

# AMBONESE MUSLIM JIHADISTS, ISLAMIC IDENTITY, AND THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN–MUSLIM RIVALRY IN THE MOLUCCAS, EASTERN INDONESIA

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*From 1999 to 2004, communal violence between Christians and Muslims broke out in the Moluccas of northeastern Indonesia, resulting in tens of thousands of deaths and injuries, and displacing hundreds of thousands of others. Unlike previous studies and analyses that give much attention to the political economy of the conflict, the dynamics of national politics, and the role of security forces – particularly the army and the police – and non-Moluccas Muslim jihadists and combatants in initiating and orchestrating the violence, this article mainly focuses on the contributions of religion, especially Islam, the dynamics of the Moluccas' local history and politics, and the role of Ambonese or Moluccan Muslim social actors and jihadists during the carnage. Focusing mainly on Maluku province, this article discusses how the local militant religious leaders framed the violence, recruited, and mobilized the masses in the combat zone, and how the local ordinary Muslim fighters portrayed – and became involved in – the wars, used religious narratives, discourses, symbols, and teachings to give theological legitimacy to the battle, and transformed their everyday experiences through the fighting. Lastly, it examines factors that contributed to the militancy and radicalism of those involved in the violence and investigates a process of radicalization of various Muslim groupings in the Moluccas that could provide a rationale for the eruption of the interreligious violence.*

**Keywords:** Islam; Islamic reformism; militancy; radicalism; violence; jihad; Ambon; Moluccas; Indonesia

## INTRODUCTION

Over the course of 1999–2004, a vicious cycle of Christian–Muslim violence unfolded in the provinces of Maluku and North Maluku (widely known the Moluccas), both of

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which were once a single province named Maluku.<sup>1</sup> Although interreligious conflict erupted in two different provinces, both Maluku and North Maluku have shared features in common with regard to the religious character of their collective violence. The communal violence in these archipelagic provinces led to tens of thousands of deaths and injuries, and created hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Property worth millions of dollars was also demolished, wiping out much of the economic progress made in the region since Indonesian independence.<sup>2</sup>

Triggered by a small brawl in the public transport terminal of Batumerah in Ambon city between a Christian Ambonese bus driver and a Muslim Buginese passenger on January 19, 1999, the violence soon involved a large number of Christian and Muslim groups in the Ambon neighborhoods and other areas of the Moluccas. These conflicts turned into deadly large-scale communal violence once the Laskar Jihad (lit. “Holy War Militia”), a Java-based armed jihadist Islamic paramilitary group, sent several thousand fighters to Ambon city, the provincial capital of Maluku, in mid-2000.<sup>3</sup> As a result of this escalation of violence, the previously stable and peaceable Moluccas became the site of devastating interreligious violence. Jacques Bertrand reveals that the violence marked the first time in Indonesia’s history where Muslims and Christians “were pitted in such ethnic warfare.”<sup>4</sup>

The collective conflict, furthermore, undermined and destroyed local cultural traditions of interreligious cooperation, such as the *pela-gandong* (“inter-ethnic/village alliance system”) and the *salam-sarane* (“Muslim-Christian unity”), which had once provided the cultural resources for some measure of peaceful coexistence between Ambonese/Moluccan Muslims and Christians.<sup>5</sup> Since the outburst of fighting, relations among these local religious groups have been marked by suspicion, mistrust, and misunderstanding. Each religious group prefers to live with their co-religionists. Even though Christians and Muslims are in the same area or village, they live in separate blocs, making the island a segregated plurality. Although the conflict formally ended in 2002 with the signing of the Malino II Peace Treaty, mass violence did not come to an end. Despite tremendous efforts at peacebuilding and reconciliation by local peace activists, difficulties persist in resolving disputes, rebuilding ties, and establishing any framework for a shared public culture of citizenship.<sup>6</sup>

Against this backdrop, this article, focusing mainly on Maluku province, is intended to examine three major issues, all of which have been largely neglected in previous studies of the Moluccas violence, namely (1) the role of religious identity, discourses, and symbols, especially Islam; (2) the local dynamics of Maluku’s social, political, and religious history;

1 In late 1999, as an outcome of political turmoil, the northern part of Maluku province became an autonomous province named North Maluku with Ternate as the provincial capital, while the southern region of the province retained “Maluku” as the province’s name with Ambon as the provincial capital.

2 ICG 2000a, 2000b, 2002; Bohm 2005; van Klinken 2001, 2007; Hefner 2005; Wilson 2008; Hedman 2008.

3 ICG 2002; Sidel 2006, pp. 196–223.

4 Jacques Bertrand 2002, p. 84.

5 Bartels 1977; Cooley 1961.

6 See, for example, Goss 2004; Hefner 2005; Pannell 2003; Hedman 2008; Brown 2005; Bartels 2003; van Klinken 2007.

and (3) the contributions of Moluccan, especially Ambonese, Muslim actors, jihadists, and Islamic groupings during the Maluku carnage. The bulk of this article, however, is intended to demonstrate the religious dimensions, and not the political and economic ones, of the Maluku conflict. While many, if not most, scholars argue that religion is only a mask for the true political-economic aims of the violence, this article suggests that political and economic issues were actually a “smokescreen” to conceal religious goals: the demolition of particular religious groups and areas, the spread of particular faiths, the conversion of other believers, among others. The forced circumcision (*khitan*) of some Christians and compelling of other religious believers to renounce their faiths and embrace new ones indicate the religious motivations of the fighters’ involvement in the combat zone.

Although this article focuses on Islam, this does not mean that Christianity contributed nothing to the violence. I have explained elsewhere the role of Christianity, the mobilization of Christian masses by Christian leaders and Protestant pastors through church networks and institutions, and the use of Biblical narratives, Christian teachings, and Judeo-Christian symbols of the Christian fighters (called “Christ soldiers”) to legitimize the warfare;<sup>7</sup> accordingly I will not repeat this here. In short, both Islam and Christianity played vital roles during the conflict, either exacerbating tensions and violence or supporting peace and reconciliation.<sup>8</sup> The word “religion” used in this article refers not only to religious doctrines, teachings, and symbols, but also to religious agents (actors, adherents, communities, and organizations) who produce and reproduce religious knowledge and cultures. There are at least four main elements of religion, namely ideas (content of belief), practices (ritual behavior), social organization (religious community), and religious/spiritual experiences, all of which could play multiple roles in the violence and post-violence situation such as that found in the case of the Moluccas.

The data presented in this article is mainly based on my dissertation research and fieldwork in Ambon city and surrounding areas, including the islands of Buru, Saparua, Haruku, and Seram between 2010 and 2011, during which I undertook more than two hundred in-depth interviews with Christian and Muslim elites, government and community leaders, NGO and human rights activists, peace workers and conflict resolution practitioners, journalists, academics, youth leaders and students, as well as former members and top leaders of Christian and Muslim militia groups.

## PREVIOUS STUDIES OF THE MALUKU CONFLICT: REASSESSMENT

Much has been written about the Moluccas upheavals by academics, policy analysts, and journalists. But most previous studies and analyses tend to place exclusive emphasis on the political and economic aspects of the conflict.<sup>9</sup> For many scholars and policymakers, with a few notable exceptions,<sup>10</sup> religious factors have been considered peripheral. They tend to

7 Sumanto 2012.

8 See for instance Qurtuby 2013, 2014; Pariela 2008.

9 For example van Klinken 2001, 2007; Adam 2009, 2010.

10 For example Duncan 2013; Goss 2004.

downplay the role of religion – which includes beliefs, identities, social networks, material culture, texts, symbols, teachings, discourses, or imagery – or omit religious framing for the fighting, arguing that the underlying motives of actors engaged in the violence are merely politics and the economy. They, moreover, insist that what appears to be a religious war is upon closer analysis really motivated by material-based political interests, socio-economic reasons, and territorial grievances that are mobilized and manipulated by greedy elites, outside provocateurs, or agents of conflict.<sup>11</sup> In brief, for most observers, religion is only used as a tool to attain political and economic aims. In other words, violence is more about the “greed” than the “creed” or the creed is used to conceal the greed. Instead of examining the “religionization process” of the violence, they merely overemphasized the “politicization” of religion.

Observers from secular traditions generally find it difficult to acknowledge the degree to which different logics and moralities affect behavior in religious communities,<sup>12</sup> and they consequently underestimate the degree to which religion underwrites violent conflict on its own terms.<sup>13</sup> Looking closely at the conflict in both Maluku and North Maluku, however, one will notice that religion played a sizeable role during the communal strife.<sup>14</sup> Over the course of the mass violence, religious symbols, texts, teachings, and discourses were scattered throughout the area. The findings of a survey questionnaire I distributed to one hundred Moluccan ex-Christian fighters and Muslim jihadists, mostly under thirty years of age during the turmoil, on the islands of Ambon, Seram, and Lease (particularly Haruku and Saparua), also confirmed such a portrayal, highlighting how religion contributed to the exacerbation of the Maluku wars and how religious and ideological motivations became some of the major contributing factors for actors involved in the violence.<sup>15</sup>

Christopher Duncan’s recent study of the North Maluku turmoil reached conclusions similar to those of my study in Ambon and Maluku province in general. Building on narratives of grassroots actors – both victims and perpetrators – Duncan said that “political and economic issues were actually just camouflage for the true religious goals of the violence,” namely “the destruction of a particular religious community.”<sup>16</sup> Building on Bruce Lincoln’s model of religion – which defines religion in four domains of varying significance: discourse, practice, community, and institution – Duncan provides explanations of how religion worked and functioned during the communal strife in North Maluku by paying attention to the central role of identity politics, religious networks and elites, as well as religious ideas, symbols, and actions.<sup>17</sup> By paying heed to these vital domains of religion, Duncan suggests that any attempt to analyze interreligious violence, like that

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11 For example Tomagola 2000; Aditjondro 2001.

