

**Jesus versus Jihad:
Economic Shocks and Religious Violence in
the Indonesian Republic at the Turn of the 20th Century**

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Abstract

At the turn of the century, Indonesia was at the forefront of international attention, due to its multi-dimensional conflicts from Aceh in the west to Irian Jaya in the east that threatened to tear the nation, already stricken by economic crisis, apart. This paper seeks to critically examine the various economic, social, and political aspects of Indonesia that have led to the sectarian conflict in various parts of the archipelago, which threatened the very integrity of the Indonesian republic.

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I. Introduction

The Republic of Indonesia comprises an archipelago of 17,000 islands, straddling the equator and bordered by the Indian Ocean to its west and the Pacific Ocean to its east. In its almost 2 million square kilometers of land it is populated by an estimated 216 million people (making it the fourth most populous nation on earth), speaking some 660 languages amongst at least 300 distinct ethnic groups. This diversity extends to the area of religion: Although predominantly Muslim (88%), significant minority religions of Protestantism (5%), Catholicism (3%), Hinduism (2%) and Buddhism (1%) exist.¹

In the late 1990s and early 21st century, Indonesia was at the forefront of international attention, due to its multi-dimensional conflicts from Aceh in the west to Irian Jaya in the east. These conflicts threatened to tear the nation, already stricken by economic crisis, apart. While the republic eventually remained intact, the episode is deeply illustrative of the rapidity in which an unexpected, external economic shock—in this case a financial crisis—could lead to widespread unrest and broad social movements, some of which even escalated into full-blown sectarian and ethnic conflicts and mass killings. Moreover, the political backdrop in which the crisis occurred—involving a change of political regime and government, leadership conflicts, and power struggles—may have potentially exacerbated the situation, or at the very least led to a more prolonged crisis than necessary.

This paper is an attempt to examine the economic, social, and political aspects that lead to ethno-religious conflict, using post-financial crisis Indonesia as a case study. In particular, it considers the clashes that flared up in different parts of the republic, paying special attention to the time period between January 1999 and June 2000. This period marks the worst of the ethnic and religious strife that, at one point, appeared to seriously threaten the integrity and resilience of the Indonesian republic. The events following that window, while including occasional outbreaks of violence, were not as widespread, and by early 2001, the worst appeared to be over, and it seemed that the crisis had been successfully diffused.

A careful study of the determinants of ethno-religious conflict in a post-economic crisis environment is important for several reasons. First, understanding the relationship between different contributing factors allows us to understand how seemingly minor events may serve as a catalyst for conflict, given an appropriate environment. Second, a clearer accounting of the events of 1999–2000 clarifies

¹ Statistics were drawn from “Indonesia”, *CIA World Factbook 1999*, CIA, Washington, D.C.; Kuipers, J.C. 1993, “The Society and Its Environment”, in Frederick, W.H. & Worden, R.L. (ed.), *Indonesia: A Country Study*, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., pp. 71-135.

the interactions between both Christians and Muslims in the episode, and serves to humanize both sides of a bitter conflict. Third, the case study can offer lessons that may be relevant to dealing with economic crisis-induced sectarian conflict. Indonesia reminds us of the fragility of Christian-Muslim relations when the economic environment sours: lessons that are relevant to countries such as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Nigeria, and Sudan.

The paper is structured as follows: This introduction is followed by a background study that outlines the economic, social and political environment of Indonesia (Section II), which is then followed by a chronological summary of the crisis, based on press reports as well as field research (Section III). Section IV develops the framework for analysis by examining various theories proposed, drawing heavily from background material presented in Section II. This section closes with a detailed critique of these theories. A final section concludes the paper.

II. Background

Early History

The history of Indonesia is an intimate overlap that intertwines its geography,² religion, and politics, much like the batik cloth that the nation is famous for. In particular, religion has played an often understated role in the formally secular nation, influencing both the political environment as well as the common life of the people.

It is commonly accepted that the great majority of Indonesians came to the archipelago via immigration from Southeast Asia and South China. The main religious form at this time was spirit worship, and this persisted until the third century A.D..³ The arrival of Indians brought with it Hinduism and Buddhism—along with the emergence of the first signs of political organization along the lines of centralized states and highly organized societies.⁴

The rise and fall of the principal Indian empires also witnessed the ascendancy and ebb of Hinduism and Buddhism. The golden age of these Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms was in the late 13th and 14th centuries, when the empire of Majapahit was at its pinnacle, encompassing much of the territory of

² For purposes of clearer exposition, various maps are provided in Appendix A.

³ Feith, H. 1964, "Indonesia", in Kahin, G. M. (ed.), *Government and Politics of Southeast Asia, 2nd edition*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, p. 184.

⁴ Seekins, D.M. 1993, "Historical Setting", in Frederick, W.H. & Worden, R.L., *op. cit.*, p. 8.

modern Indonesia.⁵ The fall of this empire in the early 16th century is largely attributed to the emergence of a new factor in the archipelago's politics: Islam.

The advent of Islam in Indonesia has been variously attributed to Egyptian Arabs,⁶ Arabs of Gujerat and Lamabar in India,⁷ and South Indian Muslims.⁸ Modern scholars tend to agree on the last, although the investigation is far from complete. Regardless of source, from its arrival in the mid-9th century to its widespread adoption by the late 15th to 16th centuries, Islam had become, and would remain, the predominant religion in Indonesia.⁹

The early 16th century also saw the expansion of European colonialism in Indonesia; first by the Portuguese and later on by the Dutch. The Portuguese rallied under the banner of “gold, glory, gospel”—these aims not necessarily always in agreement with one another. The impact of the Portuguese in Indonesia was minor at best, its most significant contributions being the colony of East Timor, in the southeastern part of Indonesia and in the Moluccas (Maluku). Much of this influence, however, was merely Christianization, where the people became Roman Catholics due to military conquest.¹⁰

The Dutch East India Company (VOC), however, had a more lasting influence on the archipelago. Motivated solely by profit, the VOC went to great lengths to establish and maintain a monopoly on the spice trade that Indonesia provided. From its base in Batavia (now Jakarta), on the island of Java, it became involved in Javanese politics until its eventual bankruptcy in 1799.¹¹ This was followed by a short period of British occupation before Dutch authority was re-established in 1816. The Dutch were effectively in control of the entire East Indies, with the exception of Lombok and Bali, which possessed little economic significance.¹²

⁵ Feith, H., *op. cit.*, pp. 184-186; Frederick, W.H. & Worden, R.L., *op. cit.*, pp. 9-11.

⁶ Keyser, S. 1859, *Précis de Jurisprudence Musulmane par Abou Chodja*, Leiden, The Netherlands in Drewes, G.W.J. 1968, *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-en Volkenkunde*, Deel 124 4e Aflevering, Leiden, The Netherlands, pp. 433-459.

⁷ Pijnappel, D.J. 1872, “Over de Kennis, die de Arabieren voor Komst der Portugeezen van den Indischen archipel bezaten”, *BKI*, vol. 19, pp. 135-158 in Drewes, G.W.J., *loc. cit.*

⁸ Hurgronje, S., *Verspreide Geschriften VI*, p. 7 in Drewes, G.W.J., *loc. cit.*

⁹ Drewes, G.W.J., *loc. cit.*

¹⁰ Santoso, I. 1996, “The Church in Indonesia”, in Athyal, S. (ed.), *Church in Asia Today: Challenges and Opportunities*, The Asia Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation, Singapore, p. 328

¹¹ Seekins, D.M., *op. cit.*, pp. 16-20.

¹² Hall, D.G.E. 1964, *A History of Southeast Asia, 2nd edition*, Macmillan and Company, London, United Kingdom, p. 315.

The deepening colonial penetration in the 19th century ushered in the introduction of the “Culture System”, which was a “systematic and intensive exploitation of the island’s land and labor”.¹³ This brought with it extensive economic change—an expansion of agriculture to a large variety of cash crops such as coffee, tea, sugar and tobacco, in addition to the traditional spices. However, due to strong criticism of the system from the Netherlands, and a series of depressions at the end of the 19th century, a new “Ethical Policy” was introduced which paved the way for the introduction, by the government, of a variety of economic services, welfare programs, and schools.¹⁴

Dutch Islamic policy at this time was initially hampered by ignorance and misinformation of matters pertaining to Islam. The Dutch deemed it necessary to Christianize the majority of Indonesians, fed partly by the belief of the superiority of Christianity to Islam and partly by the erroneous belief that the syncretic nature of Indonesia Islam would render them more susceptible to conversion.¹⁵ This was eventually abandoned and a more moderate view adopted, largely due to a better appraisal of the role of Islam in Indonesian society and a demolition of the fear of Islamic fanaticism.¹⁶

Modern History

The period between 1900 and the early 1940s was the beginning of a transition for Indonesian history. The ethnic and cultural diversity, always an integral part of Indonesian life, became more marked as the population swelled. The Dutch and Western residents evolved from *trekkers*—expatriates who worked in the East Indies and would one day return home; to *blijvers*—sojourners who thought of the East Indies as their home. Indonesian Chinese could be divided into *totok*—first generation, full-blooded emigrants; and *peranakan*, native-born Chinese with some Indonesian ancestry.¹⁷

This diversity was, however, haunted by a striking paradox: As social groups become more tightly interlocked in an increasingly complex Indonesian economy, they tended to segregate themselves

¹³ Feith, H., *op. cit.*, p. 189.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 191.

¹⁵ Benda, H.J. 1958, “Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje and the Foundations of Dutch Islamic Policy in Indonesia”, *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 30, pp. 338-347 in Ibrahim, A., Siddique, S. & Hussain, Y. (eds.) 1985, *Readings on Islam in Southeast Asia*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, pp. 62-69.

¹⁶ Benda, H.J., *loc. cit.*

¹⁷ Seekins, D.M., *op. cit.*, pp. 30-31.

into their own compartments within the larger social context. Western-style urban areas with wide streets or special, wealthy quarters of towns catering to Chinese communities were widespread.¹⁸

Nonetheless, fueled by a dominant religion (Islam) and common language (*Bahasa Melayu*), there was a gradual growth of national consciousness that flourished during the Japanese occupation in the early 1940s. The tide of rising nationalism manifested itself in the establishment of organizations that promoted the nationalistic cause. These can be classified into political organizations, such as Sarekat Islam (Islamic Association), Masjumi (Consultative Council of Indonesian Muslims) and the Indonesian Nationalist Party (PNI); and Islamic social organizations such as the urban, reformist Muhammadiyah and its more rural, traditionalist rival Nahdatul Ulama (NU).¹⁹ From then on, Islam and politics would continually renew their mutual relationship with one another.

On August 17, 1945, two days after the Japanese surrender in Indonesia, two political leaders, Sukarno and Hatta, proclaimed the Republic of Indonesia, a proposition that the Dutch were unwilling to accept. Thus began a five-year revolutionary period that eventually saw the Netherlands relinquish its sovereignty over Indonesia, the rise of two major parties, Masjumi and PNI, and the installation of Sukarno and Hatta as president and vice-president, respectively.²⁰

Thus began the period of “Liberal Democracy”, between 1950 and 1955.²¹ This was characterized by strife between political parties; political power, however, was shared mainly between Masjumi and the PNI. A few events stand out as significant for the purposes of this exposition.

