I consider it a jihad."⁶⁷ Many, if not most, local Muslim participants in the violence were mobilized to be involved in the jihad struggle by a number of factors, including the rumors of Christianization efforts by RMS, the circulation of a letter allegedly signed by Rev. Sammy Titaley, chairman of the Synod of the Moluccan Protestant Church, which insulted Muslims and the prophet Muhammad and instructed Christians to attack Muslim settlements and burn down mosques, and attacks by Christian rioters.⁶⁸ Together, these factors contributed to the formation of local Islamic militant groups that sought to defend their professed faith and protect their co-religionists.

Initially, the Christian Ambonese did not interpret the violence as inherently religious. For many Ambonese Christians, the onset of violence was perceived as a result of the growing tensions between the indigenous and migrant communities. In addition, we can observe in the writings of religious leaders of Ambon's Christian community, such as John Titaley, that a prevailing belief was that the tensions with the Muslim community were the result of the declining adherence to *Pancasila* that resulted from the increased Islamization in the New Order

⁶⁶ See Kastor, , *Konspirasi politik RMS dan Kristen menghancurkan ummat Islam di Ambon-Maluku*, (Yogyakarta: Wihdah, February 2000); Putuhena, *Tragedi kemanusiaan dalam kerusuhan di Maluku:- Sebuah prosesi ulang sejarah masa lalu*, (Ambon: Lembaga Eksistensi Muslim Maluku (Lemm), October 1999).

⁶⁷ Duncan, Christopher. *Violence and Vengeance: Religious Conflict and Its Aftermath in Eastern Indonesia*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 119.

⁶⁸ Al Qurtuby, "Ambonese Muslim Jihadists, Islamic Identity, and the History of Christian-Muslim Rivalry in the Moluccas, Eastern Indonesia", 9-10. Al Qurtuby notes that in an interview he had with Rev. Sammy Titaley in Ambon in 2010, Titaley refuted the authenticity of the letter and claimed that the state had composed it in order to promote conflict in Ambon.

regime in the 1990s.⁶⁹ In fact, the Ambonese Christians had hoped that the indigenous Muslim Ambonese would join their side, or at least abstain from the fighting. These hopes, however, proved to be short-lived, as indigenous Ambonese Muslims joined the conflict on the side of the non-indigenous Muslim population. It is thus after this point that the Ambonese Christians adopt a more religious tone in their efforts to engage with their opponents.

Like their Muslim counterparts, Christian militias oftentimes employed religious narratives and imagery to incentivize or justify their actions during the course of the conflicts. Based on a 2010-2011 survey on Ambonese Christian militants conducted by Ambonese anthropologist and religious scholar Sumanto Al Qurtuby, the vast majority of respondents came to believe that the conflict was a religious war and that they were responding to rumors and alleged events that mirror those expressed by their Muslim counterparts.⁷⁰ Supposed efforts to Islamize the region, the destruction of Christian places of worship, and attacks by Muslim militants all contributed to the interpretation of the Maluku sectarian conflicts as a religious war in the mind of many Christian militants. In this regard, many Christian militants would bring with them into the riots religious items, such as crucifixes, bibles, and the “Jewish Flag”, or Star of David,⁷¹ and seek the blessings of their pastor before engaging in sectarian violence.⁷²

We should also acknowledge the motivations of those militants who decided to come to Maluku for explicitly religious purposes. Although these religious militants were not the original actors of Maluku sectarian conflicts and, thus, play little role in analyzing the origins of these

⁶⁹ John A. Titaley, "Kasus Ambon dalam perspektif pertentangan ideologis Indonesia", unpublished paper presented at Sarasehan Maluku, Salatiga, 18 September, 1999.

⁷⁰ Sumanto Al Qurtuby, "Christianity and Militancy in Eastern Indonesia: Revisiting the Maluku Violence" in *Southeast Asian Studies* vol. 4, no. 2 (August 2015), 324-325.