12 Goss 2004.

13 Appleby 2000.

14 Sumanto 2012; Duncan 2013; Adeney-Risakotta 2005.

15 It is vital to underline that, while acknowledging political and economic aims and motives of some actors involved in the violence, there were some people that were driven by “religious passion and solidarity” and “unworldly goals” for their engagement in the Maluku warfare.

16 Duncan 2013, p. 3.

17 Cf. McTernan 2003.

of the Moluccas, needs to incorporate “narratives of divine interpretation and performative acts of violence that call on religious discourse,” alongside an analysis of the political economy of the conflict.<sup>18</sup> As Duncan makes clear, interpretations and reinterpretations of religious narratives and discourses produced and reproduced by the Moluccas’ local actors of violence – within Islam and Christianity – could influence, shape, reshape, and sustain the mayhem. While religion never acts autonomously as a cause of conflict, ignoring its role completely would preclude a proper understanding of the Moluccas violence.

The second tendency in previous studies puts emphasis on the macro frameworks of analysis by highlighting the significance, influence, and impact of the developments of national politics during the New Order toward Maluku’s political grievances and Christian–Muslim inequality that in turn provided the *raison d’être* for the collective violence to erupt.<sup>19</sup> Much attention has commonly been paid to the general discussion of the different sorts of Indonesia’s national historical, socio-political, and economic factors in their contribution, directly or indirectly, to the violence. Little attention has been paid to the particular genesis of the communal warfare. Again, while analyzing national history and politics is certainly vital in understanding local phenomena, ignoring entirely the dynamics and complexities of Maluku’s socio-political and religious history will miss significant specific events, moments, episodes, features, memories, and cases of local Muslims and Christians – either good or bad – that could possibly provide fertile ground for later tensions and conflict between the two religious groups. In fact, the Christian–Muslim violence that began to explode in 1999 was deeply rooted in the local history of political-economic rivalry and religious militancy within Islam and Christianity, particularly since European colonialism.

Moreover, the previous and existing scholarship mainly focuses on analyses of the role of security forces – especially the army and police – and non-Maluku Islamist jihadist groups in intensifying the violence. It is true that the Maluku conflict was transformed into a deadly large-scale war after the involvement of the security forces in the combat zones<sup>20</sup> as well as the advent of thousands of Java-based holy war militias, mainly linked to the Laskar Jihad and the Laskar Mujahidin, in Ambon city, the provincial capital of Maluku, in the mid-2000.<sup>21</sup> However, it should be noted that actors of violence were not only security forces and outside Muslim jihadists but also Maluku’s ordinary masses (townspeople and villagers alike), armed militias (paramilitary groupings), and Christian radical groups. Whereas commanders of the Muslim jihadist groups described the Maluku strife as a holy war against the “evil efforts” of a “presumed U.S.-led Zionist-cum-Christian conspiracy,” some elite members of Ambonese Christian groups blamed state-backed policies which favored Muslim groups in the region for the Christians’ loss of control over local cultural, political, and economic resources.<sup>22</sup> It is obvious that the Maluku chaos involved non-state local actors (e.g. religious leaders, local Christian fighters, Ambonese Muslim jihadists, ordinary masses, and civilian groupings) in initiating and exacerbating the mass violence. This is to say that throughout

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18 Duncan 2013, p. 5.

19 E.g. Bertrand 2002, 2004; Pannell 2003.

20 See Azca 2011; Aditjondro 2001.

21 Schulze 2002; Noorhaidi 2005; Sidel 2006.

22 Waileruny 2009; Pieris 2004.

the communal conflict, Maluku's local actors had been active agents and not passive victims as commonly portrayed by political observers and social scientists.<sup>23</sup>

Notwithstanding this lacuna, however, previous scholarship has greatly contributed to the understanding of the nature, dynamics, and complexities of the Maluku violence. This article hence aims at complementing the previous studies and filling in these gaps.

## MOLUCCAN MUSLIM JIHADISTS AND ISLAMIC IDENTITY

It is central to observe that there were numerous indigenous (Moluccan/Ambonese) Muslim jihadist groups during the Maluku strife. The Moluccan religious groups were not only victims and passive actors but also perpetrators and active agents in the conflict. Long before the coming of Java-based Islamist militia groups, either associated with the Laskar Jihad or the Laskar Mujahidin,<sup>24</sup> there were several indigenous paramilitary religious groupings collectively called the Pasukan Jihad (Jihad Forces, sometimes called Pasukan Putih, the “White Forces”) consisting of ordinary Muslims from among both villagers and town dwellers across the islands of Ambon, Seram, and Lease (particularly Haruku and Saparua in central Maluku). However, the arrival of non-Moluccan holy war militias of the Laskar Jihad<sup>25</sup> in Ambon city in May 2000 as well as other smaller non-Ambonese militant groups collectively known as the Laskar Mujahidin, such as Jama'ah Islamiah, KOMPAK, and the splinter groups of the Darul Islam (DI) movement, who were able to reinforce the Muslim side, led to a new escalation of the conflict, and re-energized the military power of the Muslims.

The formation of the non-Maluku jihadist groups, especially the Laskar Jihad, the largest jihadist group at the time, was triggered by news of killings of hundred of defenseless Muslim civilians in Tobelo, on Halmahera Island in North Maluku. This particular event boosted the impression among many Muslims in the rest of Indonesia that Islam was threatened in the Moluccas and needed help and protection the state could not guarantee. The Laskar Jihad forces moved into Muslim neighborhoods in Ambon city, particularly in the Muslim areas of Batumerah and Kebun Cengkih, as well as other villages on the islands of Seram, Lease, and Buru. The Laskar Jihad elites believed that the central government was incapable of protecting their fellow Muslims in Ambon city and Maluku in general; accordingly they mobilized both humanitarian and armed support for the Muslim cause in

23 Despite the fact that local actors, masses, and unions have greatly participated in the post-Suharto collective conflicts, including the Maluku warfare, their role has been largely neglected in analyses and studies on the communal violence.

24 ICG 2000b, 2001, 2002; Schulze 2002; Noorhaidi 2005; Azca 2011.

25 The Laskar Jihad was formed by people of different professions and backgrounds, mainly recruited from various *jamaah pengajian* (religious study groups) and with mainly low socio-economic status. It was a paramilitary group of the *Forum Komunikasi Ahlus Sunah Wal Jama'ah* or FKAWJ for short (i.e. communication forum of those who upheld the practice and authority of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions). It claimed to have some 10,000 members, many of whom were young men who were seeking moral assurance amidst the uncertainty of Indonesian political life, particularly after the fall of the Suharto regime in May 1998. Its leader, Ja'far Umar Thalib (b. 1961), a Malang, East Java-born of Yemeni descent, united people of the same vision and mission to oppose “the oppression and humiliation directed toward the Indonesian Muslims” ([www.laskarjihad.or.id](http://www.laskarjihad.or.id)).

Maluku through radio broadcasts, publications, public statements, and religious meetings. The Laskar Jihad also advocated the arrest, trial, and conviction of the Christians they accused of instigating the conflict in January 1999. Although at the beginning few Muslims were enthusiastic about the presence of the Laskar Jihad and most did not identify closely with the militias, many were grateful to it for its role in fending off Christian fighters and shifting the balance of power between the two conflicting religious communities.

Moreover, the establishment of the locally based Pasukan Jihad, it should be noted, was not only in Maluku province but also in North Maluku, albeit with different dynamics and purposes. Unlike in Maluku, the Pasukan Jihad in North Maluku was founded in the face of not only Christian fighters, but also the Pasukan Kuning (the “Yellow Forces”), the traditional guards of the Sultan of Ternate, one of North Maluku’s Islamic Sultanates. Although the sultan claimed that the decision to deploy his Pasukan Kuning was to protect the region’s infrastructure, property, and the lives of the Christian residents from the rioters, the appearance of the Pasukan Kuning, equipped with spears and machetes, on the streets, loyal to the sultan, worried his political opponents. As a result, the sultan’s political rivals, including some Muslim leaders, established the Pasukan Putih (the “White Forces”) to attack the Pasukan Kuning and the sultan’s supporters, in addition to Christian communities. They broadcast messages (propaganda more precisely) that the sultan was pro-Christian since he had three Christian wives.<sup>26</sup>

These dreadful events in Ternate (and Tidore) were furthermore to lead to extensive, widespread, and far more deadly interreligious violence across North Maluku as innocent adherents of Christianity and Islam, including women and children, were ruthlessly slaughtered by the rioters. By the end of 1999, thousands of Muslims, particularly in Ternate and Tidore, had been mobilized by their leaders to launch attacks against Christians in north Halmahera; thereby North Maluku entered the new millennium in the grip of full-scale religious war. The above events suggest that the riots in Ternate and Tidore became the critical turning point in North Maluku’s conflict due to high-ranking Makian-Muslim leaders portraying their ethnic kin in Malifut as casualties of Christian assaults. Additionally, the brutal acts of the (Muslim) rioters in murdering a pastor, burning down Christian churches and houses, and driving out Protestants, led the region to a religious sectarian conflict. Not only Muslims, but Christian groups – either associated with the Moluccan Protestant Church (Gereja Protestan Maluku) or the Halmahera Evangelical Christian Church (Gereja Masehi Injili Halmahera) – also did the same against Muslim fighters by mobilizing Christian/Biblical religious resources. These facts suggest that religion thus played a complex role in determining the trajectory and shaping the intensity of violence. Over the course of the conflict in North Maluku, religion was not only used as a means of provocation by interest groups, but also, as Chris Wilson aptly points out, “simultaneously heightened the emotions of combatants, facilitated the mobilization of militias, determined the form of that mobilization (e.g. the names, clothing and symbolism used by the militias) and provided the ideology that sustained those militias in the field.”<sup>27</sup>