First, it should be noted that there was a debate which arose over the wording of the Jakarta Charter in 1945, where the more militant members demanded that the preamble should mention that the Republic of Indonesia should be “based on belief in Almighty God, with the obligation to carry out the *Shari’ah* for the adherents of Islam”.²² Eventually, the state ideology, *Pancasila*²³, was adopted as

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 30; Steinberg, D.J., Wyatt, D.K., Small, J.R.W., Woodside, A., Roff, W.R. & Chandler, D.P. 1971, *In Search of Southeast Asia: A Modern History*, Praeger Publishers, New York, New York, p. 284.

¹⁹ Feith, H., *op. cit.*, pp. 194-195.

²⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 199-204.

²¹ It should be noted that there is no general consensus with regard to the transition from the end of the “Liberal Democracy” period to the next, the period of “Guided Democracy”. However, most scholars agree that by 1959 the transition was complete.

²² Lev, D.S. 1972, *Islamic Courts in Indonesia*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, California, pp. 41-43.

²³ *Pancasila* applies to five inseparably related principles: belief in God, a just and civilized humanity, the unity of Indonesia, democracy guided by the inner wisdom of deliberations of representatives and social justice for the people.

the constitutional basis for the fledgling state, in line with the wishes of the majority. This major defeat meant that Indonesia would not be an Islamic republic.²⁴

Second, in the elections in 1955, the four Islamic parties at the time—Masjumi, NU, PSII and Perti—obtained only slightly more than 43 percent of the total vote. Thus, despite the majority of the country's population professing Islam as their faith, the nationalistic PNI was returned as the dominant party. To add insult to injury, the communist PKI ran in fourth, after Masjumi and NU, respectively.²⁵ Islam's struggle to assert itself in Indonesia had been largely overlooked in favor of a free Indonesia.

The period of “Guided Democracy”, from 1959 to 1965, was distinguished by the role that the army played in the development of the nascent republic. The economy was transformed by the seizure of Dutch enterprises, which were subsequently nationalized; this led to the majority of modern establishments being run by the government, with army officers in key positions in these enterprises.²⁶ There had been sporadic fighting throughout Indonesia up till this time, led primarily by Muslim extremists who wanted to create an Islamic state in Indonesia;²⁷ these were crushed by the army, which was allied to the government. Islam was forced to take a back seat: Masjumi was banned in 1960, and other Muslim political parties were marginalized.²⁸ Even the army, though sympathetic to Islam, was fundamentally secular in nature,²⁹ and Sukarno was viewed as favoring Christians to an extent that was not in proportion to their numbers.

²⁴ Tamara, M.N. 1986, *Indonesia in the Wake of Islam*, Institute of Strategic and International Studies, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, p. 13. The most plausible explanation offered for the choice of *Pancasila* instead of the *Shari'ah* is that the Islamic parties failed to convince the people that their opinions were not in conflict with *Pancasila* ideals. The debate was exacerbated by Suharto in 1953 when he stated that “the state that we want is a national state consisting of all Indonesia. If we establish a state based on Islam, many areas whose population is not Islamic, such as the Moluccas, Bali, Flores, Timor, the Kai Islands and Sulawesi, will secede. And West Irian, which has not yet become part of the territory of Indonesia, will not want to be part of the Republic” (quoted in Feith, H. 1962, *The Decline of Constitutional Democracy in Indonesia*, Ithaca, New York, p. 281). For an elaboration of the Jakarta Charter debate, see Anshari, S. 1979, *The Jakarta Charter 1945*, Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

²⁵ Boland, B.J. 1982, *The Struggle of Islam in Modern Indonesia*, Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde, Leiden, The Netherlands, pp. 45-54.

²⁶ Feith, H., *op. cit.*, p. 212.

²⁷ The most notable being the rebellions led by Kartosuwirjo and *Darul Islam* in Java and that led by Kahar Muzakkar in Sulawesi. Tamara, M.N., *op. cit.*, p. 14.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 14.

²⁹ Federspiel, H.M. 1985, “The Military and Islam in Sukarno's Indonesia”, in Ibrahim, A., Siddique, S. & Hussain (eds.), Y., *op. cit.*, pp. 151-158.

By 1965 Indonesia had become a dangerous brewing pot of social and political antagonisms. It was only fitting that this exploded into an abortive *coup d'état* on September 30, 1965 that led to Sukarno's displacement from power and a bloody purge that claimed anything from between 78,000 to 2 million lives,³⁰ with PKI members and Chinese being the primary targets of mob violence. Indeed, the Chinese were often linked to both communism as well as Christianity, although the factual basis for this is dubious. This heralded the beginning of the "New Order" era under Suharto.

Between 1965 and 1985 was a period of surprising stability under the authoritarian regime of Suharto. This was largely due to the army's dual socio-political function where its personnel played a pivotal role in the government and civil service; and the authorization of only two political parties, the United Development Party (PPP) and the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI), both of whom were considered to be close to the government³¹. Although there were occasional protests by Muslim groups during this period³², on the whole, the voice of Islam was suppressed³³, and there was increasing sentiment that the government was anti-Islam:

[There is] a denial of the proper role of the religion of, statistically at least, 90 percent of the population. Muslims place the campaign in the context of other government policies that were deemed anti-Islam: the abortive 1973 marriage Bill, the struggle over the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the recognition of *kebatinan* (Javanese mysticism) as a religion, questions on the place of religious holidays in the academic calendar, etc., all part of a suspected official policy of secularization to deny a special place to Islam. To *santri* concerns about the political dominance of the syncretic Javanese are added more acute suspicions about Christian missionary designs on the faithful as well as insidious Chinese influence.³⁴

This in turn led to the rise of extremist Muslim groups³⁵ who often used violence as a means to express what they felt was the predilection of the majority. However, religious groups were not the

³⁰ Seekins, D.M., *op. cit.*, p. 54-57. Modern scholarship suggests alternative explanations for the bloodbath; these range from allegations that it was an "internal army affair" with no PKI involvement to scenarios where the United States was significantly involved.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 59; Tamara, M.N., *op. cit.*, p. 16. The secular Golkar, up till 1999 the *de facto* ruling political player, was not considered a political party but rather a collection of functional groups.

³² Such as the objection over the Marriage Bill in 1973 which would have made religious law subordinate to civil law.

³³ In fact, the re-channeling of Islamic emphasis towards more religious and cultural directions may have served to benefit the ethical and moral influence of the faith. See Samson, A.A. 1985, "Indonesian Islam since the New Order", in Ibrahim, A., Siddique, S. & Hussain (eds.), *Y.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 165-170.

³⁴ Weatherbe, D.E. 1985, "Indonesia in 1984: Pancasila, Politics and Power", *Asian Survey*, vol. 25, no. 2, p. 189.

³⁵ An example being the Islamist militant group Holy War Command (Komando Jihad).

only ones who contributed to violent action; pro-independence groups and pro-communist groups³⁶, as well as ethnic-based violence (in particular, against the minority Chinese), also played a part.

The economy was the chief beneficiary of this improved stability, and from the 1970s till 1997 it had grown at an average of 7 percent per annum, making it one of the high-growth Newly Industrializing Economies of Southeast Asia³⁷. The political scene was also surprisingly (perhaps suspiciously) stable: Golkar dominated elections from 1971 through to the 1990s.

However, the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997–98 brought an abrupt end to this march, and the collapse of Indonesia’s economy was more acute than that of its neighbors.³⁸ Although the view commonly held was that the crisis was brought on by a combination of corruption, collusion and nepotism (known to Indonesians as KKN) and the mythical jinn of “contagion”,³⁹ it is likely that weaknesses inherent to the Indonesian economy were responsible,⁴⁰ and these reasons were a convenient scapegoat used to appease a disgruntled population looking for something (or someone) to blame. The dream was over, and in its absence, the underlying social and political weaknesses, tamed by affluence, were to manifest themselves once again.

In May 1998, Suharto was forced to resign as a result of widespread protests calling for reform. For a brief spell the country was run by B.J. Habibie, but in 1999 Abdurrahman Wahid, the leader of the National Awakening Party (PKB)—the political arm of NU—and Megawati Sukarnoputri, daughter of ex-president Sukarno, were installed as president and vice-president of Indonesia, respectively.

President Wahid was widely regarded as traditional and tolerant with respect to religion, whereas Megawati had a tendency to be secular in outlook. These were counterbalanced by Amien Rais, a vociferous and influential former chairman of the modernist, reformist Muhammadiyah, and current chairman of the People’s Consultative Assembly (MPR). Rais carried with him a history of anti-Christian, anti-Chinese, anti-Semitic and anti-Western statements,⁴¹ but was often viewed as the

³⁶ Such as the Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (Fretilin) and the outlawed PKI, respectively.

³⁷ Soesastro, H. 1999, “The Economic Crisis in Indonesia: Lessons and Challenges for Governance and Sustainable Development”, available: <http://www.pacific.net.id/pakar/hadisusastro/economic.html> (accessed April 6, 2005).

³⁸ “The Faltering Firefighter”, *The Economist*, July 8, 2000, p. 3.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 4. Real GDP fell by 20 percent in 18 months and at one point the rupiah lost over 85 percent of its value against the US dollar.

⁴⁰ These can be groups into three main themes: weaknesses of the financial system, problems in institutional arrangements, and a need for a long-term growth strategy. Soesastro, H. 1999, *loc. cit.*

⁴¹ Lee, K.H. 1999, “Only a Handful Are in the Race”, *The Star*, May 27, 2000; Rubenstein, C. 1999, “Amien Streak”, *The Review*, July 1999, p. 19.

power behind the new government.⁴² The new coalition signaled the beginning of a transition, but the task was far from easy; the government had to contend with a country that, since 1997, had been continually wracked by violence and conflict, corruption and scandal.

Following the tumultuous events between 1999 and 2000, Indonesia has since emerged from the conflict window where violence was widespread and seemed uncontrollable. It remains a stable, if potentially wary, member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). While occasional outbreaks of violence did occur after that two-year window (notably in Aceh and Maluku), the people and government of Indonesia have successfully managed to navigate two new presidents, a terrorist bombing in Bali, and a terrible natural disaster in the form of a magnitude 9.0-quake-generated tsunami.

Indonesian Islam

Indonesian Islam is predominantly *sunni*, although there exist adherents to the smaller *shi'ah* discipline. Although orthodox Islam is the dominant form on the larger islands of Kalimantan, Sumatra and Sulawesi, on the most populous island of Java it is possible to segregate believers into *santri* (orthodox Muslims) and *abangan* (Muslims who practice a syncretic faith that includes animist, Hindu-Buddhist and *sufi* Islamic beliefs). The two differ in emphasis (*abangans* being more interested in ritual detail whilst *santris* focus on doctrine) as well as social organization (the former centered on the family and the latter on the community of believers, or *ummat*).⁴³ The *santri* is the minority in Java, and were often of a higher social class.

Amongst the *santri* it is possible to further subdivide the group into traditionalists and modernists. Traditionalists, who form the bulk of the devout Muslims in Indonesia, are concerned mainly with pure religion; they tend to be conservative, and believe that education should be conducted in the traditional Islamic schools, such as the *madrasah* and the *pesantren*, although this pattern is changing⁴⁴. Most would belong to the largest Muslim social organization,⁴⁵ Nahdatul Ulama, and were often drawn from the lower, rural class.