⁷¹ Based on personal observation, Jewish iconography remains popular among Maluku's Protestant population. References to the Old Testament of the Bible are frequent points of conversation about faith. Jewish symbols, such as the Star of David, and even the flag of Israel are seen in people's homes and on public property. During church services and prayer groups, Ambonese Protestants even utilize Hebrew, such as saying "shalom" as a greeting.

⁷² *Ibid*, 125.

conflicts, the entrance of *Laskar Jihad* militants adds another deeply religious dimension to the conflict in Ambon. Since fighting initially broke out in Ambon between the Muslim and Christian communities, radical Islamic clerics, led by Jafar Umar Thalib, formed *Laskar Jihad* member with the express purpose of declaring holy war on the Ambonese Christians. In addition, during the sectarian violence, *fatwas* were issued by clerics in Saudi Arabia and Yemen, declaring the Ambonese Christians to be *kafir harbi*, or belligerent infidels, meaning they could be killed with religious authority, further emboldening the *Laskar Jihad* militants in Maluku. However, the entrance of *Laskar Jihad* into the Maluku sectarian conflict did not occur until over a year after violence began; thus, we cannot attribute the origins of the sectarian violence to their influence or sense of religiosity. Rather, *Laskar Jihad*'s role in the conflict is the exacerbation of violence that was already occurring.⁷³

In acknowledging the explicitly religious narratives that emerged during the Maluku sectarian conflicts, this paper does not intend to imply that religious convictions were the primary force in causing or instigating violence throughout the region during this period of time. Rather, by examining the use of religious narratives and imagery, we can begin to understand what sort of belief systems were held by the participants of the sectarian conflicts and how this may relate to the hardening of communal identities based on religion rather than language or ethnicity. We can, thus, observe that local actors were in part driven by faith-based concerns in addition to social, political, and economic anxieties. This is most evident in the fact that militias in the Maluku sectarian conflicts came to be identified by their religious affiliations rather than their ethnic or linguistic ones. Furthermore, despite tensions that may have and certainly did arise

⁷³ Noorhaidi Hasan's *Laskar Jihad: Islam, Militancy, and the Quest for Identity in Post-New Order Indonesia*. (Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2006), 149.

between indigenous Muslim groups and non-indigenous Muslim groups, the indigenous and non-indigenous Muslim groups were oftentimes allied by these shared religious concerns.

Could *Adat* Have Prevented the Violence?

As mentioned previously, for much of its modern history, Maluku had been regarded as an example of interreligious harmony in Indonesia. The indigenous communities of Ambon and many other islands in Maluku province had historically adhered to a custom known as *pela*, which is a system of relationships and alliances between local settlements, regardless of language or religion. This system was instrumental in settling conflicts and forming trade agreements between settlements across Maluku. Importantly, majority-Muslim and majority-Christian settlements frequently established and maintained *pela* with one another, minimizing the risk of religion-based warfare between the settlements joined in a *pela*.⁷⁴ The particular relationship was often lauded by the Indonesia's government, especially Minister of Religion Tarmizi Taher, who on numerous occasions visited Ambon and, subsequently, urged the rest of Indonesia to look to Ambon's example. As such, for the former leaders of the New Order and international observers, it came as a shock when Ambon did descend into conflict in 1999.

As previously mentioned, the Catholic Crisis Centre of the Diocese of Amboina's "Recommendations from Langgur" paper from 2001 suggested that a return to the pre-Village Law 1979 organization of village power structures and adherence to *adat* and *pela* would have helped prevent the spreading of violence in 1999. As such, this pre-1979 village structure should be reapplied across Maluku. However, this position failed to take into account that for much of the New Order period, both the Protestant Church of Maluku and reformist Muslims had

⁷⁴ For more *pela* information, see Dieter Bartels. "Guarding the Invisible Mountain". (Ithaca, NY: Unpublished Dissertation, 1977).