26 See Wilson 2008.

27 Wilson 2008, pp. 192–93.



The North Maluku conflict became more intense and vicious after commanders (e.g. Benny Bitjara for the “Christian Soldier” group and Abu Bakar Wahid for the Pasukan Jihad) and members of the militia groups of both Islam and Christianity utilized religious doctrines, teachings, and symbols to sanction fighting, killing, and other forms of violence, along with the fears of Christians and Muslims for their lives and the sustainability of their faith. Many Muslims declared an obligation, willingness, and enthusiasm to wage *jihad* to prevent Christian expansionism and “missionarism” in the province. In addition, a large number of Muslim militias joining the Pasukan Jihad were motivated by what Wilson calls “jihadist principles” – a “desire to defend Islam and defeat those who had attacked Muslims.”<sup>28</sup> Likewise, the Christian groups in Halmahera, where interreligious civil wars took their most extreme form, put emphasis on religious solidarity and symbolism as a vehicle for mobilizing the unity and courage needed to oppose and fight against the Muslim militias and the rioters. Members of the Protestant Churches also evoked Christian sentiment in mobilizing combatants. Christians wore large crosses on the battlefield and proclaimed their struggle to protect Christianity and fellow Christians in North Halmahera. As Wilson has noted, there were also many Christians who said that their “ultimate” objective during the conflict was to “defend Jesus.” During the fighting, to engage with the spirit and breviary of the Laskar Kristus (the “Christ Soldiers”), pastors sang “Onward, Christian Soldiers.”<sup>29</sup>

As in North Maluku province, local Muslims in Ambon city and Maluku province in general also assembled groups of Pasukan Jihad.<sup>30</sup> During the collective conflict, each Muslim *negeri* (Ambonese term for a village) throughout the rural areas and in the down-towns of the islands of Ambon, Lease, and Seram mostly had their own Pasukan Jihad. As a result, there were Pasukan Jihad Kailolo, Pasukan Jihad Hitu, Pasukan Jihad Pelauw, Pasukan Jihad Negeri Lima, among others.<sup>31</sup> These groups of Pasukan Jihad were founded from the early days of the conflict – well before the arrival of the Laskar Jihad in Maluku – triggered by rumors of the burning of Ambon’s main mosque Masjid Al-Fatah by Christian rioters and attacks on some Muslim regions in Ambon city by Christian fighters. The founding of the Pasukan Jihad, some ex-Muslim jihadists have claimed, was aimed at defending Muslim villages and communities from Christian fighters. Although the local jihadists claimed that the jihad they used was for defensive purposes, there is no doubt they attacked Christian groups and regions in retaliation.

A number of Maluku’s Muslim leaders organized and mobilized Ambonese/Moluccan jihadist and militia groups including, among others: (1) radical Muslim leaders of Arab, Hadrami, or Yemeni descent such as, most notably, Mohammad (Mo) Attamimy, Umar Aly Attamimy, Salim Basoan, and Ikram Ibrahim, and including *habaib*, Ambonese/Moluccan Arabs who were believed by local Muslims to be descendants of Prophet Muhammad PBUH; (2) Ambonese/Moluccan indigenous political and religious leaders (e.g. KH Ali Fauzy, KH Abdul Wahab Polpoke, Hanafi Marhum, and others); (3) elite

28 Wilson 2008.

29 Wilson 2008, pp. 147–76.

30 Christians did the same by establishing the abovementioned Laskar Kristus.

31 Sumanto 2012.



members of Muslim migrant groups particularly Butonese; and (4) respected village/community leaders and figures such as *bapa raja* (village head), *bapa jou* (*adat* chief), *haji* (the hajj), *bapa imam* (the prayer leaders), and *tuang guru* (Islamic teacher). During the violent conflict, they organized their followers according to clan (Ambonese: *fam*) networks, ethnic associations, or communal and family ties, in order to involve themselves in the jihad struggle against Christians whom they saw, at the time, as the enemies of Islam and Muslim *ummah* (community).<sup>32</sup>

In addition to the individual actors described above, Ambonese/Moluccan militant Muslim organizations and non-state civilian groupings also played a vital role in the process of mass mobilization and the framing of the violence as a sacred war against the Christian foes. These Islamic organizations included (1) the Forum Umat Islam led by Mo (Mohammad) Attamimi, an Ambonese Arab of Hadrami descent (now head of the Maluku branch of the Ministry of Religious Affairs); (2) Front Pembela Islam (Muslim Defenders Front) led by Husain Toistuta (formerly Imam of Ahuru mosque, now a member of parliament from Partai Golkar); (3) Front Pembela Islam *Maluku* (Moluccan Muslim Defenders Front, chaired by Husni Hentihu); (4) Forum Pemuda Muslim Baguala (Forum for the Muslim Youth of Baguala, led by Hanafi Marhum); (5) Pusat Komando Jihad Maluku (Maluku center for jihad command); (6) Satgas Amar Ma'rif Nahi Munkar (task force for commanding the right and forbidding the wrong); (7) Forum Silaturahmi Umat Islam Maluku; (8) Ikatan Persaudaraan Muslim Nusa Ina (Association of the Muslim Brotherhood of Nusa Ina, led by the Irwan Patty); and (9) Front Islam Maluku (Moluccan Islamic Front).<sup>33</sup> More specifically, the purposes of these organizations included, among others: (1) organizing or mobilizing Ambonese Muslim jihadists; (2) collecting donations to support the wars and help the victims; (3) defending Muslim territories; and (4) attacking targeted Christian areas. Besides those organizations, youth associations like *Gerakan Pemuda Islam* (Muslim youth movement, led by Adnan Hatala), as well as Maluku branches of national Muslim student bodies such as Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam (HMI), Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia (PMII), Ikatan Mahasiswa Muhammadiyah (IMM), and Kesatuan Aksi Mahasiswa Muslim Indonesia (KAMMI) became some of the key agents in mobilizing Muslims in Ambon town to fight against the Christians.

There were several factors that caused Moluccan Muslim leaders to become involved in the jihad struggle and then frame the violence as a holy war against “Christian infidels.” These factors included: (1) rumors of the Christianization of Maluku land by former members and activists of the Republik Maluku Selatan (RMS, Republic of South Maluku), a separatist movement in the 1950s that demanded independence for Maluku from Indonesian rule; (2) the circulation of a letter signed by the chairman of the Synod of the Moluccan Protestant Church, Rev. Sammy Titaley, which insulted Islam, the Qur'an, Prophet Muhammad and Muslims in general, as well as instructing Christians in North Maluku

32 Interviews with Muslim actors engaged in the jihad struggle such as Muhammad Safin Soulisa (November 26, 2010) and KH Abdul Wahab Polpoke (October 4, 2010) in Ambon city.

33 This information is based on my interviews and conversations with a number of Ambonese scholars and leaders including Jacky Manuputty (January 2, 2011), Abidin Wakano (June 2, 2010), and Hasbullah Toisuta (November 2, 2010).

to wipe out Muslims in order to protect Christian communities and properties;<sup>34</sup> and (3) attacks on Muslim neighborhoods, burnings of some mosques, and killings of some Muslims in Ambon city by Christian rioters. All of these issues had strengthened the belief on the part of Muslims that the violence was a truly religious war for religious ends. Since the conflict was framed and portrayed as a “religious war,” religion thus had become a powerful language for – and the main source of – mobilization of masses.

It is interesting to point out that the Maluku Muslim jihadists involved in the warfare were mostly ethnically native Ambonese or those from the “Ambonese cultural area,”<sup>35</sup> such as Ambon Island, Lease (Haruku and Saparua), and Seram. Non-Ambonese Muslim migrants such as Javanese, Butonese, Buginese, and Makasarese mostly fled to their home regions in Java and Sulawesi (Celebes). For this reason, today’s Ambonese Muslims have become somewhat disappointed with the Muslim migrants, saying that these migrants – or in their terms, “*anak dagang*” (“trade sons”) as opposed to “*anak negeri*” (“village sons”, meaning “indigenous people”) – only came to Ambon for trade and money. Moreover, the leaders of these organizations also issued a *fatwa* (Islamic edict) of jihad struggle.<sup>36</sup> In its official statement issued on April 16, 1999, the Front Islam Maluku (FIM), for instance, declared five points highlighting the obligation of jihad for Muslims in Maluku against the Christians as follows:

First, FIM – or Muslims in Maluku in general – refuse any attempt at pseudo-peace offered by anyone, and command for all Muslims in Maluku to establish the spirit of “Islamic militancy” through jihad struggle for the sake of Islam until death comes. Second, urge Muslim elements in Maluku to build Islamic solidarity/brotherhood (*ukhuwah Islamiah*), under the spirit of *tauhid* (the Oneness of God), in order to take concrete actions through the jihad movement to defend and secure Muslim communities. Third, insist on all elements, including security forces and central government, not to hinder the jihad movement waged by Ambonese/Moluccan or other Indonesian Muslims. Fourth, FIM believes that crimes and cruelty committed by Moluccan Christians can only be stopped through jihad struggle. Without jihad, Muslims’ rights in Maluku will endlessly be threatened and suffer. Fifth, FIM declares open resistance against the evil and brutality committed by Moluccan Christians. *Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar.*

34 In an interview with me (Ambon, June 16, 2010), Rev. Sammy Titaley questioned the originality of the letter; accordingly he refuted it and accused the state apparatus of actually writing the letter to provoke Muslims into attacking Christian communities.