The influential, urban Modernists seek to absorb educational and organizational principles from the secular West, placing Islam within the framework of modernity and change. They tend to be

⁴² Tesoro, J.M., "Behind the Power of Amien Rais", *Asiaweek*, Nov 12, 1999.

⁴³ Geertz, C. 1985, "The Religion of Java", in Ibrahim, A., Siddique, S. & Hussain (eds.), *Y., op. cit.*, pp. 271-277.

⁴⁴ Lee, K.H. 1995, *Education and Politics in Indonesia: 1945-1965*, University of Malaya Press, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, pp. 93-128.

⁴⁵ NU disassociated itself from politics in 1985; PKB is the current political vehicle for NU.

members of the other major Muslim social organization, Muhammadiyah, and place education in the hands of secular state schools and universities modeled on Western educational tradition.⁴⁶

The lines between all these factions are blurring. The movement of many of the younger generation of *abangan* towards more orthodox Islam, the renaissance of Islamic ideas amongst the general population, the formation of new Muslim cadres who teach Islam within a modern context and the increasing awareness of Islam in the political elite have contributed towards a rapid rapprochement between *abangan* and *santri*, traditionalists and modernists.⁴⁷ This consolidation could mean that Islam would now feature as a more prominent voice in Indonesian national life.

The Church in Indonesia

The church in Indonesia remains a minority. Only in the regions of East Nusa Tenggara, East Timor, North Sulawesi and Irian Jaya do they form a majority, with significant minorities existing in North Sumatra, West Kalimantan and Maluku.⁴⁸ This pattern strongly reflects the way in which, historically, the two faiths entered the archipelago—Islam from the west and Christianity from the east.

The social geography, however, is changing: Through the government-sponsored Transmigration Program, outmigration from the predominantly Muslim Java has seen some 730,000 families relocated to Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Maluku and Irian Jaya⁴⁹—all areas with a large Christian population. There has been, consequently, an increasing intermingling of Indonesians who differ in both ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Although Christianity is a minority religion, the government, through *Pancasila* and the Constitution, guarantees the freedom of religion.⁵⁰ Church growth has been healthy, with a Christians numbering

⁴⁶ Tamara, M.N., *op. cit.*, p. 2-3.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 4-11; “The Map of Conflict in Maluku”, paper delivered for the Indonesian Day programme, Feb 12, 2000, available: <http://media.isnet.org/ambon/BristolE.html> (accessed April 6, 2005).

⁴⁸ Tahun Doa Nasional 1991, *Propinsi di Indonesia*, Link, Jakarta, Indonesia. The Muslim-Christian (Catholic and Protestant) ratio for the provinces are: North Sumatra (63%/33.5%), West Kalimantan (52%/30%), East Nusa Tenggara (8%/85%), Timor Timur (East Timor) (2%/84%), North Sulawesi (46%/53%), Maluku (57%/42%) and Irian Jaya (West Papua) (16%/83%).

⁴⁹ Kuipers, J.C., *op. cit.*, p. 85-86.

⁵⁰ 1945 Constitution, article 29: “The government guarantees the freedom of every Indonesian inhabitant to adhere to his/her own religion and to worship and practice according to his/her religion and faith”. Note that this only applies to faiths regarded as monotheistic by the government, including Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism, *inter alia*.

almost 9 percent of the population Christians by the end of the 1970s, almost 10 percent by the end of the 1980s and possibly as much as 11 percent by the year 2000.⁵¹

However, two government decrees (Decree 70 and 77) issued in 1978 served as powerful measures to curtail the evangelistic activity of the church; these were issued to address the concern that religious tension due to conversion of Muslims by Christians might contribute to instability.⁵² These were not entirely unfounded: Publications by Islamic research groups on the situation in Indonesia often reflect disappointment, animosity and possibly even resentment.⁵³

Christian-Muslim relations have encountered a few episodes where dissensions arose; in addition to those already mentioned above, these include a series of Muslim apologetic and polemic publications, and isolated cases where Christians or churches have been openly criticized or attacked.⁵⁴ Tolerance has, however, been the order of the day and this pattern did persist until the 1990s.

III. The Crisis in the 1990s⁵⁵

As discussed in the previous section, there had been no systematic outbreaks of violent activity in Indonesia as a result of Christian-Muslim clashes, at least until recent history. The major incidents pertaining to the shift probably found its roots in the early 1990s.

⁵¹ Santoso, I. 1996, *op. cit.*, p. 335.

⁵² Liao, D.C.E. (ed.), *World Christianity, Volume 2: Eastern Asia*, Missions Advanced Research and Communication Centre, Monrovia, California.

⁵³ Srisanto, S. 1974, "Church Growth and the Cultivation of Positive Christian/Muslim Relations", *International Review of Mission*, vol. LXIII, no. 251, p. 355. See for example von Denffer, A. 1981, "Indonesia: How Muslims are Made Christians", *Islamic Foundation Study Paper*, no. 6, Leicester, United Kingdom. An example of Christian evangelistic efforts with respect to Muslims can be found in Bentley-Taylor, D. 1975, *Java Saga: Christian Progress in Muslim Java*, OMF Books, London, United Kingdom.

⁵⁴ Boland, B.J., *op. cit.*, pp. 224-242.

⁵⁵ As is often the case, press reports as well as field research only reveal a skewed understanding of the events. Since religion remains a sensitive, heartfelt issue, reports tend to be biased, favoring one party over another. This is exacerbated by the fact that for coverage on conflict and fighting, it is only feasible to interview only one side, as it would be dangerous for reporters to cross over the other. The following account seeks to be as objective as possible, obtaining press releases from both sides of the conflict and basing all field reports on relatively reliable sources. In certain cases, only initials are used in order to protect the identity of the individuals.

A Brewing Storm

In November and December 1992, Muslims attacked several Christian churches and homes on the island of Java—apparently in response to a rise in Christian fundamentalist proselytizing.⁵⁶ In November 1995, Christian youths in East Timor destroyed properties belonging to Muslims in retaliation to reports that an Indonesian official had insulted the Catholic faith. The official was subsequently arrested, but it was an ominous sign of growing religious tension.⁵⁷

Such events started becoming more widespread. In East Java, Muslims in Surabaya looted and destroyed 10 churches in early June 1996.⁵⁸ A similar event, on a larger scale, was repeated in the town of Situbondo when a Muslim mob went on a church-burning spree on the 10th October 1996. The violence quickly fanned out to neighboring cities and by the end of “Black Thursday”, 25 buildings, mostly churches but also a monastery and an orphanage, were destroyed, and 5 casualties reported.⁵⁹ On the 26th December 1996, mob violence in West Java, originating in Tasikmalaya, and subsequently spreading to nearby towns. This “Black Christmas” left in its wake scores of shops, banks, homes, churches and schools that were ravaged and at least two deaths.⁶⁰ Although official claims were that the violence was as much ethnic as well as religious,⁶¹ there were already suggestions that the riots could have been orchestrated.⁶²

The Volcano Erupts⁶³

In mid-May 1998, violent riots broke out in Indonesia, both in Jakarta and in other cities. The pillaging mobs targeted Chinese shops, looting and burning, throwing the capital city into disarray and releasing a reign of hate and terror.⁶⁴ Although the popular verdict was that it was a response to

⁵⁶ Mallet, V., 'Islam Turns S E Asia's Secular Heads', *Financial Times*, Sep 30, 1993.

⁵⁷ “Christians on Rampage Against Muslims in East Timor”, *The Muslim News*, Nov 24, 1995.

⁵⁸ “Ten Churches in Indonesia Destroyed by Muslim Mobs”, *Compass Direct*, Jun 20, 1996.

⁵⁹ “Buchan, A., 'Muslim Rioters Kill Five Christians and Torch Churches in Indonesia’”, *Compass Direct*, Oct 16, 1996.

⁶⁰ Sim, S., “Mob Violence in West Java Spreads”, *The Straits Times*, Dec 28, 1996.

⁶¹ Savill, R., “Muslim Rioters Set Christian Churches Ablaze in Indonesia”, *Daily Telegraph*, Dec 28, 1996.

⁶² Amien Rais stated the day after the riots that “the way it happened was so systematic, so organized – it was inspired and directed by a certain group of people”. “Muslims’ Olive Branch to Indonesian Christians”, *Berita NECF*, Dec 1996/Jan 1997.

⁶³ A chronological listing of the major events from mid-1998 onwards is provided in Appendix B, and selected accompanying photographs are provided in Appendix C.

⁶⁴ Watts, D., “Looters Plunder Stores as Jakarta Burns”, *The Times*, May 15, 1998.

the economic downturn that the country was undergoing, the uprising had in fact included a deliberate, systematic campaign of rape, perpetuated against Chinese, often Christian, women and girls.⁶⁵ Accounts of these incidents suggest that a strong religious element was also present.⁶⁶

In addition, major incidents began to occur in other parts of Indonesia. Up till then, violent activity had been largely confined to the main island of Java. However, at the end of May 1998, several demonstrations occurred in Irian Jaya, calling for investigations into alleged human rights violations.⁶⁷ This was followed by the killing of three non-Irianese transmigrants in June and widespread demonstrations in July calling for independence.⁶⁸ This inspired a military crackdown, where blanks and rubber bullets injured up to fifteen demonstrators; other reports claim.⁶⁹

The violence spread like wildfire. Before the end of the year, there were riots in West Kalimantan,⁷⁰ Central and South Sulawesi,⁷¹ and West Timor.⁷² Many had religious overtones, such as the attack of mosques in Kupang, West Timor and the torching of a Catholic church in Ujung Padang—the tit-for-tat violence slowly mounting as worshippers retaliated to news of previous attacks in other parts of the country.

Jakarta itself had the dubious distinction of being the cradle for the first ominous signs of the carnage to come in Maluku. Riots that flared in the capital's Chinatown on the 22nd November were the result of internecine clashes between rival Muslim and Christian Ambonese gangs. At least thirteen people lost their lives and eleven churches were ransacked and burnt by a Muslim mob seeking revenge for the rumored burning of a mosque by Ambonese Christians.⁷³

⁶⁵ Spillius, A., "Jakarta Mob Raped 100 Chinese", *The Daily Telegraph*, June 23, 1998; Spillius, A., '20 Women Killed in Indonesia Riots', *The Daily Telegraph*, Jul 15, 1998.

⁶⁶ V., personal communication, June 21, 1998.

⁶⁷ Human Rights Watch 1998, "Indonesia Alert: Trouble in Irian Jaya", *Human Rights Watch Press Release*, July 1998.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*; Murphy, D., 'Irian Jaya's Independence Dream', *Christian Science Monitor*, Jun 1, 2000.

⁶⁹ Human Rights Watch 1998, *loc. cit.*

⁷⁰ Christian Nationals Southeast Asia, personal communication, Sep 11, 1998.

⁷¹ Indonesian Christian Communication Forum, personal communication, Jan 5, 1998; "Indonesian Church Torched", *BBC News*, Dec 4, 1998.

⁷² *Ibid*.

⁷³ Sim, S. & Pereira, D., "Six Die in Fresh Jakarta Violence", *The Straits Times*, Nov 23, 1998; Spencer, G., "Ethnic, Religious Riots in Indonesian Capital Leave 13 Dead", *Associated Press*, Nov 23, 1998

These were but a foretaste of the destruction that was to continue, enveloping the vast nation and affecting the lives of millions of people all over Indonesia. The events will be reviewed by region, in chronological order, concentrating on the more significant events that have occurred. As outlined in the introduction, the analysis will be restricted to the critical window between January 1999 and June 2000.