independently sought to reach a more “pure” form of their faiths that was unhindered by local customs and, consequentially, weakened the institution of *adat*.⁷⁵ That the importance of *adat* was diminishing without government intervention suggests that a simple return to pre-1979 village structures would have been difficult. Nevertheless, this weakening of *adat*, through the Village Law 1979, which reorganized traditional village political structures to conform to the centralized administrative conventions of the New Order, and the initiative of local religious communities, negatively impacted interfaith ties.⁷⁶

The belief that the observation of *pela* could have prevented violence is prevalent across Ambon.⁷⁷ Today, at government and school events across Maluku, people often sing regional songs, most often singing “*Gandong E*”, which itself alludes to a form of *pela*, known as *pela gandong*.⁷⁸ This song implies that the communities of Ambon represent an unbreakable bond of brotherhood and compassion. Another song, “*Banjir Duka*”, has the lyrics, “Floods of grief, tears, the pity/Houses and villages perish, the pity/Already forgotten *pela*, forgotten *gandong*, the pity”⁷⁹ While these songs are currently being sung to promote reconciliation between the religious communities, they reveal that many Ambonese wholly believed that *pela* could have prevented the sectarian violence. Lyrics like those of “*Banjir Duka*” urge the people of Ambon to preserve *pela*, because the consequence of neglecting this custom is the potential for conflict.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Richard Chauvel. “Ambon’s Other Half: Some Preliminary Observations on Ambonese Moslem Society and History” in *Review of Indonesian and Malayan Affairs*, 14,1 pp.40-80 (1980), 79.

⁷⁶ Bartels. *Guarding the Invisible Mountain*. 326.

⁷⁷ This statement is based on the author’s observations having lived in Maluku for ten months and frequently being told this belief by locals.

⁷⁸ *Gandong* is Ambonese Malay for “womb” or “uterus”. It is also a cognate for the Indonesian *kandung*. In this context, the term *gandong* is referring to the brotherhood of the singer and the listener. A *pela gandong* is a very strong form of *pela* that exists between two villages on the belief that those two villages descend from a common ancestor.

⁷⁹ Original lyrics “Banjir duka, aer mata, sio/Rumah dan kampong binasa, sio/Su lupa pela, lupa gandong, sio”

⁸⁰ The lyrics to these songs were found here: Pieter Tanimal. *Memori Tragedi Kemanusiaan di Ambon, Maluku*. (Ambon, Indonesia: Yayasan Nunusaku, 2000), 9.

For many indigenous Ambonese, both Christian and Muslim, the failure to adhere to *adat* and, in particular, *pela* was a major contributing factor to the proliferation and exacerbation of these sectarian conflicts.⁸¹ As such, many indigenous communities in Ambon attributed the failure to observe indigenous *adat* by the migrant communities, such as the Butonese, Bugis, and Makassarese, as helping to create the conflict and prevent any sort of immediate resolution.⁸² However, many forms of *adat* observed by the communities in Ambon, most notably *pela*, are based in relationships between indigenous *negeri* (the local word for village). Affiliation to a *negeri* is based on heritage. Thus, regardless of where one is born, they are affiliated to the *negeri* of their ancestors. Because the origins of these migrant communities lay outside of Ambon and the surrounding islands, where these practices were followed, the migrant communities were largely unable to follow such *adat*. The position of the migrant communities within this system is not clear as the non-indigenous groups are not affiliated to any local *negeri*. Thus, although many Ambonese sought to implement the ideas of *adat*, such as *pela*, in generating a peaceful resolution to the sectarian conflicts, these proposals would have been difficult to implement as they would not have really addressed those issues facing these non-indigenous groups.

The ability of *pela* to stop the spread of the violence is documented in Maluku. During the same period of time that sectarian violence was consuming Ambon, the Kei Islands in southeastern Maluku were also experiencing Christian-Muslim conflict. However, in the Kei Islands, local leaders were able to utilize *pela* to control the spread of violence in the islands and

⁸¹ For a more detailed account of this interpretation, see Bartels. "Your God is No Longer Mine" in *A State of Emergency: Violence, Society and the State in Eastern Indonesia*. Sandra Pannell, ed., pp. 128-153. (Darwin: Northern Territory University Press, 2003).