35 Bartels 1977.

36 *Fatwa* (pl. *fatawa*), or Muslim jurists’ opinions, may address either a specific problem of interest to a particular person or a matter of public concern. During the Middle Age of Islam, Muslim scholars issued strict qualifications that a jurist or *alim* (pl. *ulama*) had to meet before becoming qualified to issue a *fatwa*, and the more serious the subject the higher the qualifications demanded of a jurist. Today, however, the situations that enforced this system of qualifications have crumbled and disappeared. Now, practically anyone can appoint himself a *mufti* (a person who issues a *fatwa*) and proceed to spew out *fatwa*, without either a legal or a social process that would restrain him (Abou El Fadl 2005, pp. 28–29).

The statement cited above indicates that the jihad struggle in Maluku was already being waged by Ambonese/Moluccan Muslim leaders since the early days of the conflict, and not since the arrival of the Laskar Jihad and the Laskar Mujahidin-linked militia groups. When the Laskar Jihad of Ja'far Umar Thalib arrived in Ambon, some of the organizations mentioned above merged or joined with the Laskar Jihad (e.g. that of Mo Attamimi), while others operated independently (e.g. that of Hanafi Marhum). After the first outbreaks of violence in 1999, Hanafi Marhum, along with other radical Muslims such as Rusli Amiluddin, Sulaiman Watupono, Sayuti Marasabessy, and Wahab established *Forum Pemuda Muslim Baguala* (Forum for the Muslim Youths of Baguala), a local jihadist group based in Kotajawa in Ambon Island set up to defend Muslim communities from Nania to Laha in the seashore of Ambon Bay (commonly known as Baguala).

Moreover, just days after the first incident of January 19, 1999, most Muslims, particularly youths and men, were involved in the jihad struggle. After some ceremonies in the mosques, Muslim jihadists from Jazirah Leihitu in the northern part of Ambon Island, led by the *raja* (traditional village chief) and *imam* (Islamic leader), came down to Ambon town to attack Christian areas and to kill followers of Jesus Christ, who were considered Muslim enemies intent on destroying Islam and Muslim community in the land of Maluku. In addition to arrows (*panah*), blades (*parang*), and fish bombs, the jihadists used a white piece of cloth as a headband. This cloth was taken from "*kain sirathal*," namely a cloth that functioned to substitute for a *sajadah* (prayer rug) when the *sajadah* is being washed.

Due to its significant function, accordingly, local Muslim villagers considered this *kain sirathal* as sacred, and therefore whoever used the headband from this particular cloth would be safe and protected from danger on the battleground. On the headband was written: *La ilaha illa Allah, Muhammad Rasulullah* ("No god but God and the Prophet Muhammad is Allah's messenger"). For local Muslim jihadists, this white headband (*pita putih*), along with the writing of *La ilaha illa Allah, Muhammad Rasulullah*, is considered as *jimat* (an amulet) that could protect its user, as well as being a marker of Islamic identity.<sup>37</sup> There were indeed a number of rites, ritual practices, and ceremonies performed before the jihadists went to the combat zone. Some ex-jihadists told me that they were bathed or showered by local *imam* or *tuang guru* by using water blessed with prayers. Prior to taking a bath, the jihadists were obliged to wear a white cloth prepared by the *imam*. The jihadists believed that by doing so they became *kebal* ("invulnerable") and in turn would be safe on the battlefield.

As stated earlier, it is vital to highlight that for ordinary Ambonese Muslims, especially the jihadists, the interreligious conflict in Maluku was portrayed as a sacred war. A former Muslim jihadist from Negeri Lima of Leihitu Peninsula told me:

When the communal conflict erupted in Ambon on January 19, 1999, the only thing that Ambonese Muslims thought of was waging *jihad fi sabilillah* ("jihad in the Allah path"). If there was a child or member of the family who died on the

37 The description of the involvement of Muslims from the "Muslim *negeri*" in the Leihitu Peninsula, consisting of twelve villages, in the Ambon war is summarized from a number of my Ambonese Muslim informants – all from the Jazirah Leihitu – including M. Safin Soulissa, Yusuf Laisouw, Ismail Heluth, M. Yamin, Alidad Hataul, and Ikkal "Eten" Pelu.

battleground, they were happy because they died as a martyr (*mati syahid*) so would be guaranteed immediate admission to heaven. When the dead bodies were brought to their home villages, they were enthusiastically welcomed by people with the shouting of “*Allahu Akbar*” [God is great] and crying not because of sadness but cheerfulness. Before going to the battlefield, the jihadists were gathered in a mosque to receive advice (*tausyiah*) from local *imam*, mosque staff (*ta’mir*), or *raja* (head of *negeri*). They commonly advised on a number of activities that were considered as taboo (*haram*) in warfare. These included (1) the prohibition of insults, mocks or vile remarks; (2) the ban on using “dirty words”; (3) the prohibition of robbing or stealing; (4) the prohibition of drunkenness. In addition to these taboos, the jihadists were advised to conduct good things like *salat* (praying). People who had previously engaged in “forbidden activities” according to Sharia Law (such as stealing and gambling), did not permit themselves such activities during the Ambon war because they feared that these particular acts would contaminate their sacred jihad struggle and mission. Thus during the conflict, the level of people’s religiosity and piety became very high. In the aftermath of the conflict, many of these ex-jihadists “returned to normal” – stealing and gambling.<sup>38</sup>

It is thus obvious that for local ordinary Ambonese/Moluccan Muslims, the image of the communal violence in Maluku was a religious-based conflict or “sacred war” in which religious identities, symbols, and discourses became a significant contributing element of the conflict. A questionnaire survey I distributed to ex-Ambonese/Moluccan Muslim jihadists during my fieldwork in Maluku from 2010 to 2011 confirmed this view. Of fifty persons I surveyed, 90 percent of respondents believed that the Maluku war was a religious war, stating that religion had become a significant factor in the conflict, and 92 percent of respondents were convinced that the battle was a sacred war. Moreover, 92 percent of respondents confirmed that the reason for engaging in the jihad struggle was to defend religion and Muslim communities, the other main reasons given were because mosques had been destroyed (90 percent), the Qur’an had been burned (90 percent), Allah SWT had been insulted (84 percent), and religious leaders had been killed (72 percent). Only 18 percent of respondents answered that the war was a chance to gain land or properties from other opposing communities, and 56 percent participated because their properties had been destroyed. When they were asked about shouting *Allahu Akbar* (God is great) or *shalawat* (prayers of adoration to the Prophet Muhammad) during the war, 98 percent of respondents answered that they had done so. During the wars, these jihadists also brought the Qur’an and the *takbir* or white headbands with tauhid lettering. As stated earlier, for the Muslim jihadists, the white headbands (*pita putih*) not only served as a group marker or religious identity but also an amulet (*jimat* or *azimat*).

Like the Moluccan Christian fighters,<sup>39</sup> most Ambonese and Moluccan Muslim jihadists believed that the battle was a sacred war for a number of reasons. First, religion became the main conduit of the mobilization of the masses in the fighting. Second, the combat was to

38 Interview with SS, Ambon, November 26, 2010.

39 See for example Patty 2006 and Talakua 2008.

defend *aqidah* (Islamic faith) and God (Allah SWT) from Christianization efforts. Third, Christians attacked the Muslims' dignity and honesty. Fourth, the war was God's order or command to erect *kalimat ilahi* (God's words). Fifth, the war was *Perang Sabil* ( *jihad fi sabillillah* or jihad in God's path). Sixth, the skirmish was honored in the eyes of God. And seventh, there was the involvement of religious leaders on the battlefield. For Ambonese and Moluccan Muslim jihadists, furthermore, the clash was viewed as having been launched by Ambonese Christians and RMS supporters who joined forces with international Christian-Jewish communities to destroy Islam and Muslim communities in the land of Maluku. They also believed that the battle was a means or tool by which to (1) expand Christianity in the lands recently dominated by Muslims, (2) convert Muslims, and finally (3) establish a Christian state of Maluku. This is why for most Muslims in Ambon and Maluku in general the conflict was regarded as a sacred/religious war to rescue Islamic faith (*aqidah islamiyah*) from "Christian infidels"<sup>40</sup> (more or less the same reason was given by the Christian side).

Due to the perception that the clash was a holy war, when the jihadists gathered in the mosque – before going to the combat zone – the *imam*, *bapa raja*, and *tuang guru* advised them about the rules of war, namely certain misconduct or wrongdoing that could contaminate the jihad sacred mission. These include the prohibition on stealing, robbery, killing women and children, mocking, rape, or drunkenness. This perception changed after the coming of Java-based Laskar Jihad forces. For the Laskar Jihad members, in the time of war, properties belonging to opposing religious groups (Christians) may be taken away or utilized because they were considered to be the *anfaal* ("bounties of war"). Moreover, the Laskar Jihad, according to Ambonese jihadists, only thought about the "ends" (defeating the Christians) not the "means." In contrast, for Ambonese jihadists, the means determined the end. This is among the reasons why some factions of Ambonese jihadist groups refused to join with the Laskar Jihad and preferred to act independently. For most Ambonese jihadists, jihad (i.e. holy war) was the most sacred duty of a Muslim because of God's command and guaranteed him/her a safe passage to paradise.