Irian Jaya

In Irian Jaya there have been no major continuous outbreaks of violence. The most recent military shootings occurred in early May 2000.⁷⁴ The fear is that the Indonesian military would use relatively small incidents to justify large crackdowns. The oppressed people, many of them Christian, continue to campaign and stage peaceful demonstrations, hoping to be heard by an international community that has largely ignored them.⁷⁵ Although the majority of the indigenous Papuans favor independence, it is unlikely that the province would follow East Timor down the road to independence any time soon, as the military's business interests and the government's financial stakes in this, the most resource-rich region in Indonesia, is far too valuable to relinquish.

Jakarta

In the capital, there were no major outbreaks of violence after the earlier riots in 1998. There was, however, widespread unrest as demonstrations calling for *jihad* continued to be held by Islamic groups, in March 1999,⁷⁶ January 2000⁷⁷ and April 2000.⁷⁸ Rumors of attacks⁷⁹ did arise, proposing a massacre of Chinese during the June 1999 election period, but failed to be borne out. Sporadic attacks, such as the attack of the Christian Doulos Foundation rehabilitation centre in December 1999⁸⁰ and a car bomb attack on the Philippine ambassador in response to moves in the Philippines to stamp out Islamic extremism,⁸¹ marred an otherwise calm capital during this period.

⁷⁴ Murphy, D., *loc. cit.*

⁷⁵ "Breaking Free from Betrayal", *New Internationalist*, Nov 1999.

⁷⁶ "Thousands of Muslims Protest At Ambon Bloodshed", *Reuters*, Mar 7, 1999.

⁷⁷ Firdaus, I., "Muslims Protest in Jakarta", *Associated Press*, Jan 12, 2000.

⁷⁸ "Muslims Call for Jihad", *The Times*, Apr 7, 2000.

⁷⁹ W.L., personal communication, May 27, 2000.

⁸⁰ "Christian Rehab Centre Attacked", *Associated Press*, Dec 16, 1999.

⁸¹ "Car Bomb Attack in Jakarta", *BBC News*, Aug 1, 2000.

Kalimantan

In March 1999, 64 villagers were killed as the indigenous Dayak and Malay communities clashed with transmigrants from the island of Madura, as four days of fighting destroyed 800 buildings in what was believed to be an ethnic clash.⁸² It should be noted, however, that West Kalimantan has a significant Christian minority, and these tend to be indigenous peoples as compared to the transmigrants, who would more than likely be Muslims. Riots flared up again later in the year as security forces fired on rioters demanding the release of relatives jailed over the earlier incident, and by the end of the year, hundreds were killed in the months of violence and tens of thousands of migrants displaced.⁸³

In Central Kalimantan, similar clashes between ethnic groups were reported in July 2000, in Kumai. Four people were reported killed and scores of others injured in the affair, and several houses were burnt as well.⁸⁴

Maluku

The first signs of violence in Maluku, interestingly, were not between Christians and Muslims, but between rival Muslim gang members, in a four-day drunken brawl starting on the 15th January 1999.⁸⁵ A day after the end of that episode, on the 19th January, a Christian bus driver, Jacob Leuhery (alias “Yopy”) had a dispute with two Muslim Bugis youths. The disagreement led to a confrontation between two Christian and Muslim groups. This confrontation sparked off clashes all over the city, with Christians attacking Muslims and *vice versa*.⁸⁶ The violence was organized and brutal; casualties numbered more than fifty by the time there was a cessation of fighting, with more than a hundred seriously injured.⁸⁷

⁸² Spillius, A., “Bus Fare Feud in Borneo Kills 64 Villagers”, *The Daily Telegraph*, Mar 20, 1999

⁸³ “Indonesia Ethnic Rioting Continues”, *Associated Press*, Apr 7, 1999.

⁸⁴ “Four Killed in Fighting in Central Kalimantan”, *The Jakarta Post*, Jul 6, 2000; “Communal Violence Hits Kumai in C. Kalimantan”, *The Jakarta Post*, Jul 7, 2000.

⁸⁵ “More Violence Marks the End of Ramadan in Indonesia”, *CNN News*, Jan 18, 1999.

⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch 1999, *Indonesia: The Violence in Ambon*, Human Rights Watch Report, vol. 11, no. 1(c), available: <http://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/ambon>. This report is extremely detailed and is the best source of information for the period January 19–March 10, 1999. The incidents related here are chiefly a summary of that document, with supplementary materials from the press and field research.

⁸⁷ “Troops Flown in to Quell Ambon Riots”, *The Straits Times*, Jan 22, 1999; ‘Uneasy Calm in Indonesia’, *BBC News*, Jan 24, 1999; Pereira, D., “Military Appeals for Calm in Ambon”, *The Straits Times*, Jan 25, 1999.

Even the arrival of troops only managed to restore an uneasy calm for a short time, as sporadic violence continued to manifest in Ambon.⁸⁸ On 2nd February, widespread fighting broke out once again in Ambon,⁸⁹ and quickly spread to Seram and Saparua.⁹⁰ Over the course of the next week, small-scale fighting either broke out or there were tense confrontations in many villages between Christians and Muslims. The depth of hostility and suspicion that the violence had produced by this time was exemplified by the fact that villagers started burying their belongings in order to protect them.⁹¹

On 13th February onwards, the armed forces lost their reluctance to shoot, and many deaths during this period onwards were a result of the armed forces opening fire.⁹² Death tolls started to mount, and thousands were forced to flee and seek refuge in other parts of Indonesia.⁹³ For the first time, reports of the partiality of security forces started to surface—claims often assert that police forces ally with Christians and army forces with Muslims.⁹⁴ The threat of a civil war in Maluku was real and growing. In early June 1999, the first wave of Maluku riots ended, in anticipation of the upcoming Indonesian parliamentary elections.

Unfortunately, in late July, riots in Ambon set off the next wave of fighting.⁹⁵ Muslim sources during this time begin to claim Israeli and Western involvement in the ongoing conflict in Maluku,⁹⁶ whereas Christian sources place the blame of Islamist “terrorist” groups.⁹⁷ On both sides, however, the call for the removal of armed forces from Maluku was unanimous, as many believe that their presence

⁸⁸ “Sporadic Violence on Riot-Torn Indonesian Island”, *CNN News*, Jan 25, 1999.

⁸⁹ “Ambon Clashes Erupt Again”, *BBC News*, Feb 2, 1999.

⁹⁰ Human Rights Watch 1999, *loc. cit.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ “Thousands Flee Indonesian Violence”, *BBC News*, Feb 22, 1999.

⁹⁴ “Police Losing Control of Indonesian Mobs”, *BBC News*, Feb 23, 1999; Human Rights Watch 1999, *loc. cit.* Interestingly, Muslim sources admit that more real help is given by the army to Muslims, whereas Christians are willing to give up their police for and let the entire force be transferred. See , Adjie, A. 1999, *Riots and Fightings* (sic) *in Ambon*, Muslim Lawyers Guild, Indonesia, available: <http://go.to/maluku> (accessed April 5, 2005).

⁹⁵ W.L., personal communication, Aug 7, 2000.

⁹⁶ “Israel and West Get Involved in Moslem Massacre in Ambon”, available: <http://www.ummah.net/sos/indonesia1.htm> (accessed May 9, 2000).

⁹⁷ W.L., personal communication, Jul 30, 1999.

had only fuelled greater unrest and more killing.⁹⁸ In October 1999, the reshuffling of the cabinet put a temporary halt to the fighting and ended the second wave of Maluku riots.

In early November, two days of religious riots in Tidore, North Maluku, set in motion the third wave of Maluku riots. This third wave was characterized by the escalation of the conflict to an extent that the number of casualties increased notably. Damage was being incurred in whole districts, and a significant political impact was mounting.⁹⁹ Areas of unrest included North Halmahera, Buru, Ambon, Seram and Haruku.¹⁰⁰ Tens of thousands of refugees were forced to flee in the latest round of violence,¹⁰¹ and by mid-January 2000, the official estimates of refugees numbered slightly over 76,000,¹⁰² with almost 8,000 buildings being destroyed—among them, 45 mosques, 47 churches and 20 schools.¹⁰³ Eyewitness reports related a scene reminiscent of war,¹⁰⁴ not religious violence.

The situation continued to deteriorate. On 7th May 2000, Laskar Jihad, a force assembled by Islamic groups with the intention of liberating their suffering brothers in Maluku, sent 3,000 members to Maluku.¹⁰⁵ In spite of government objection,¹⁰⁶ more volunteers continued to be sent over the course of the month.¹⁰⁷ Fresh clashes quickly erupted,¹⁰⁸ but the force refused to leave,¹⁰⁹ leading to appeals

⁹⁸ Investigation Team, Justice Station for Ambon Ummah Care, “Muslims Slaughtered by (Indonesian) Marinir”, Aug 26, 1999, available: <http://www.ummah.net/sos/indonesia1.htm> (accessed May 9, 2000); Crisis Centre of Indonesian Communion of Churches, “TNI Personnel Involved in Clashes and Shooting of Civilians”, Press Release, Oct 8, 1999; “Ambonese People Demonstrate for Armed Forces to Retreat from Ambon”, *Antara News Agency*, Oct 8, 1999.

⁹⁹ Astill, J., “Nine Killed in Spice Isles Violence”, *Daily Telegraph*, Nov 6, 1999; Masariku Network 2000, “Report on the Third Wave of Moluccas Riots: November 1999 – Present”, Jul 14, 2000, available: <http://www.go.to/ambon> (accessed Apr 5, 2005).

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*; “Hundreds Die as Muslims and Christians Battle in Indonesia”, *CNN News*, Dec 31, 1999.

¹⁰¹ Firdaus, I., “Thousands Flee Indonesian Violence”, *Associated Press*, Jan 5, 2000.

¹⁰² *Kompas*, Jan 16, 2000.

¹⁰³ *Tempo*, Jan 17, 2000.

¹⁰⁴ Christian Solidarity Worldwide, *Overview Briefing for Unstarred Question Debate: Tuesday 20th June 00*, CSW, Surrey, United Kingdom.

¹⁰⁵ “Laskar Jihad Members Sent to Ambon”, *Jakarta Post*, May 7, 2000.

¹⁰⁶ “Government Wants Jihad Force to Leave Maluku”, *The Jakarta Post*, May 10, 2000.

¹⁰⁷ “Fresh Batch of Laskar Jihad Enters Ambon”, *The Jakarta Post*, May 16, 2000.

¹⁰⁸ “At Least 17 Killed in Fresh Violence in Ambon”, *The Jakarta Post*, May 18, 2000.

¹⁰⁹ “Laskar Jihad Rejects Calls to Leave Maluku”, *The Jakarta Post*, May 25, 2000.

for UN intervention.¹¹⁰ The repercussions of the presence of Laskar Jihad were most clearly seen in the press reports that continued to churn out stories of fighting and bloodshed. The death toll was now in the hundreds, but could possibly have been in the thousands, as the possibility of press restrictions, preventing an objective assessment of the true state of affairs, was very real.¹¹¹ It should be noted that media reports were often subject to distortion as well.¹¹²

In late June, the Indonesian government imposed a state of civil emergency in Maluku,¹¹³ but the killings remained uncurbed.¹¹⁴ There were also peripheral losses due to the violence. In July, a ferry, the *Cahaya Bahari*, sank with almost 500 refugees on board; only ten survivors were subsequently found.¹¹⁵ The Pattimura University—the most prestigious university in Maluku—was destroyed by fire.¹¹⁶ In the meantime, arms continued to pour into the devastated region,¹¹⁷ and television footage finally caused the Indonesian military to admit that the troops had taken sides in the conflict,¹¹⁸ something that field research had long since ascertained.¹¹⁹ Meanwhile, militant forces from both sides determined to fight on.¹²⁰

¹¹⁰ McCall, C., “Plea to UN as Fighting Rages on Islands”, *South China Morning Post*, May 19, 2000.