⁸² Jeroen Adam. *Communal Violence, Forced Migration & Social Change on the Island of Ambon, Indonesia*. (Ghent, Netherlands: Unpublished Dissertation, 2010), 142.

limit the destruction that such violence would have had.⁸³ Regardless, the violence in the Kei Islands still did occur, implying that there were underlying ethno-religious tensions in Kei that resulted in the eruption of violence, although the role of the violence in Ambon cannot be underestimated in influencing social and political affairs in Kei. Furthermore, while the Kei Islands were experiencing similar demographic trends as Ambon, the presence of migrants in proportion to the population was not as large and the Christians maintained a larger majority in the Kei Islands. As such, the experience of utilizing *pela* in the Kei Islands is not exactly comparable to that of Ambon.

Conclusion

The strong nationalistic policies and social programs of the New Order regime, while perceived as necessary in building an Indonesian national identity by the Suharto government, greatly diminished the influence of religious and regional organizations throughout Indonesia, generating a sense of discrimination and oppression by numerous groups, including Christians and Muslims in Ambon. Muslim groups were particularly concerned with the perceived marginalization of Islamic organizations and the exclusion of conservative Muslim from higher political and economic positions. Christians, especially those living in Ambon, frequently had their loyalty to the Republic of Indonesia questioned, casting in doubt their livelihoods and future in the country. Furthermore, while both the Christian and Muslim communities throughout Indonesia were experiencing tension with the state, the two religions maintained a very mistrustful, anxious relationship, that was dominated by fears of Islamization by the Christians

⁸³ This position is outlined in this report: Craig Thornburn. *Musibah: Governance, Intercommunal Violence, and Reinventing Tradition in the Kei Islands, Southeast Maluku*. Victoria, Australia: Monash Asia Institute, Monash University, 2005.

and Christianization by the Muslims as well as competition for prominent economic and political positions.

In the 1980s and 1990s, with the increasing influence of Islamic organization in Indonesian politics and subsequent presence of greater numbers of Muslims in civil service positions, we see growing anxiety over the availability of civil service positions by both Christians and Muslims. Political scientist Gerry Van Klinken attributed this intense anxiety over the civil service jobs to the economic downturn of 1997, which left many former civil servants without jobs.⁸⁴ However, the beginning of Muslim-Christian competition over these positions can be seen as early as 1992, when Akib Latuconsina was appointed governor of Maluku. As such, the most notable origin of the increasing socio-economic competition in Ambon can be traced to the early 1990s. In addition, the privileged access to education that Christians held since the colonial era must be taken into consideration.

The manipulation of political parties and local bureaucracy by the national and local governments also generated competition and tension between Christian and Muslim populations in Ambon. The sense of neglect that many Muslims felt from the political parties and the notion that they were being passed over for prominent political positions and civil service jobs contributed to the desire of local Muslims to join ICMI to advocate on their behalf. Meanwhile, the support for Saleh Latuconsina, an Ambonese Muslim, from the national office of Golkar, despite support for the opposing candidate from the local Christian-dominated Golkar, solidified the widely-held Christian Ambonese belief that the national government did not consider Ambonese Christian interests and aspirations. Considering that the violence was occurring at a

⁸⁴ van Klinken, "The Maluku Wars: 'Communal Contenders in a Failing State'", 135-136.

time of political liberalization and decentralization, these electoral and bureaucratic competitions were likely to evolve into rounds of communal conflict.

Regarding local institutions, many Ambonese believed that *pela* could have prevented the violence; even though, during the New Order, the relevancy of the *pela* had begun to diminish. This can be seen the Village Law of 1979, which attempted to standardize all village political structures across Indonesia, and the 1981 *fatwa* issued by the MUI that banned non-Muslims from participating in Muslim holidays and *vice versa*, diminishing the ability of local Ambonese to observe *adat*. Furthermore, migrants and *transmigran* from elsewhere in Indonesia, who did not adhere to Malukan *adat*, began to represent a more substantial portion of the Ambonese population. This diminished the ability of *pela* to effectively bring together all warring parties to settle their dispute according to local *adat*. However, while the *pela* could have been used to settle peace between two indigenous Ambonese villages, the explanation of the decline of *pela* does not take into account the migrant population, the tensions that arose between the migrant Muslim communities and the indigenous Christian community, or the abandonment of many traditions by local Protestant and reformist Muslim communities.