Throughout the pre-battle meetings the *imam* or *tuang guru* (Islamic leaders) quoted a number of verses from the Qur'an that supported the jihad movement against Christians whom they saw at the time as the destroyers and foes of Islam and the Islamic community. Favorite verses of the Qur'an which the jihadists cited included:

And fight in the cause of God those who fight you, but do not transgress limits; God is not transgressors. And slay them whenever you catch them, and turn them out from where they have turned you out, for tumult and oppression are worse than slaughter; but fight them not at the sacred mosque, unless they [first] fight you there; but if they fight you, slay them. Such is the reward of those who suppress faith. But if they cease, God is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful. And fight them on until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in God; but if they cease, let there be no hostility except to those who practice oppression.<sup>41</sup>

40 Interviews with Hanafi Markhum (December 14, 2010) and Hadi Basalamah (February 1, 2011).

41 Q.S. 2: 190–93.

For Muslim jihadists, the verses (*ayat*) cited above were considered as the “rules of war” in Islam,<sup>42</sup> and as speaking of the real battlefield, not of metaphorical battles or of moral crusades.<sup>43</sup> Ustad Abdul Wahab Polpoke (native Ambonese) and other Ambonese jihadist leaders such as Ustad Ali Fauzy (Chinese-Ambonese), Ustad Ikram Ibrahim (Arab-Ternatan), and Ustad Mo Attamimi (Ambonese Arab) also quoted these popular verses when they declared jihad struggle or issued *fatwa* on the obligation of jihad against Christian fighters. Another favorite verse often quoted by the jihadists is: “Never will the Jews or the Christians be satisfied with thee unless thou follow their form of religion... ”<sup>44</sup>

Ambonese Muslim jihadists interpreted this particular verse as, more or less, “the tireless endeavors of Christians and Jews to weaken and defeat Muslim communities until they surrender and become Christians or Jews.” This particular verse influenced Ambonese Muslims’ thoughts and attitudes toward Ambonese Christians whom they saw, at the time, as deceivers and distrustful people. Ambon’s Muslims often say: *Jang percaya deng Obet lai* (“Don’t believe Obet again”). In Ambon, Obet, derived from the name Robert, is a sarcastic term for Christians. For some local Muslim jihadists, the Ambon conflict was viewed as part of a Judeo-Christian conspiracy to cleanse Ambon of Muslim influences; hence waging jihad was the only solution to defend Muslim territories and protect Muslim communities.

To legitimize the jihad struggle, during wartime the jihadist militant leaders divided the Land of Ambon and Maluku into two opposing groups – the Muslims and the Christians. The Muslims were members of the Islamic community, the *ummah*, who possessed territories in the *Dar al-Islam* – the Land of Islam – where the edicts of Islam were fully promulgated. The Christians, however, were regarded as the *harbi* or “belligerent infidels” – people of the *Dar al-Harb* (the Land of Warfare), any country (nation, land, and area) belonging to the infidels or unbelievers that have not been subdued by Islam but who, nonetheless, are destined to pass into Islamic jurisdiction either by conversion or by war. All acts of war are permitted in the *Dar al-Harb*.

It is interesting to point out that, for some conservative, militant Muslims in Ambon, Christians were the same as Jews or were “two sides of the same coin,” even though there was no Jewish community in Ambon. It is unclear what the rationale behind this view actually was – whether it was the Islamic discourses on Judaism and Christianity that had contributed to the Ambonese Muslims’ understandings of the adherents of these Semite religions, the actual political practices of (some) international Christians and Jews, or the dark history of Christian–Muslim relations in Ambon that shaped the perspectives of Muslims on the ground. But, coincidentally, most Ambonese Christians were

42 The verse cited above started with the phrase “*wa qatilu*” meaning in Arabic “to kill each other”; hence it was clear that the context of the verse was the battlefield, where killing is expected. However, for some militant conservative Muslims, those verses were used not only to justify the obligation of jihad (fighting) in the battleground, but also that of fighting against (and killing) those (i.e. non-Muslims) who tried to convert Muslims. For them, attacking *aqidah* (belief) through missionary activities is as dangerous as attacking Muslims physically (Husein 2005, pp. 163–66).

43 See also Thalib 2001; Kastor 2000.

44 Q.S. 2: 120. There are indeed a number of verses in the Qur’an dealing with the jihad struggle, the obligation of war for Muslims to defend their religion and community of believers (Muslims), or the sacred duty to wipe out the infidels or unbelievers, including Christians and Jews (e.g. Ibn Warraq 2003, pp. 414–17).



proud to be associated with Jews, Israelites, or even modern Israelis. While Ambon's Muslims stood behind the Palestinians, Ambonese Christians gave their support to Israel in the Palestine-Israeli conflict. Some Ambonese Christians believed that God would support anyone who supported Jews.

In Ambon, people translated their everyday experiences of conflict into broader frameworks they knew from other places in the world. Typical examples are identifications with the conflict in the Middle East. Graffiti such as "We are the Best Israel" or "Bravo Jews" are often found in deserted houses of Christians and other public buildings in the Christian regions. Similar sorts of writings can still be retrieved in many Muslim places depicting militant organizations such as Hezbollah or references to the Intifada.<sup>45</sup> The religious rationale behind the Ambon communal violence was followed with great attention as many Muslims and Christians in the rest of Indonesia felt concern for or sympathized with their religious brethren. This religious affinity made it possible for certain orchestrators to mobilize new actors toward violence. This happened both inside and outside Ambon.

For Muslim jihadists and exclusivists in general, furthermore, Christians were no longer seen as *ahl al-kitab* (People of the Book) who held special status within Islam, but as infidels or a community of unbelievers (*kafir*) intent on destroying Muslims and Islamic belief. Certainly the changing discourse of Christians – and the Jews – from *ahl al-kitab* to *kafir* is not a new phenomenon, and not unique to Maluku. The Qur'an itself shows seemingly contradictory notions of Christianity and Christians. On one hand, the Qur'an regards Christians as *ahl al-kitab* having been granted a special position (Q.S. 42: 15). However, on the other hand, the Qur'an also reminds Muslims that the People of the Book had denied the truth and attempted to make Muslims follow their religions (Q.S. 3: 64). In short, the Christians' status as *ahl al-kitab* did not exempt them from being called to the right path.<sup>46</sup>

This seemingly ambiguous position of the Qur'an, along with the ongoing processes of proselytization (Christianization) and the unequal experiences of the two religious communities toward colonialism in which Ambonese Muslims portray Christians as part of the European colonialists or as collaborators with the Europeans (for example, the Muslims called Ambonese Christians the "Black Dutch Men" or "*Belanda Hitam*"), to a significant extent influenced the jihadists' and exclusivists' interpretations and unwelcoming attitudes toward Christians and Christianity. This is particularly true if we look at the portrayal of Christians and Europeans by *Hikayat Tanah Hitu*, the oldest Ambonese Muslim text (composed in Ambonese-Malay language with Arabic script in the sixteenth century by Imam Rodjali of Hitu), which is still preserved by today's Ambonese Muslims in Leihitu. In the *Hikayat Tanah Hitu*, for instance, on *Alkisah XX/35*, it is stated that the Ambonese Muslims portrayed Europeans and their Christian counterparts as *kafir*, and described the wars between Moluccan Muslims and European colonialists (Portuguese and Dutch) as *Perang Sabil* ("war in the path of God" or "holy war" for short). The Christianization of local inhabitants, including in Muslim villages, gave further impetus for the Muslim

45 Adam 2009, 2010.

46 Husein 2005, pp. 157–66.



side to not welcome Christians as their religious fellows who came from the same origins (i.e. People of the Book). The *kapata* (Ambonese traditional poetry) from Jazirah Leihitu (composed in Ambonese-Malay) describes the warning against Christian proselytization, with special reference to the Halong region, as follows:

*Topu kelane, haria topu kelane*  
*Topu Isilame, haria topu kelane*  
*Halonga Isilame, jadi Halonga Nasarane*  
*Topu Isilame, haria topu kelane*<sup>47</sup>

An English translation of this pantun:

Hold firmly, please hold firmly  
 Hold Islam, please hold firmly  
 (Because) Muslim Halong has become Christian  
 Grasp Islam, please seize firmly

## THE HISTORICAL ROOTS OF CHRISTIAN–MUSLIM RIVALRY AND ISLAMIC MILITANCY

Why and how did Moluccan Muslims become involved in the fighting against their Christian fellows and neighbors? How did the local history of Maluku contribute to a process of Islamic militancy and violence? There were certainly numerous factors and reasons why Moluccan Muslim jihadists engaged in combat against Christian fighters, among which were the active role of Maluku's political and religious actors – clerics, teachers, *imam*, politicians, village heads, *adat* chiefs, youth leaders, etc. – in the mobilization of the ordinary masses to involve themselves in the warfare as depicted in the previous paragraphs.

The following section will focus on the historical setting of the Christian–Muslim rivalry prior to the communal violence, particularly since the European colonial period, and of the process of Islamic reformism and radicalism that might have provided fertile ground for the 1999 violence to flourish.

To start with, let me quote an interesting statement by Thamrin Ely, an Ambonese Muslim leader and a chairman of the Muslim group during the signing of the Malino II peace deal, as follows:

When the mass violence erupted in Ambon in 1999, there were flyers written by the Moluccan Ulama Council about the Muslim revenge against Christians for killings committed by the Christian inhabitants of Leitimor, particularly the village of Passo, against Hitu Muslims some three hundred years ago, on September 9, 1699, more precisely. During that time, the story goes, Christians walked over hundreds of Muslim bodies. This event marked the seizure of land from the Hitu Muslims. The same thing happened when Muslim

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47 My thanks go to Thamrin Ely for citing this *kapata*.

fighters attacked the Christian villages of Hatiwe-Tawiri. They also legitimized their attacks by historical claims that the land once, some hundreds of years ago, belonged to them. Such historical legitimacy of land ownership was also used by some Muslim rioters when they occupied Christian areas of Kelang, Boano, Manipa, and west Seram, resulting in the removal of Christian populations. No one can deny that the past works very well in influencing today's Ambonese Muslims to commit violence and aggression against the Christian community.<sup>48</sup>

Contrary to some studies and opinions that undermine the role of local history, Thamrin Ely's statement indicates that the historical past did matter during the Maluku violence. Former members of the Ambonese Muslim jihad and Christian militias whom I talked with and interviewed also expressed a strong connection with the historical past of the Christian–Muslim conflict and the imbalance of relations in the archipelago as a factor in their engagement in the warfare. Moreover, both religious groups utilized a local history of inequality, popular narratives of grievances, and memories of violence and hostility to legitimize their violent acts. Ely's statement also reveals the history of Maluku's Christian–Muslim rivalry and antagonism.