¹¹¹ P.F., personal communication, Jun 15, 2000.

¹¹² In one such case, a report written by a Catholic priest describing the destruction of churches was published with all references to the word “church” substituted for the word “mosque”. In another case, a clash between Muslim and animist tribes in Halmahera was misreported as one between Muslims and Christians. In another case, there was blatant misreporting in order to support a particular preconceived bias—the reason for the slaughter of Muslims in Maluku was explained by the “fact” that they were a minority there. In truth, the Muslims are actually the majority. Finally, Christian sources tend to admit that both sides are party to the violence, whereas Muslim sources often picture themselves as victims only. Christian Solidarity Worldwide, *Draft Report on Visit to Indonesia, 12-21 April 2000*, CSW, Surrey, United Kingdom; W.L., personal communication, Jun 14, 2000; *Impact International*, *op. cit.*, p. 12

¹¹³ “Violent Clashes Spark Civil Emergency”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, Jun 27, 2000.

¹¹⁴ Mydans, S., “Indonesia Recoils at Uncurbed Island Killings”, *The New York Times*, Jun 28, 2000.

¹¹⁵ Spillius, A., “Hope Runs Out for Ferry Survivors”, *The Daily Telegraph*, Jul 1, 2000; Spencer, G., “10 Indonesian Ship Survivors Found”, *Associated Press*, Jul 3, 2000.

¹¹⁶ “University Destroyed in Moluccas”, *BBC News*, Jul 4, 2000.

¹¹⁷ “Arms Smugglers Caught Off Moluccas”, *BBC News*, Jul 11, 2000.

¹¹⁸ England, V., “Footage Turns Up Heat on Military”, *South China Morning Post*, Jul 18, 2000.

¹¹⁹ L., personal communication, Jul 27, 2000.

¹²⁰ “Moluccan Militants: God on Our Side”, *BBC News*, Jul 7, 2000; “Christian Militia: We’ll Fight On”, *BBC News*, Jul 18, 2000.

Domestic and international pressure had begun to pour in—Muslims calling for *jihad*,¹²¹ while both parties started mounting extensive letter-writing campaigns.¹²² Both religious¹²³ as well as secular¹²⁴ institutions began to pressure the Indonesian government to end the religious violence. However, the government initially adamantly refused any form of foreign intervention in Maluku, stating that the issue was a domestic one.¹²⁵ But with the situation spiraling out of control, president Wahid eventually admitted that some form of limited foreign assistance might be desirable in order to end the sectarian violence.¹²⁶ In late July, Laskar Jihad issued an ultimatum via loudspeaker that Ambonese Christians were to leave the city before the 31st July or risk being exterminated.¹²⁷

Accounts of the atrocities committed against both Christians and Muslims are frightening, inhumane, and very frequently, downright gross. Victims are being mutilated for declaring their allegiance to their faith, often in a brutal manner, involving loss of limb, head or appendages.¹²⁸ Looting and burning was widespread, with reported cases of entire villages—most of them Christian—being burnt down,¹²⁹ in addition to long lists of churches and mosques being destroyed.¹³⁰ Women—both Christian and Muslim—were being raped on the streets, often by gangs of men.¹³¹ In some cases, after being killed, the victims were cut up, skewered, and grilled,¹³² and a pregnant woman even had her belly sliced open and her unborn child speared.¹³³ Some women and children were abducted and

¹²¹ *Associated Press*, Jan 12, 2000, *loc. cit.*; *The Times*, Apr 7, 2000, *loc. cit.*

¹²² An example of Christian pressure is the Jubilee Campaign for Urgent Action in Indonesia; of Muslim pressure, the open letter from the Indonesian Muslim Students Association of North America.

¹²³ World Council of Churches, “WCC Appeals for Restoration of Law and Order in Malukus Region”, Jun 29, 2000; Pope John Paul II, *Reuters News Service*, Jun 12, 2000.

¹²⁴ Human Rights International, *HRI Press Release*, Jul 17, 2000.

¹²⁵ “World Told Not to Meddle in Maluku”, *The Jakarta Post*, Jul 8, 2000.

¹²⁶ Specifically, technical and logistical aid. See Lekic, S., “Wahid: Indonesia May Require Aid”, *Associated Press*, Jul 17, 2000.

¹²⁷ J.H., personal communication, Jul 24, 2000.

¹²⁸ “Encouragement for Believers Scarred by Indonesian Riots”, *Open Doors News*, Jan 2000; “Maluku: Massacres Without End”, *Impact International*, Apr 2000, p. 12.

¹²⁹ Head, J. “Thousands Flee Indonesian Violence”, *BBC News*, Feb 22, 1999.

¹³⁰ P.R., personal communication, Feb 25, 1999.

¹³¹ “Another Bosnia Tragedy in Indonesia”, *Republika*, Jan 4, 2000; I.H., personal communication, Jul 3, 2000.

¹³² Buchan, A., “Security Forces Under Scrutiny after Ambon Riots in Indonesia”, *Compass Direct*, Feb 23, 1999.

¹³³ The victim, Rena Makewe was a Christian, from Benteng Karang. The incident was never reported clearly, and wild distortions resulted over who the victim and perpetrator was, with Muslims and Christians both blaming the other side.

forcibly converted.¹³⁴ It has also been rumored that the prices for the head of a Christian and lay minister are 50 and 25 million Indonesian rupiah, respectively.¹³⁵

Yet in all these events there still existed some signs of encouragement and hope. There has been support between villagers, with Muslims protecting Christians in their homes and *vice versa*,¹³⁶ often at the expense of their own lives—“traitors” of the faith are often punished. Women from both camps have stood up for one another and have publicly called for an end to the violence.¹³⁷ Miracles have been reported, and whilst it is easy to be skeptical of claims of bullets that do not pierce skins and blades that are rendered impotent, there is comfort in knowing that the innocent are not always meaninglessly butchered.¹³⁸

Nussa Tenggara

A mass gathering of Muslims in the main city of Mataram in Lombok, West Nussa Tenggara, on the 17th January 2000 meant to demonstrate their solidarity with Muslims fighting in Maluku dissolved into a church burning spree.¹³⁹ The violence spread rapidly throughout the island and by the 19th, the island was evacuated of tourists, and many Christians fled as well, with between six and ten thousand being forced to seek refuge.¹⁴⁰ It was the appeal of Muslim clerics to their followers that finally brought peace to the embattled island the next day, as well as security forces who threatened to shoot on sight, although the loyalty of the armed forces to quelling the violence was questioned.¹⁴¹

Field research suggests that there were even attacks on refugee camps by the rioters during this period, and that Muslim preachers had deliberately broadcast messages inciting destruction over

¹³⁴ Christian Solidarity Worldwide, *12-21 April 2000*, *loc. cit.*; I.H., personal communication, Jul 3, 2000.

¹³⁵ G.L., personal communication, jun 30, 2000; Barr, J., “Hope Dies in a Spiral of Bloody Violence—Life Today in Maluku Islands, Indonesia—A Cry for Help”, *Uniting Church in Australia National Assembly*, available: <http://www.geocities.com/alifuru67/y2000x/uchurch1506y2k.htm> (accessed Apr 5, 2005).

¹³⁶ Fofid, R. & Salampessy, Z., *Association of Independent Journalists Report*, Feb 18, 1999.

¹³⁷ Akkara, A., “Daily Life in the Maluku Islands: Chaos, Fear and the Threat of Violence”, *ENI*, Jul 31, 2000.

¹³⁸ W.L., personal communication, Mar 1, 1999; Kontak Sala Waku, “Reporting Situation in Ambon/Maluku—Dec 30–31, 1999”, available: <http://www.ummah.net/sos/indonesia1.htm> (accessed May 9, 2000).

¹³⁹ Communion of Churches in Indonesia, Jan 18, 2000; MacDougall, J.M.J. 2000, *Lombok Unrest: Description and Analysis*, available: <http://media.isnet.org/ambon/lombokunrest.html> (accessed July 25, 2000).

¹⁴⁰ Spencer, G., “Muslims Ransack Indonesian Island”, *Associated Press*, Jan 19, 2000.

¹⁴¹ Spencer, G., “Peace Returns of Indonesian Island”, *Associated Press*, Jan 20, 2000; Spillius, A., “Inquiry into Army Role in Violence on Tourist Isle”, *The Daily Telegraph*, Jan 21, 2000.

mosque loudspeakers. It might even have been possible that the names and addresses of target individuals were put on lists to have their homes destroyed.¹⁴²

Sulawesi

On 21st April 1999, a church complex was petrol-bombed in Ujung Padang, the provincial capital of South Sulawesi, in response to television broadcasts of a bomb which exploded in a Jakarta mosque. In addition, the Muslim mob also lobbed petrol bombs into a school and other buildings.¹⁴³ Sectarian conflict also arose in another town in the province, Luwu, where locals and transmigrants fought in January 2000. At least four people were killed, and a hundred houses burnt; for not the first time, both Muslims and Christians accused the military and the police of siding with the opposite faction in the fighting.¹⁴⁴

In Central Sulawesi, Poso experienced communal conflict, with 360 homes and 4 churches destroyed without retaliation in April 2000.¹⁴⁵ Later fighting between May and June involved casualties from both sides, as Christians retaliated to Muslim attacks.¹⁴⁶ Later searches uncovered mass graves totaling 211 people in three separate places.¹⁴⁷

Sumatra

On the 6th January 2000, threats of violence were made against churches in Lampung, South Sumatra.¹⁴⁸ The demand: For the problem in Ambon to be resolved by the next day, otherwise the residents of Lampung could expect a similar event in their city.¹⁴⁹

Although the threats were not realized, other parts of Sumatra were less fortunate. In the North Sumatran city of Medan, a home-made explosive device went off in the GKPI Protestant church in

¹⁴² S.A., personal communication, Jan 25, 2000.

¹⁴³ Spillius, A., "Indonesian Mob Destroys Church After Mosque Bombing", *The Daily Telegraph*, Apr 21, 1999.

¹⁴⁴ Cooney, D., "Four Killed in Indonesia Violence", *Associated Press*, Jan 10, 2000.

¹⁴⁵ J.H., personal communication, Jun 3, 2000.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ "211 Confirmed Dead in Poso Communal Clashes", *The Jakarta Post*, Jul 7, 2000.

¹⁴⁸ W.L., personal communication, Jan 8, 2000.