As mentioned in the beginning, many Ambonese believed that *agents provocateurs*, who remained loyal to the New Order, were guilty of initiating and spreading the violence in Maluku. However, these theories have never been proven, nor would they explain the reason why the inhabitants of Ambon became so thoroughly involved in the sectarian conflict. Sectarianism seems to occupy the mind of many militants who traveled to Ambon, but there is little evidence to suggest that separatist forces dictated the actions of Ambonese Christians. The issue of religiosity has been brought up as a possible reason for the violence in Ambon, even though this presumption also holds a number of errors. While the *Laskar Jihad* militants who poured into

Maluku to wage holy war on the Christians were certainly, in part, motivated by religious belief, but the inhabitants of Ambon who participated in the sectarian conflict were largely guided by their desires to maintain or gain political and economic positions, or simply defending themselves. As such, we need to look to the roots of this competition over political and economic positions, which is evident in the nationalistic policies of the New Order regime.

The pressures and shortcomings of the New Order's nationalistic policies, the reemergence of Islam as a formidable political force in the 1980s and 1990s, and the subsequent Christian anxiety over Islamization, together with a long history of socio-economic stratification that occurred along religious lines, made Ambon an unpredictable powder keg of sectarian conflict. In addition, Suharto's promotion of increasingly centralized, hierarchical governance greatly diminished local institutions in Maluku and elsewhere in Indonesia. As such, when the Republic of Indonesia experienced decentralization in the aftermath of the fall of the New Order regime, the Muslim and Christian populations of Ambon found themselves in competition for positions in the local political and economic structures.

The policies of the New Order regime were not the only sources of discontent between the Muslim and Christian populations of Ambon, but many of the actions of Suharto and the social and economic trends that were established during his 31-year rule heightened mistrust and pushed the various ethnic and religious groups in Ambon into uncertain and tense socio-political situations once the New Order government fell. At the time of Indonesia's independence, Ambon and the surrounding islands together had a majority Christian (predominantly-Protestant) population. However, due to high birthrates among indigenous Ambonese Muslims and the increase of migrants from elsewhere in predominantly-Muslim Indonesia, the religious demographics began to shift in the years leading up to the conflict, challenging the positions

once held by Christians in Ambon. While circumstances like this one can easily be pointed at as one of the underlying causes for the outbreak of violence in the region, the support of nationalism over local and religious identities and the increasingly prominent role of Islamic organizations and the ensuing anxiety it caused for Christians and more secularly-minded Muslims in the last years of the New Order can also be seen as causes for the commencement and continuation of sectarian conflicts throughout the archipelago. The combination of these sorts of trends further weakened the existent social, political, and economic institutions of Ambon over the course of the New Order; thus, creating the conditions that caused Muslim and Christian groups in Ambon to engage in armed struggle with one another.

The magnitude of the conflict in Ambon was unimaginable to the peoples of Maluku and the leaders of Indonesia. When violent altercations first began in January, 1999, people expected the violence to be contained and quickly resolved, but the conflict ended up continuing for three years. Once the Malino II Accords were signed in 2002, the conflict largely ended, with brief flashes of violence sporadically occurring in the succeeding years. However, after the dust settled and the reconciliation process was initiated, it was clear that the sectarian conflict had left lasting impacts on the political, economic, and social landscapes of Ambon and the rest of Maluku. Ethno-religious segregation continues to define the human geography of Ambon and the surrounding islands. It has been over sixteen years since the sectarian conflict began until the time this piece was written, but the causes and legacies of the period of violence are still the subject of much scholarship and debate.

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