This point of view also contradicts most studies that tend to see pre-1999-violence Maluku as being marked by a remarkable history of peaceful coexistence and interreligious tolerance between Christians (both Protestants and Catholics) and Muslims. Indeed, most scholars have presented a view of Ambon (and Maluku) before the bloody conflict erupted as, more or less, an “earthly paradise” filled with abundant natural resources, particularly cloves and nutmeg, thereby earning the archipelago the epithet “Spice Islands” or the “sweet islands” where deeply religious people lived in harmony with nature and with one another.<sup>49</sup> The Ambon city slogan: “*Ambon Manise*” (“sweet and charming Ambon”) also signifies such a pleasant portrayal. This “romanticist view” not only keeps conflict and violence out of Ambon's past but also leaves history out of the picture as well.

As Thamrin Ely reminds us, the Maluku violent conflicts were not an incident without historical precedent. Rather, they were deeply rooted in the social history of Maluku: a history of rivalry, conflict, and opposition.<sup>50</sup> As the Australian historian Richard Chauvel has rightly noted, the unprecedented inter-group conflict that engulfed Ambon town and the Moluccas in general from 1999 to 2004 was the product of processes of social and political change dating back to colonial times, exacerbated by the collapse of traditional means of conflict management that had been built up over four centuries.<sup>51</sup> The legacy of inter-village alliances (i.e. *pela-gandong*), the traditional system of Christian–Muslim unity (i.e. *salam-sarane*), and the local mechanism of conflict resolution (i.e. *baku bae*) in Maluku

48 Interview with Thamrin Ely, Ambon, March 28, 2010.

49 Deane 1979, Bartels 2003.

50 Compare this argument with that of M. C. Ricklefs in his study of the 1965–66 anti-communist movement in Java. Ricklefs (2007) argues that this tragic incident was strongly rooted within Java's history of polarized society and enmity that emerged in Javanese politics since the mid-twentieth century.

51 Chauvel 2007, p. 110.

(Ambon Island and central Maluku respectively) appeared as an indigenous means of settling disputes and hostilities which were widespread and commonplace in the region. Seen from another perspective, these traditional ways of intergroup reconciliation and unity also indicate that the violence had been part of everyday life in Moluccan societies before, during, and after the European colonial period.<sup>52</sup>

Moreover, the production and reproduction of communal conflict cannot be separated from popular narratives of antagonism, sorrow, pride, and heroism among Maluku's Muslims and Christians, both natives and migrants. A Seramese Muslim, an ex-member of a local jihadist group, told me that the reason for his involvement with the jihad movement in 1999 against Christians was driven by retaliation going back many years when the Christians of Aboru in the island of Haruku in central Maluku razed his village and killed his family. In contrast, the Christian community of Aboru legitimized their violent acts against Muslims during the Maluku wars by pointing out a historical precedent where their forefathers, under the leadership of Kapitan Tua Saya, greatly succeeded in defeating their Muslim rivals of the Amaika kingdom in Haruku some four hundred years before.<sup>53</sup>

As is well known in history, ever since Christianity was introduced by European colonizers and missionaries to Moluccan society, tensions and clashes between Christians (first Roman Catholics and then Reformed Protestants) and Muslims began to take place. The first European colonizers who came to the Moluccas were Spaniards, who landed in North Maluku for a brief period, followed by Portuguese who brought in Roman Catholicism in the sixteenth century, and later Dutch who brought Reformed/Calvinist Protestantism in the early seventeenth century. Before the advent of European Christians in the Moluccas, Muslims had long-established Islamic sultanates in North Maluku (notably Ternate, Tidore, Bacan, and Jailolo) and small kingdoms in the southern part of the Moluccan islands, particularly Hitu, Seram (Hoamoal), and Haruku (Hatuhaha). Islam was introduced to the archipelago by Muslim merchants, teachers, preachers, gurus, Sufis, as well as “aristocrats” and their families, mainly from Malacca and Java.

On the Ambonese islands in particular, Islam was mainly based in the mini-kingdom of Hitu and other small villages on the Leihitu peninsula, while the large number of Christians (Catholics) in the sixteenth century lived on the Ambonese peninsula of Leitimor and on the small Lease Islands of Haruku, Saparua, and Nusalaut. It is unclear when the first indigenous Christian community was established. However, when the great apostle Francis Xavier landed at Hative on the western shore of the Bay of Ambon on February 14, 1546 he was welcomed by local Ambonese Christians from a few of the villages, who had previously been baptized by the Portuguese.<sup>54</sup> Upon his visit, Francis Xavier, co-founder of the Society of Jesus, had decided that Jesuits needed to be sent

52 See for example Amal [2010a](#), [2010b](#).

53 Interview with Rev. John Peea and Rev. Wen Lesbassa, pastors of GPM (the Moluccan Protestant Church) working in Aboru, February 10, 2011. On the history of Aboru, see Pattikayhatu [2008](#).

54 It is reported that as early as 1538 the first three villages of Ambon embraced Christianity, and when Francis Xavier visited Ambon in 1546 he encountered seven village communities, six of which were located in Jazirah Leitimor, professing Christianity. Only in the second half of the sixteenth century was Christianity accepted in some of the villages of the Lease Islands.

permanently to Maluku, the consequence of which was that by the middle of the sixteenth century Ambon/Maluku witnessed the arrival of Jesuit priests.

The question is: how and why had these people become Christians? François Valentijn (1666–1727), a preacher who had twice entered the service of the VOC and was the most prolific and most frequently-read author on Ambon and the surrounding islands, reports that the heathen people of Leitimor had sent emissaries to Malacca (and Goa of Sulawesi) to ask the Portuguese to help them against their foes of Muslim Hituese. These messengers came into contact with Catholicism and made the *orang kaya* (one of the village leaders) of Hative ask for protection and baptism. The Portuguese responded to their wishes and from that time became involved in insular politics and old rivalries in Ambon. The villagers of Hative (and Tawiri) may have regarded baptism more as a sign of alliance with the Portuguese than as a sacrament based on faith. Later, to complete the implementation of Portugal's policy of *feitoria, fortaleza e igreja* (trading, military domination, and the gospel, often pictured as glory, gold, and gospel), Hative and Tawiri became the centers of the Catholic mission and new churches were built in both places.<sup>55</sup>

The encounter between Christianity and Islam in the Moluccas was furthermore marked by friction, conflict, and competition over local scarce resources, as well as by the struggle to defend their religious continuity and identity.<sup>56</sup> Christian–Muslim dread, tension, and violence during the colonial periods were mostly driven by three major factors: (1) the discriminatory policies, harsh politics, and mercantile endeavors of the colonizers, particularly the Portuguese, Dutch, British, and later Japanese; (2) the contest for economic, symbolic, and cultural resources; and (3) aggressive missionary activities and proselytization within Islam and Christianity.

Maluku, unlike other areas of the Malay-Indonesian archipelago, had the longest experience of colonialism – from European to Japanese colonials, from the sixteenth to twentieth century – that has shaped the region's society, culture, and politics.<sup>57</sup> Colonialism had been marked by numerous acts of violence perpetrated by the colonizers against the local populations, notably Muslims, sometimes as a result of the rivalry that existed between the Europeans (Spaniards versus Portuguese, Dutch versus Portuguese or British). The efforts of the European colonizers to assert control over Maluku often, if not always, met with considerable resistance from the local populations.<sup>58</sup> In the early 1570s, for instance, the Muslim ruler of Ternate Babullah succeeded in expelling the Portuguese, together with native Christians, so that by 1573, as the historian Leonard Andaya has stated, “the Jesuits acknowledged that almost their entire mission in North Maluku and Ambon had been destroyed.”<sup>59</sup>

However, it should be noted, although the Portuguese were displaced (by Muslims) in some areas in the Moluccas, this does not mean that they were merely passive victims of population displacements. As noted by Stefan Halikowski Smith, the Portuguese also

55 Abdurachman 2008, pp. 4–5; Grimes 1993.

56 See Heuken 2002; Keuning 1988; Knaap 1991.

57 Amal 2010a, 2010b.

58 Grimes 1993; Keuning 1988.

59 Andaya 1993, p. 132.

“organize[d] the expulsion of various ‘aliens’ from their colonies as a consequence of their own political misfortunes. ...”<sup>60</sup> As noted earlier, the main motive behind the Portuguese expansion into the Moluccas was the discovery of cloves and nutmeg, as well as the religious mission and seeking new converts. Because of their involvement in the complex set of antagonism and alliances, the Portuguese failed to control the clove trade in Maluku, which was occupied by Muslim traders who had settled in the area long before the coming of the Portuguese. Since at first the Portuguese had difficulty in developing Christianity and convincing local inhabitants to accept it, they were certain that Ambon could not be converted without force of arms. As a result, the Portuguese, with their Ambonese allies, captured the Muslim areas of Mamala and Hitu and displaced their villagers.<sup>61</sup>