¹⁴⁹ "Bila masalah di Ambon tidak dapat diselesaikan besok, maka Lampung akan menjadi Ambon kedua!", *ibid.*

late July, injuring 47 members of the congregation. Two other bombs were subsequently discovered in churches in the city before they detonated and were diffused by police bomb squads.¹⁵⁰

Timor

After 23 years of armed occupation and as many as 200,000 killings, the Indonesian government announced on the 27th January 1999 that East Timor could have its freedom.¹⁵¹ Immediately, however, pro- and anti- independence groups clashed in the Kovalima district, leading to 4,000 people having to seek refuge at the church in Suai in order to escape the killings.¹⁵² Divisions quickly emerged, leading to fears of factional violence in the province, especially when news emerged that the Indonesian military was arming the civilian population.¹⁵³ The threat of an East Timor war became very real.¹⁵⁴

Escalating violence in East Timor eventually led up to claims of at least 25 people being shot or hacked to death by the Indonesian army, with other reports placing the number of victims to as high as 45.¹⁵⁵ In May, pro-independence militia went on a rampage in Dili streets, claiming at least 2 lives as the province, seeking a referendum for its independence in August, spiraled toward chaos.

Even after the overwhelming result of the referendum was for independence, militiamen continued to rampage on the streets of Dili, killing Catholic priests and nuns and UN workers. Churches, monasteries, church-run schools and hospitals were all attacked, and what would have been a politically-motivated conflict degenerated into ethnic and religious violence.¹⁵⁶ The homes of Christians were destroyed, including that of Bishop Carlos Bello, the Nobel peace prize-winning bishop responsible for reconciliation efforts between the pro- and anti- independence groups.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁰ McCall, C., “Christians Pray in Fear After Explosions”, *South China Morning Post*, May 29, 2000; “47 Injured in Medan Church Blast”, *The Jakarta Post*, May 29, 2000.

¹⁵¹ Aglionby, J., “Timor Can Have Freedom”, *The Guardian*, Jan 28, 1999.

¹⁵² “East Timor Groups Clash Following Independence Proposal”, *Catholic World News*, Jan 29, 1999.

¹⁵³ “Indonesian Government Arming Civilians in Timor”, *Catholic World News*, Feb 2, 1999.

¹⁵⁴ Watts, D., “Threat of Timor War Grows”, *The Times*, Feb 3, 1999.

¹⁵⁵ Jatmiko, A., “Bishop Claims East Timor Massacre”, *Associated Press*, Apr 7, 1999.

¹⁵⁶ Watts, D., “Timorese Run for Their Lives as Militiamen Go on Rampage”, *The Times*, Sep 4, 1999; “Militias Rampage Against Christians in East Timor”, *Religion Today*, September 10, 1999.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

Eventually, UN peacekeepers were sent into East Timor to quell the violence, which an Indonesian army defector has revealed to be a civil war plot, designed to purge the territory.¹⁵⁸ In November, international press revealed that murdered priests had been found in mass graves,¹⁵⁹ and a senior UN official revealed that women refugees from East Timor were being “raped and abused in camps in Indonesian West Timor”.¹⁶⁰

At the end of January 2000, the UN International Commission of Inquiry on East Timor documented that there was “systematic and widespread intimidation and terror, destruction of property, violence against women, forced displacement, and attempts to destroy evidence”, concluding that the Indonesian army, police as well as militia armed by the security forces were responsible.¹⁶¹

Cases of violence are still reported from East Timor, despite its independence. Gang clashes in Baucau and Dili in January indicate that the case for peace in the territory is far from settled.¹⁶² The refugees have also had their calamities; floods claimed the lives of 125, and a further 547 died in the squalid conditions of the camps.¹⁶³ Under these circumstances, the Indonesian government in August approved a plan to close the refugee camps.¹⁶⁴ Likewise, the tiny communities of Muslims left in the newly independent state live in ghetto-like conditions and are stoned by the Christian population who accuse them of siding with pro-Indonesia militia.¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁸ Watts, D., “Defector Reveals Civil War Plot in Timor”, *The Times*, Sep 17, 1999.

¹⁵⁹ Dutter, B., “Bodies of Murdered Priests in Mass Grave”, *Daily Telegraph*, Nov 27, 1999.

¹⁶⁰ “Refugees Raped”, *Sunday Telegraph*, Nov 7, 1999.

¹⁶¹ Human Rights Watch 2000, “Justice for East Timor”, *Press Backgrounder Mar 2000*, available: <http://www.hrw.org/backgrounder/asia/timor/etimorback0330.htm> (accessed Apr 3, 2005).

¹⁶² Paterson, H., “Gang Violence Rocks East Timor City”, *Associated Press*, Jan 11, 2000; Paterson, H., “Rioting in East Timor Injures Four”, *Associated Press*, Jan 25, 2000.

¹⁶³ Spillius, A., “Timor Floods Kill Refugees”, *Daily Telegraph*, May 19, 2000; “547 Timor Refugees Died in Camps”, *Associated Press*, Jul 19, 2000.

¹⁶⁴ “Indonesia Okays Plan to Close East Timor Refugee Camps”, *The Jakarta Post*, Aug 1, 2000

¹⁶⁵ “Muslims in Ghetto and Under Attack”, *Impact International*, July 2000, p. 34.

IV. Competing and Complementary Theories

Economic Rationales

Prior to the 1997/98 economic and political crisis, the economy powered along with an impressive 7 percent growth rate and an annual GDP in the excess of 600 billion.¹⁶⁶ The staggering effect of a 15 percent contraction during the crisis would obviously have an impact on the ordinary lives of the people. Average income per capita, already low before the recession, fell to between US\$600 and US\$700 per annum. An inflation rate of 77 percent that bordered on hyperinflation, and an unemployment rate of 20 percent that implied that as many as 17.5 million people were out of work.¹⁶⁷ The rupiah lost more than half its value as compared to pre-1997 figures; to an ordinary worker, this means that he has taken an involuntary 50 percent pay cut.

On top of macroeconomic worries, the economy faced microeconomic troubles as well. Microeconomic reform was slow and inefficient, with the Indonesian Bank Restructuring Agency only being able to collect on less than 2 percent of its debts. Bank scandals rocked the economy,¹⁶⁸ and even the economics minister had no faith in his country's ability to attract foreign investment, as he so publicly declared.¹⁶⁹

Even in the aftermath where the economy showed positive signs of recovery, the plight of the common people was often ignored, and the huge army of the unemployed provided a potential source of discontented individuals who, for lack of more productive activities, could be engaged in religious strife.

Political and Military Explanations

There are a few political factors that have been implicated in attempts to explain the crisis. Two stand out: The argument that the violence is a facade for secessionist tendencies; and the argument that the violence has been perpetrated by provocateurs involved in a wider conspiracy to discredit the current, democratically-elected government.

¹⁶⁶ *CIA World Factbook 1999, op. cit.*, p. 6.

¹⁶⁷ Calculated from the 1997 labor force estimates of 87 million.

¹⁶⁸ The most recent being the Bank Bali scandal, linking huge liabilities to the Habibie government; it remains unresolved. Kwik, K.G., "Bank Bali Scandal Remains Unresolved", *Compass*, Sep 27, 1999.

¹⁶⁹ *The Economist*, July 8, 2000, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

The independence hypothesis contends that the states of Maluku, through the South Maluku Republican Movement (RMS); Irian Jaya, through the Free Papua Movement (OPM); and East Timor, through the Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (Fretilin), were seeking to gain independence, since they are states with a large non-Muslim minority (or even majority). These pro-independence forces, it is argued, do not have the support of the majority of the people, but are using the banner of religious incompatibility as a front for securing independence.¹⁷⁰

The second conjecture, that of provocateurs involved in a power struggle, implicates a few groups.¹⁷¹ The first group is the *status quo* group—that of Suharto and his supporters. The second is made up of hard-line Muslims, while the third is comprised of certain Indonesian business conglomerates.

The first group is undoubtedly the most complex. There are the powerful players as well as their instruments. The powerful political elite that were named included B.J. Habibie, whose attempt to arouse unrest in the conflict areas would destabilize the political strongholds of Megawati Sukarnoputri; General Wiranto, who would enjoy greater military power in the conflict regions; and ex-president Suharto.¹⁷²

Groups that have been implicated as their instruments of this political elite include Laskar Jihad,¹⁷³ although this has been vehemently denied by its leader, Ja'far Umar Tholib;¹⁷⁴ and various local gangs.¹⁷⁵ These groups often masquerade under the pretext of religion but various sources have accused them of being the first to instigate the violence in both Lombok and Maluku;¹⁷⁶ in addition,

¹⁷⁰ Madjiah, L.E., “Indonesia, a Nation Divided by Faith”, *The Jakarta Post*, Jul 3, 2000.

¹⁷¹ “Genocide Incompatible with Religion and Faith”, *The Jakarta Post*, Jan 17, 2000.

¹⁷² Aditjondro, G.J., “The Players Behind the Maluku Madness”, *The Jakarta Post*, Jul 20, 2000.

¹⁷³ Grant, M. 2000, *Moluccan Christians Face Ethnic Cleansing in Their Homeland*, Perth, Australia.

¹⁷⁴ “Jihad Force is No One's Political Tool: Commander Ja'far”, *The Jakarta Post*, May 15, 2000.

¹⁷⁵ In Ambon, the main Christian youth gang, Christian Boys (Coker), are led by Milton Matuanakota and Ongky Pieters; their antagonist Ongen Sangaji leads the rival Muslim gang, Pancasila Youth. See Aditjondro, G.J., “While Elephants Fight, the People of Maluku are Crushed in Between”, Jan 23, 2000, available: <http://media.isnet.org/ambon/gajahe.html> (accessed July 26, 2000). In Lombok, two “crime control” gangs, Bujak and Amfibi, combined in August 1999 to form a large paramilitary organization that involved themselves in organized violence. See MacDougall, J.M.J. 2000, *loc. cit.*

¹⁷⁶ This point deserves elaboration. The destruction in Lombok was said to be very systematic and organized, possibly by these groups. Likewise, many reports claim the same for Maluku, and that there were many people in the mob that were not locals. *Ibid*; van Klinken, G. 1999, *What Caused the Ambon Violence?*, available: <http://www.serve.com/inside/index.htm> (accessed July 26, 2000).

they are also more inclined to be involved in the ongoing fray.¹⁷⁷ Interestingly, it is also alleged that they have ties to the Suharto regime.¹⁷⁸

The second group, the radical Islamic organizations, is motivated by the desire to establish an Islamic state based on the *Shari'ah*. These radical groups would find nominal support from the reformist organizations, the main one being Muhammadiyah. As a matter of fact, on 12th July 2000, Muhammadiyah cast off *Pancasila* and readopted Islam as its key principle.¹⁷⁹ The Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI), with Habibie as its chairman, galvanized students from universities to participate in a “Long March” against poverty and ignorance, with the Muslim community as its spearhead.¹⁸⁰ Clearly, the political environment in Indonesia for the past decade has proven to be conducive for the development of orthodox Islam.¹⁸¹

In the *jihad* rallies in Jakarta, there was no attempt to hide the militant desire of the leadership. Rallies have activists brandishing weapons,¹⁸² and training conducted in Bogor resembled military-style camps.¹⁸³ A document handed out to *jihad* volunteers included, amongst the inventory of personal items for each individual, face masks as well as swords.¹⁸⁴ In a publication entitled “Burn the Churches: Investigations of Religious Conflicts in Indonesia”, the author was clearly fundamentalist throughout the book, and at one point made clear statements against president Wahid.¹⁸⁵

The third group are Indonesian business conglomerates who benefit from the religious troubles, since they then escape from their obligations to pay trillions of rupiah in debt to Indonesian

¹⁷⁷ Larmer, B., “Warriors of Red and White”, *Newsweek*, Jan 17, 2000.

¹⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch 1999, *loc. cit.*; W.L., personal communication, Oct 4, 1999.

¹⁷⁹ “Muhammadiyah Readopts Islam as Key Principle”, *The Jakarta Post*, Jul 12, 2000.

¹⁸⁰ “Elected Chairman of the ICMI Indonesia”, in B.J. Habibie: *His Life and Career*, available: <http://habibie.ristek.go.id/english/cv/cvl.htm> (accessed Jan 20, 1999).

¹⁸¹ In his final years as president, Suharto became increasingly Muslim-friendly; he went on the *Haji*, and he allowed the establishment of an Islamic bank and other Islamic institutions. The head of the MPR, Amien Rais, continues to be a channel for Islamist views in parliament. See *Impact International*, Apr 2000, p. 12; Rubenstein, C. 1999, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

¹⁸² *The Times*, Apr 7, 2000, *loc. cit.*

¹⁸³ “Laskar Jihad Worry Bogor Residents”, *The Jakarta Post*, Apr 10, 2000.

¹⁸⁴ Ja'far Umar Thalib 2000, *Laskar Jihad ke Maluku*, Ihya'ussunnah, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

¹⁸⁵ Husaini, A. (ed.) 2000, *Gereja-Gereja Dibakar: Membedah Akar Konflik SARA di Indonesia*, DEA Press, Jakarta, Indonesia, pp. 136-37.

banks¹⁸⁶—incurred during the days of corruption prior to the current economic crisis. These conglomerates, in general, had close links to the Suharto family.¹⁸⁷

To tie all that up was the general weakness of the president and his cabinet. This does not necessarily speak of Wahid's character, but rather, the regime that he was inducted into and the entire political environment that defines Indonesian politics. The leadership has often found it difficult to agree,¹⁸⁸ and the religious war has threatened to topple the country's first democratically-elected leader.¹⁸⁹

Civil-military ties in Southeast Asia has historically been delicate, and all the more so in Indonesia. The military often employed a dual social and political function, known as *dwifungsi*, and the Indonesian military played important roles in bringing both Sukarno and Suharto to power.¹⁹⁰ The Indonesian military is used to force as a means to achieving ends, a methodology that has been thoroughly criticized.

The status of the military in the religious conflicts in Indonesia is ambivalent; on one hand, some reports claim that the presence of the military has aggravated the conflict, mainly due to their participation in the actual fighting, and being less than impartial in doing so.¹⁹¹ On the other, the military has also been accused on standing idly by while the destruction was being carried out.¹⁹² The admittance of military involvement is well documented for the case of Maluku; for other provinces, in particular East Timor, such evidence has not been as forthcoming.

Socio-Psychological and Religious Motivations

The sociological and psychological perspectives provide fertile ground for understanding the current situation, and the pre-eminence of religion as the source of the conflict.

¹⁸⁶ Lekic, S., "Indonesia Blames Many for Violence", *Associated Press*, Jan 25, 2000.

¹⁸⁷ Aditjondro, G.J., Jul 20, 2000, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

¹⁸⁸ To the extent that Rais and Wahid were called on to stop making controversial statements. "Nurcholis Asks Gus Dur, Amien to be Silent", *The Jakarta Post*, Jul 7, 2000.

¹⁸⁹ Sherwell, P., "Religious War Threatens Indonesian President", *Sunday Telegraph*, Jan 9, 2000.

¹⁹⁰ Sulistyono, H., "Berets and Pens: Civil-Military Ties in SE Asia", *The Jakarta Post*, Apr 7-8, 2000.

¹⁹¹ England, V., *loc. cit.*; Human Rights Watch 1998, *loc. cit.*

¹⁹² Masariku Network 2000, *Change of Security Setting by the Military Commander and Structure of the Command of Civil Emergency as a Background of the Destruction of Pattimura University and Poka-Rumab Tiga Villages*, available: <http://www.geocities.com/alifuru67/noframe/masariku1007y2k.htm> (accessed Apr 5, 2005).

Foremost is the need to understand the psyche of the Indonesian people. Violence comes from social or political conditioning, and in the case of Indonesia, it has been argued that due to the culture of violence that has characterized Indonesian society, it becomes much easier to arouse these tendencies and hence legitimize the use of force to attain ends and resolve differences. Mass violence can also have a self-perpetuating effect, especially for those who have been traumatized by the incidents.¹⁹³

In Maluku, the traditional system of *pela*—where traditional intervillage relations ensured a peaceful co-existence between people of different beliefs—has been broken down due to several factors. The influx of non-Ambonese Muslims has altered the demographic distribution and diluted the sense of commitment to *pela*. In addition, the younger generation seldom feels the same sort of allegiance to a system they regard as ancient and outdated. Finally, with re-Islamization and re-Christianization, the traditional syncretic beliefs that allowed the two religions to rest more comfortably with one another disappeared, as religious leaders stressed the importance of orthodox belief, making the other religion far less acceptable.¹⁹⁴

Going beyond the provincial level, the breakdown of the national ideology, *Pancasila*, might explain the clashes on a wider scale. In recent times, *Pancasila* has often been used as a sort of mantra that is not questioned because no dissent with regard to it is allowed. The concept has never been allowed to take root in the hearts and minds of the people.¹⁹⁵ Now that the influence of a repressive government is gone, it is possible that the rote learning of the principle imposed previously is paying unwanted dividends through the religious clashes that are in direct confrontation to *Pancasila*.

Under a certain interpretation, the Muslim can directly justify his or her call to arms.¹⁹⁶ However, it is generally harder for the Christian to do so—at least, not unambiguously. Christian ministers are often in a dilemma as to what to preach: To leave the vengeance to God,¹⁹⁷ or to retaliate in self-defense.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹³ Anggraeni, D., “Is Violence Part of Indonesian Culture These Days?”, *The Jakarta Post*, Jul 30, 2000; Buchori, M., 'Mass Violence Wrecks Psyche of Nation', *The Jakarta Post*, Jun 20, 2000.

¹⁹⁴ Bartels, D. 2000, *Your God Is No Longer Mine: Moslem-Christian Fratricide in the Central Moluccas (Indonesia) After a Half-Millennium of Tolerant Co-Existence and Ethnic Unity*, available: <http://www.geocities.com/alifuru67> (accessed Jul 27, 2000); Picaulima van Engelen & Saimima, H., “The Seeds of Discontent in the Beautiful Maluku Islands”, *The Jakarta Post*, Jul 20, 2000.

¹⁹⁵ Horn, F.L., “Indonesia: A Nation in Crisis”, *The Jakarta Post*, Jun 16, 2000.

¹⁹⁶ Sura 9:5

¹⁹⁷ Deut 32:35; Rom 12:19; Mt 38:42

¹⁹⁸ 1 Sam 17; Eze 32:19–21; Lk 22:36

Nonetheless, a preacher who preaches forbearance is often not listened to, as congregations, frustrated with a gospel of peace when all around them is violence, react in kind.

Analysis and Critique

The weakness of the economy as a reason for the manifestation of innate differences is an argument that holds a great deal of weight. One might say that the poor performance of the economy is the bedrock for current tensions; conversely, an economy which is bringing prosperity and an improved standard of living to the people makes differences that much easier to tolerate. One must not forget that in addition to the disgruntlement of the unemployed (and hence their greater willingness to lend themselves to the religious cause), the youths and students—often the first to be retrenched in a recession—have often been named in the press as the most active participants in the inter-religious strife.¹⁹⁹

Mix all that with little hope for an imminent improvement in their current economic conditions,²⁰⁰ and you have the perfect recipe for mobs looking for a fight. One could venture as far as to say that if economic conditions were not as they were, there is a good chance that the conflicts would have been far less widespread, if they were to have happened at all. Consequently, the first step in any attempt to quell ethno-religious unrest of this form, it would seem, would be to get the economy back on track—a task far easier said than done.

The independence hypothesis, at first glance, appears to hold water for three of the states that experienced sectarian conflict: Maluku, East Timor, and Irian Jaya. However, a more careful examination of the events and circumstances of the time would appear to contradict this worldview, at least in its naïve form.

It is highly improbable that the people of Maluku, prior to the crisis, would have wanted independence to an extent that would have led them to condone the violence that eventually occurred. Despite the historical presence of the RMS, the people of Maluku had lived, since the inception of the republic, in relative contentment, despite differences in religious proclivities. The RMS had been, and still remains, a small—if somewhat over-emphasized—element.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ Larmer, B., *op. cit.*, p. 38.

²⁰⁰ This thought is echoed by Airlangga University lecturer Daniel Sparingga. “Poverty Adds Fuel to Indon Crisis”, *Malaysia Star*, Jan 25, 1999.

²⁰¹ How much this is recognized by the Muslims involved in the conflict is debatable. A Muslim mindset that misunderstands this might argue that the Christians are attempting to form an independent state and are hence unpatriotic.

East Timor gained official independence following the UN-sponsored act of self-determination in 1999. The violence committed by the pre-independence militia after the referendum shows that religious fervor had a part to play in the ensuing conflict. Even Bishop Belo himself claimed that the pro-Indonesian armed gangs were participating in a “genocide that does not spare the Catholic Church.”²⁰² The church was, after all, often perceived as pro-independence, and so by association Christians and church leaders would be a target for anti-independence militia and security forces. However, East Timor had always sought independence since annexation by the Indonesian military in 1975. One could make a case that the move toward independence was inevitable, and the sectarian violence was merely a sideshow, not the result of independence.

In Irian Jaya, where the desire for independence was similarly strong, conflicts typically occurred between security forces and the indigenous people. While these two groups would represent a clash between Muslims and Christians—primarily because the army is more likely to be Muslim and the indigenous Papuans Christians—to frame any clashes between the two as a religious one would probably be off the mark. One should not deny that there might be some religious overtones involved, but this would be extremely minor at best.

Therefore, the motivation behind the sectarian clashes in these provinces²⁰³ might be explained by the independence hypothesis, but one would require a more nuanced approach than the straightforward case often portrayed in the media.²⁰⁴ In any case, the mechanism for sectarian violence appears to be indirect. One needs another, more fundamental, reason to explain the broader phenomena of the violence.

The conspiracy theory explanation is an interesting one to study; mainly because it encompasses so many elements and implicates so many players, and partly because it is a sad reflection of much of Southeast Asian politics in the 20th century. Therefore, before dismissing the entire conspiracy racket offhand, there is a need to remember that whilst conspiracy theories may seem farfetched in the Western context, it is very plausible in the region. The fact that the many powerful government

²⁰² “Mann, S., ‘Church Anger at Attacks on Its Flock’, *International Herald Tribune*, Sep 11, 1999.

²⁰³ And indeed, even for Aceh. However, since the confrontation there has been between Muslims from pro-independence forces and government security forces, it has not been considered in the scope of this paper.

²⁰⁴ “Divisions Emerge Over Timor Independence”, *BBC News*, Feb 1, 1999; *Agence France-Presse*, Jun 22, 2000. For example, initial reports of RMS flags being sighted in Maluku are likely to have been due to confusion between RMS flags and that of the warring religious groups. See Fofid, R. & Salampessy, Z., *loc. cit.*

figures, the president included, have voiced this as a distinct possibility²⁰⁵ lends further credence to the entire situation being a complex, shady web of political intrigue.