After the defeat of the Portuguese by the colonial newcomers, the Dutch, who went on to occupy Maluku for more than three centuries, the major conflicts in the Moluccas were no longer between the “crusading” Catholics and Muslims, but between the Dutch-supported Protestants and local Muslims. The victory of the Orthodox wing of the Reformed Church during the Dordrecht Synod (1618–1619) had strengthened the religious duty of the state to “maintain the sacred service of the church, to prevent and eliminate every form of idolatry and false religion.” This religious conscience, in addition to the new emphasis on permanent centers in the world of Asia, may have led to the insertion of this religious duty in the preamble of the VOC (*Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie* – United East Indies Company) charter of 1623.<sup>62</sup> However, it should be remembered that the pastoral and missionary obligations of taking care of proper religious duties had actually been formulated before in private instructions to the first two governors general, Peter Both (1609) and Gerard Reynst (1613). They were obliged to “promote the eastern trade in service of the propagation of the name of Christ, the blessing of the non-Christians”.<sup>63</sup> Later, by 1635, the VOC began to encourage Christian proselytizing in Aru in the hope that this contact would contribute to the re-establishment of old commercial ties between this archipelago and Banda.<sup>64</sup>

Moreover, from 1605 onward the VOC sent ordained ministers and teachers to Ambon with the aim of preaching Protestantism, establishing religious schools, building churches, and translating sermons, catechism, and some basic prayers into Ambonese-Malay. Later on the schoolteachers became the backbone of Ambonese Christianity. At the time, the teacher was also the leader of the Sunday morning service, so it is understandable that Ambonese Christianity was based on local schools. At the same time, the number of schools grew rapidly from 32 schools with 1,200 pupils in 1633 to 46 schools and 3,600

60 Halikowski Smith 2010, p. 218.

61 See for example Amal 2010b; Andaya 1993.

62 It has to be stressed, however, that the VOC never restricted its personnel to members of the Reformed Church. Not only among the common soldiers and marine personnel, but even among governors general some Protestants and Catholics were found, in addition to a smaller number of Armenian and Mennonite traders. In other words, the VOC could not really behave as a strict Reformed body. This is different from the articles of the charter for the West Indies Company (WIC), where the company was given the task of proclaiming the knowledge of God to the inhabitants of Brazil. The VOC was given in the preamble only the general obligation to preserve the public faith (see for example Aritonang and Steenbrink 2008).

63 Aritonang and Steenbrink 2008.

64 Meilink-Roelofs 1962, p. 222.

pupils in 1680, and finally 54 schools with 5,190 pupils in 1700.<sup>65</sup> While the Dutch established numerous schools for Moluccan Christians, they only built six schools for the Muslim communities, which were specifically for families of elite Muslims in the villages who were willing to collaborate with the Dutch. As a result of the lack of formal education and professional employment, the Muslim population turned into second-class citizens in colonial Ambonese society.<sup>66</sup> To this day, Ambonese Protestants are somewhat bitterly referred to as the “*anak emas*” – or the “golden boy” [of the Dutch] – by the Muslim population, while Protestant Ambonese proudly call themselves “the Black Dutchmen” (*Belanda Hitam*).<sup>67</sup>

Ambon was founded as a Christian town, after the clash between the Portuguese and the Ternatans, in the early 1570s. After Dutch rule became more and more stable in the seventeenth century, the production of cloves was concentrated in the Christian areas of the southern districts of Ambon and Lease Islands (Haruku, Saparua, and Nusalaut).<sup>68</sup> Not only that, in an attempt to control the production (and trade) of cloves and spices, which were previously under Muslim control, the Dutch destroyed the growth of spices, especially cloves, and transplanted them to the Christian regions of Ambon and neighboring Lease Islands. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, it should be noted, there were no cloves growing in the Christian villages of Leitimor at all. As a result, by 1619 the VOC, under the administration of Jan Pieterszoon Coen (1619–1623; 1627–1629), had embarked on a policy of excluding Asian traders and imposing control over the clove-producing areas.<sup>69</sup> This monopoly of the VOC on the purchase of cloves affected primarily Muslim regions of Hitu (North Ambon) and Hoamoal (West Seram).

The VOC’s policy to establish an effective monopoly on the purchase of cloves, added to the Dutch policy of countering the spread of Islam and of introducing elementary forms of education and pastoral care for the sake of the consolidation and propagation of Christianity in Ambonese islands, had undeniably led to friction and resistance from the Muslim chiefs of Hitu and Hoamoal. For the Dutch, Islam was the symbol and mortar of the opposition against the VOC’s policy.<sup>70</sup> The Dutch, for their part, endeavored to prevent the spread of Islam as much as possible and to protect the heathen and Christians against the Muslims of Hoamoal and Hitu as much as was in their power. As a result, from 1625 on there were yearly conflicts with the Muslims from these two regions that once had been the main Muslim centers in the Moluccas, in addition to Ternate and Tidore. The conflict between the Dutch, along with Ambonese Christians, and local Muslims with the support of Ternate and Java resulted in the violent suppression of Hitu (1642–1646) and the near-total depopulation of Hoamoal, the hotbed of all

65 Cf. Husein 2005; Steenbrink 1993.

66 Cf. Chauvel 1990; Bartels 2003.

67 Knaap 1991.

68 Deane 1979; Knaap 1991.

69 Steenbrink 1993.

70 This is not to suggest that the VOC had been successful in winning the loyalty of the Catholic communities established earlier by the Portuguese. The Catholics were subject to the same demands and repression as their Muslim compatriots and the Dutch did not continue the pastoral care and education begun by the Portuguese.

anti-VOC resistance, between 1651 and 1656. Hoamoal's Muslim villagers were then accommodated by the Dutch in the Muslim villages of Leihitu, whereas its heathen population was relocated in the Christian villages of Leitimor. The chiefs of Hoamoal, furthermore, had a place of residence assigned to them in Batumerah, in the vicinity of the VOC's chief fortress in Ambon.

The direct rule of the VOC, which was initially restricted to Ambon town and the Christian villages on the islands of Ambon and Lease, was extended more and more to the coastal regions of the Northern Moluccas, as well as Seram and Buru, particularly in the Christian territories. Until the mid-seventeenth century, when the VOC imposed its authority over the "Muslim territories" of Hitu (Ambon), Hoamoal (Seram), Hatuhaha (Haruku), Buru, and other regions, there was an uneasy balance of power between the Dutch and the Muslim polities of these regions. Muslim resistance against the Dutch ended with their defeat, and the Muslim population was relocated to other regions. Just as in the case of Hoamoal, the Muslim population of the islands of Boano, Kelang, and Ambalau was transferred to the island of Manipa. All the Muslim chiefs of the coastal areas of Buru were obliged to settle in the neighborhood of the VOC's fort at Kayeli. The Muslims of Ihamahu (Saparua), who had likewise taken part in the rebellion, were banished to Seram. The evacuated areas were systematically destroyed and rendered unfit for reoccupation. It is thus obvious that the separation of Maluku's Christians and Muslims had already taken place in the Dutch colonial era.

While Portuguese and Dutch policies and politics favored Christians, those of the Japanese advantaged Muslims. Having long been discriminated against under the Dutch, Moluccan Muslims welcomed the Japanese as liberators, while they saw the Dutch as oppressors. Their gratitude toward the Japanese was expressed through the help they gave in destroying Dutch collaborators in the area. Christians saw the arrival of the Japanese as a great misfortune for their souls and security. The loss of the Dutch was the loss of their protector and supporter.<sup>71</sup> The Japanese, furthermore, utilized Muslims as a buffer against the Allies (the Dutch and Australia). In order to resist and defeat what the Japanese called "un-Islamic Allies," the Japanese appealed to, recruited, and mobilized local Muslims to form groups of jihadist movements in the islands of Ambon, Lease, and Seram.<sup>72</sup>

Under the supervision of Kabayashi Tetsuo (Omar Faisal), a Japanese graduate of Al-Azhar University of Egypt, the Japanese established Jam'iyyah Islamiyah of Seram (the Seram Islamic Organization), the first supra-village organization for Muslims in Maluku, whose main purposes included the establishment of Muslim jihadist groups across the island. The Japanese attempts to mobilize Muslim support for the battle which they saw or framed as a holy war against "Christian infidels" went with theological explanations. The Japanese even revealed that fasting in Ramadan would not be observed so that efforts could be redoubled in the war against anti-Islamic Allied powers. Moreover, the founding of this Islamic organization brought with it the promise of total transformation and a new era of Moluccan or Ambonese Muslims. The old-fashioned and

71 Chauvel 1990.

72 Chauvel 1980, 1990.



conservative thinking that had dominated Moluccan or Ambonese Islam would be replaced by a new version of Shariah-based purified Islam, and the “*adat* sickness,” which had given rise to so much misunderstanding and fighting, would be eliminated. The Japanese reform of Islam was cheered by Muslim youths (*kaum muda*) and reformist Muslims, some of whom were linked to such Islamic modernist organizations as the Muhammadiyah (established in Ambon in 1933 by Haji Abdul Kadir Kimkoa) and the Sarikat Islam whose leaders included A. M. Sangaji.

After the war, members of Masyumi, a national Islamist political party, supported the ideas of Islamic reform and anti-Christianity initiated by the Japanese. At first, Masyumi was home to various Muslim groupings from varied Islamic streams but later it turned and was transformed into a Muslim Brotherhood-type Islamist political party after the organization came under the leadership of Mohammad Natsir (1908–1993), an admirer of the Muslim Brotherhood founder, Hassan al-Banna, and President Sukarno’s main opponent. The Ambon branch of Masyumi was founded by Hamid bin Hamid and other Muslim reformist figures when Mohammad Natsir visited Ambon in early 1951. At first, Hamid and other Muslim leaders in Maluku who founded the Masyumi branch in Ambon were not acting through any particular identification they had with the party’s modernism. At the time, Muslim leaders thought there should be a special Muslim party in Maluku to help unite Muslim groups and overcome the consequences of Dutch colonial neglect of Muslim communities. Thus the initial reason for the founding of the Maluku branch of Masyumi was to create Muslim solidarity in order to strengthen Islamic identity and Muslim brotherhood.

In brief, the members, functionaries, and activists of the Jam’iyyah Islamiyah Seram, Sarikat Islam, Muhammadiyah, and Masyumi became the main advocates for Islamic puritanism and militancy and, to some degree, anti-Christianity, whose adherents they saw at the time as stooges of the Dutch colonizers. The emergence of Islamic reform in some areas of Maluku has no doubt caused damage to local forms and practices of Islam as well as to traditional cultural institutions and cultures such as the inter-village alliances (*pela gandong*) and Christian–Muslim unity (*salam-sarane*), in part because they considered these forms un-Islamic. One of the most influential Masyumi–Muhammadiyah leaders in Maluku was Ali Fauzy, a respected radical-conservative cleric, who had trained many Muslims across the Moluccan islands to become missionaries, teachers, preachers, and imams, among others. He was the man who during the Maluku violence became one of the strongest Muslim spiritual leaders against Christians, in addition to Rustam Kastor and Mo Attamimy. He was the man who issued a “jihad fatwa” that required Muslims to struggle against Christians long before the coming of the Laskar Jihad. Although Christian–Muslim opposition in the Moluccas took place long before the rise of modern Islamic organizations and political parties in the twentieth century, it was actually the Jam’iyyah Islamiyah Seram, Sarikat Islam, Muhammadiyah, and Masyumi that played a great role in the deepening process of radicalization, purification, and religious militancy of Moluccan Muslim communities by providing strong Islamic and theological foundations for anti-Christian sentiments that provided “religious grounds” for the Christian–Muslim violence in 1999.

Moreover, post-independence regimes, especially Suharto’s New Order, continued to maintain the colonial legacies of discrimination and proselytization that had deepened

imbalanced relations and jealousy between Christians and Muslims. Even though Suharto discouraged Islamic political activism, he boosted programs of *dakwah* (Islamic missionaryes and propagation) across the country through various programs including migration from Muslim-dominated areas in Java or Sulawesi to Christian-populated regions. Under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the government also installed and sent Muslim preachers to the migration areas. Migration policies encouraged under Suharto since the 1970s not only changed Maluku's economic features but also shifted the balance between Christians and Muslims due to a steady flow of Muslim immigrants.

The Muslim population in Maluku increased from slightly less than 50 percent of the total in 1971 to nearly 60 percent by 1999. During the same period, the Christian population declined from about 47 percent to roughly 40 percent. The impact of immigration is clearly evident in the steady increase of non-native Muslims, from about 5 percent of the total Maluku population in 1971 to more than 14 percent in 1995.<sup>73</sup> Most of these Muslim migrants came from South and Southeast Sulawesi: Buton, Makassar, Kendari, and Bugis, with substantial numbers emigrating from Java. From 1969 to 1999, 25,319 households (almost 100,000 people) had migrated to Maluku and North Maluku, with more than half settling in Central Maluku, particularly on the islands of Ambon, Buru, and Seram. Additional migration not related to government policy also took place. Although the number of these unofficial migrants is difficult to estimate, the vast majority of them were Muslims.<sup>74</sup>

Suharto's appeal toward Muslims was especially obvious after the late 1980s. In Maluku, in order to win support from Muslim groups, Suharto twice appointed Ambonese Muslims of Pelauw and ICMI members to the governorship (first, M. Aqib Latuconsina in 1992 and M. Saleh Latuconsina in 1997). Since Aqib Latuconsina was appointed as Governor of Maluku (1992–1997), a change in political climate began to emerge in Maluku. Governor Aqib quickly began to apply a policy of the “reformation of bureaucracy” by (1) sending Muslim bureaucrats, particularly those from his clans and region (Pelauw and Kailolo of Haruku), to study in Makassar and Java by using funds from the province of Maluku; (2) “Islamizing” – and therefore de-Christianizing – the state bureaucracy (provincial and regional government) by placing Hatuhaha Muslims in positions of authority in his administration; and (3) recruiting Muslim schoolteachers and civil servants.

As described above, Ambonese Christians were far more educated than the Muslims as a result of Dutch policies. Accordingly, since vital positions in the bureaucracy required a high level of education, Christians, until the late 1980s, still enjoyed key positions in provincial/regional government, except in the top leadership (governor). In the case of governors, Suharto would personally appoint his loyal cadres, usually people of military background (and *abangan* Javanese). Latuconsina's nepotism and clan-ism received much criticism from the side of Christians, inflamed Christian–Muslim relations, and heightened tensions among rival local groups. Some Christian leaders felt that during the Latuconsina administration, there had been a systematic effort to eliminate Christians from bureaucracy

73 These statistics are derived from the official census figures of *Survei Penduduk Antar Sensus* for 1985, 1990, and 1991.

74 Panggabean 2004, pp. 416–37.

that later provoked conflict and worsened Christian–Muslim relations.<sup>75</sup> It is through these religious changes and the political context within the Maluku social field that the communal violence of 1999–2004 can be understood.

## CONCLUSION

The description and analysis sketched above suggest that Maluku’s history was marked by the diversity, complexity, and dynamics among Muslim and Christian groups whose historical experience has significantly differed from one another. Historical processes of religious polarization, purification, and proselytization (both Christianization and Islamization) later on led to the destruction of Maluku’s ethnic unity and stability, while the genesis of the Christian–Muslim division later radicalized interreligious relations and sharpened intergroup tensions.

It is apparent that the historical legacies of colonial and post-colonial governments and society, including the role of European Christian missionaries (Portuguese Catholics and Dutch Reformed Protestants) as well as local Christian leaders and ministers, left wounds among local contemporary religious communities. As in the case of North Maluku province,<sup>76</sup> Reformed Christianity in particular, with the addition of modern American-style Pentecostalism, has contributed to the destruction of Maluku’s local traditions, beliefs, and cultures such as the gradual displacement of integrative customary institutions such as *pela gandong* (i.e. a cross-cultural/religious inter-village alliance) by more exclusive religious affiliations, as well as to the process and shape of the “radicalization” of Christian communities and purification of the Christian faith. In addition, the rise of reform Islam, Islamist political parties, and reformist Muslim organizations that reached the region before Indonesia gained its independence in 1945 contributed to the “radicalization process” of local Muslim societies. In short, the combination of unfair politics and “religionization” (Christianization and Islamization) of local cultures and societies had changed and transformed Maluku’s religious communities from “common adherents of religion” to “zealous followers” of Islam and Christianity. The political practices of colonialism and neo-colonialism thus had influenced and shaped religious division, radicalization, and fanaticism in the Moluccas.

This article, however, does not claim that Maluku’s religiously-based actors and organizations within both Islam and Christianity were the primary causes of the conflict. Rather, it suggests that these religious associations became one among the contributing structural and ideological influences on actors (Muslim jihadists and Christian fighters) engaged in the violence. Moreover, it underlines the contributions of religious motivations and identity of the fighters during the conflict, not merely providing symbolism and ideological conviction for the actors’ campaign to achieve more worldly goals. Research on religion in conflict situations suggests that the link between religious sentiments and discourses and conflict-oriented mobilization is often complex. It is therefore important not to exaggerate or underestimate the role of religious actors and associations in the time of violence since they vary in responding to the conflict situation.

75 Pieris 2004.

76 Duncan 2013; Adeney-Risakotta 2005.

Lastly, although religion was no longer a significant factor in the most recent communal riots that broke out in Ambon city, Pattimura University, and Pelauw village on Haruku Island between 2010 and 2012, this does not mean that religious issues have disappeared from Maluku's social field and individual lives of Christians and Muslims in the region. However, unlike Ambonese/Moluccan Christians who are relatively able to transform their dark past to a bright present and their religious conflict to a productive inter-religious peace, Muslims in this area seem to find it difficult to achieve reconciliation with their Christian brethren. Most Muslims, both migrants and settlers, still view Christians with suspicion. While Christian leaders utilize church networks and institutions to disseminate the message of the vitality of peace and brotherhood, Muslim clerics and political elites tend to avoid a "genuine reconciliation" and Christian–Muslim unity. In post-interreligious violence Maluku, Islam-based political parties in particular (notably the PPP, PKS, and PBB) have greatly contributed to the shape of and to deepening "Islamic militancy" and Muslim–Christian segregation. These sorts of political parties in which religious networks and resources have been the main conduit for political mobilization have undoubtedly benefited from religious militancy and division. Furthermore, whereas churches, particularly the Moluccan Protestant Church, have been used to spread peace messages, mosques, for the most part, have been utilized to propagate hostility, intolerance, and "Islamic superiority".

Moreover, while the Synod of the Moluccan Protestant Church, especially under the chairmanship of Dr. Rev. I. J. W. Hendriks and Dr. Rev. John Ruhlessin, have been successful in convincing Christian communities as to the significance of interfaith tolerance, peace, and reconciliation for the goodness of Maluku's future, the Maluku Ulama Council has failed to unite Muslim factions, especially the radicals and conservatives, in order to establish peaceful relations with Christians. In brief, apart from the tremendous efforts of Muslim moderates, peace activists, and conflict resolution practitioners who tirelessly conduct reconciliation and peacebuilding activities across the archipelago and bridge "religious deadlock" to air tensions, Maluku's Muslims in general are still unwilling to live side by side with Christians, preferring to live in a separate bloc with their Muslim co-religionists. If not resolved properly, this issue will become a time bomb in the years to come. This is to say that Maluku's future of just peace will strongly depend on the willingness of local Muslims to open up their minds and thoughts and begin to establish trust with their Christian fellows.

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