To recapitulate, the proposed political aims for the *status quo* group are, first, to destabilize the strongholds of Megawati Sukarnoputri so as to pave the way for Habibie to capture the presidency, and second, to create unrest where General Wiranto could then revive regional military commands.²⁰⁶ This explanation was much stronger when Megawati was the strongest presidential candidate opposing Habibie and when Wiranto was still the armed forces commander. The change in the political seesaw since then²⁰⁷ has not, unfortunately, been accompanied by a corresponding change in the situation at the conflict areas. It seems highly unlikely that any prolonging of the fighting would benefit either party, short of a military *coup d'état*. One has to surmise that the theory, while potentially credible for events prior to 1999, was rendered redundant by changes in circumstances. Events in 1999–2000 appeared to gain a momentum of their own.

It is no secret that the ultimate goal of most Islamist groups are to establish an Islamic state, as its proponents believe that Islam is a complete philosophical, social and economic system, independent of secularism and Western capitalism. These groups would thus be more amenable to employing political means to attain that goal, as they do not distinguish between politics and Islam. They have been clear about their displeasure with Wahid's presidency, which they feel does not reflect the predominant status of Muslims in Indonesia.

The brand of Islam in Indonesia has been tolerant, and even though it is changing, it remains far from the strict forms practiced in Iran and Saudi Arabia that have a tendency to relegate non-Muslims to a *dhimmi*²⁰⁸ status. So long as *Pancasila* remains as the state ideology, religious discrimination will be difficult to enforce, even in practice. The president himself has called for tolerance.²⁰⁹ The role of Laskar Jihad presents more of a conundrum. It has been acknowledged that their presence in Maluku has been a source of fuel for the continuing conflict,²¹⁰ but outbreaks of

²⁰⁵ Among its adherents are Major Generals Suaidi Marasabessy and Amir Sembiring, President Abdurrahman Wahid, Foreign Minister Alwi Shihab and Defence Minister Juwono Sudarsono. Human Rights Watch 1999, *loc. cit.*; "Abdurrahman Wahid Warns Off Detractors", *The Jakarta Post*, May 8, 2000; "Albright and Alwi Discuss Maluku, E. Timor Troubles", *The Jakarta Post*, Jul 30, 2000; Aditjondro, G.J., Jul 20, 2000, *loc. cit.*

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ Megawati then took over the vice-presidency and Wiranto has since been removed from his post.

²⁰⁸ Sura 9:29.

²⁰⁹ Junaidi, A. & Sophiaan, A.R., "President Calls for Tolerance", *The Jakarta Post*, Jul 24, 2000.

²¹⁰ "Moluccas Militants Face Expulsion", *BBC News*, Jul 25, 2000.

violence have existed in other parts of Indonesia as well, in the absence of these forces. In areas such as Kalimantan and Sulawesi, religious confrontations cannot be justified by the presence of these provocateurs. Thus, again, we arrive at the conclusion that whilst religious provocation by political forces may indeed have been a large contributing factor to the violence, it cannot explain the situation in Indonesia completely.

To place the blame solely on extractive behavior by Indonesian business conglomerates also appears to be a little farfetched. After all, unless the entire nation crumbles and all banks are forced to foreclose, any benefit that is garnered from changes in debt obligations are only postponed, and not cancelled. Surely these firms would not be as myopic as to expect to escape from repayment forever. Likewise, if the nation falls apart, the conglomerates would lose their home base, something that they would surely wish to avoid. It seems like a Catch-22 and any domestic instability could even have a detrimental effect on the continuation of their businesses.

As in all conspiracy theories, it is very difficult to separate the wheat from the chaff. The tangle of the different players and the spectrum of their possible intentions make it difficult to address. Assuredly, political forces exert a very strong influence on what has happened in Indonesia, especially at the beginning of the crisis. But one has a nagging feeling that there is more involved than just a high-level conspiracy.

The weakness of Wahid and his government should be understood in the context of the greater picture: That he had, in fact, an extremely difficult job, given the circumstances in which he arrived into and the external forces that existed around him at the time. His disinclination towards using the full force of the military to resolve the situation was understandable, as it could simply usher in a military coup. The importance of support by the people of Indonesia would have been critical. Instead, there was been talk of his impeachment; and the president faced a vote of no confidence in August.²¹¹ The continued fragmentation of the leadership had ominous signs for peace in Indonesia.

Very often, the mere presence of a well-trained and well-armed military can contribute to increased bloodletting, especially when it has the kind of history of disregard for human rights that the Indonesian military does. The involvement of security forces in a religious conflict in Maluku was no coincidence, as earlier reports have already quoted security sources stating that they too had religious affiliations and it would be difficult to maintain objectivity.²¹²

²¹¹ "Indonesia Should Have Impeachment Institution", *The Jakarta Post*, May 15, 2000; McCarthy, T., "Democrat... Or Boss?", *Time*, Jul 17, 2000.

²¹² *BBC News*, Feb 23, 1999, *loc.cit.*

How does one approach this problem? To remove all troops would imply that the government is allowing the state to descend into anarchy. And yet, if the troops themselves are involved in the fighting, does not the situation worsen? A balance has to be achieved, it was fortunate that the military, which remained in subjection to the government throughout the episode, did not take matters into its own hands.

The various psychological and sociological theories provide the best explanation for the scale of the conflict. Religion is the lowest common denominator, and the battle cry to fight for God is usually the easiest make. Given the psychological and social factors that were already in place, playing the religion card becomes the easiest way to foster disharmony. The provocateurs may rally small groups of people, such as gangs of hooligans, but in order to draw in the larger population, the provocation of a *jihad* or crusade army provides the final push necessary to draw in the rest, already incubating with the various psychological and social aspects of discontent.

Each of the three factors that have been explicated provide an understanding, at three different levels of abstraction, of the current crisis. And in them there is possibly the best solution pointing the way on toward reconciliation. The vicious cycle established by the violence should be recognized and swiftly dealt with, and an attempt should be made to reacquaint Muslims and Christians in Maluku with the *pela* system—and perhaps introduce a modified form in other areas. In the absence of a strong-arm government, the need is to recognize *Pancasila* as the genetic code of the nation, and not simply a piece of propaganda. The fact that these traditional values are the key to harmony has been echoed not only by religious leaders but by the president himself,²¹³ and as the nation flounders on its first tentative steps towards a full-fledged democracy, indoctrination should be replaced by education.

There is also a subtle part played by demography. As a cosmopolitan centre, Ambon attracts a large migrant community from the islands all over Maluku. It is not unlikely that, through familial or friendship contacts, unrest from the capital would spread to outlying areas. A similar scenario could be extrapolated to Jakarta, being the nation's capital, to the rest of the republic—recall, all the initial riots were confined to Java and mainly Jakarta. The need to ensure that the Indonesian capital remains calm in turbulent times is paramount. There is a great vested interest to ensure that Jakarta, as the seat of political power, does not dissolve into ethnic or religious violence. A religious riot in the nation's capital would reverberate throughout the entire republic, and threaten to tear it apart. This has to be ensured, to a limited extent, by the presence of a large military and police force.

²¹³ Doogue, E., "Indonesia's Traditional Values Are Key to Harmony, Says WCC Official", *ENI Bulletin*, no. 7, Apr 19, 2000.

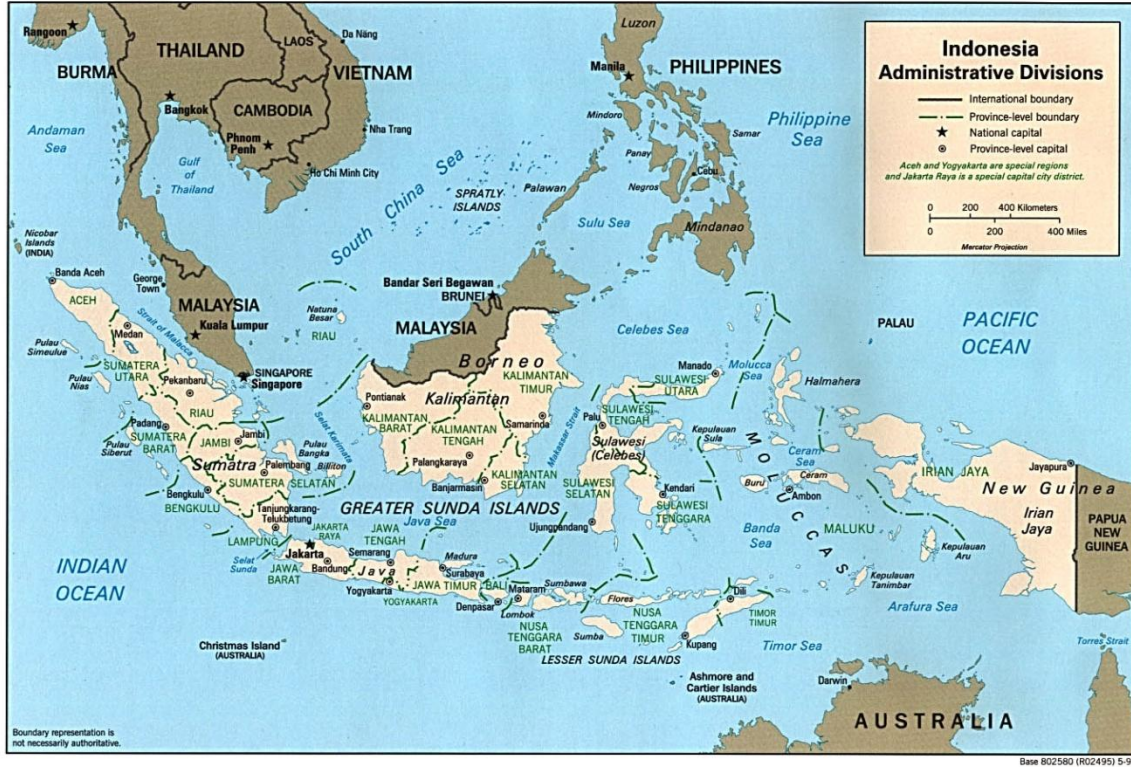
V. Conclusion

The events that transpired in Indonesia between January 1999 and June 2000 are symptomatic not of fundamental problems that exist between Muslim-Christian relations, but of the kinds of atrocities that men can perpetrate against one another when the greater socioeconomic fabric of society breaks down. The rape, pillage, and murder—committed in the name of God by both sides of the conflict—are a reminder that religion can be used to justify unconscionable actions.

How easy, though, it is to assert the virtuous that one should turn the other cheek. It is hard to fault retaliatory action when loved ones and friends being subjected to unspeakable atrocities, or when all that a person has lived and worked for are destroyed before their very eyes. Indeed, when the rule of law appears to break down, it appears far easier to claim vigilante justice, especially when those in authority seem to be either powerless or abetting the violence themselves.

The vast majority of victims in crisis of 1999–2000 is not reflected in the official statistics of those dead and wounded; it is the farmer who is forced to take refuge in the jungle because his home has been razed to the ground, the mother who has to raise seven children by herself, the five-year old boy who sees his sister violated by strangers, the teenage girl who will never be able to close her eyes without seeing images of her mutilated friends. Is there hope? Perhaps, if Christians and Muslims can see beyond their own worldviews, and recognize their common humanity behind the veneer of religion, there can be hope that the violence of at the turn of the century is but a historical aberration.

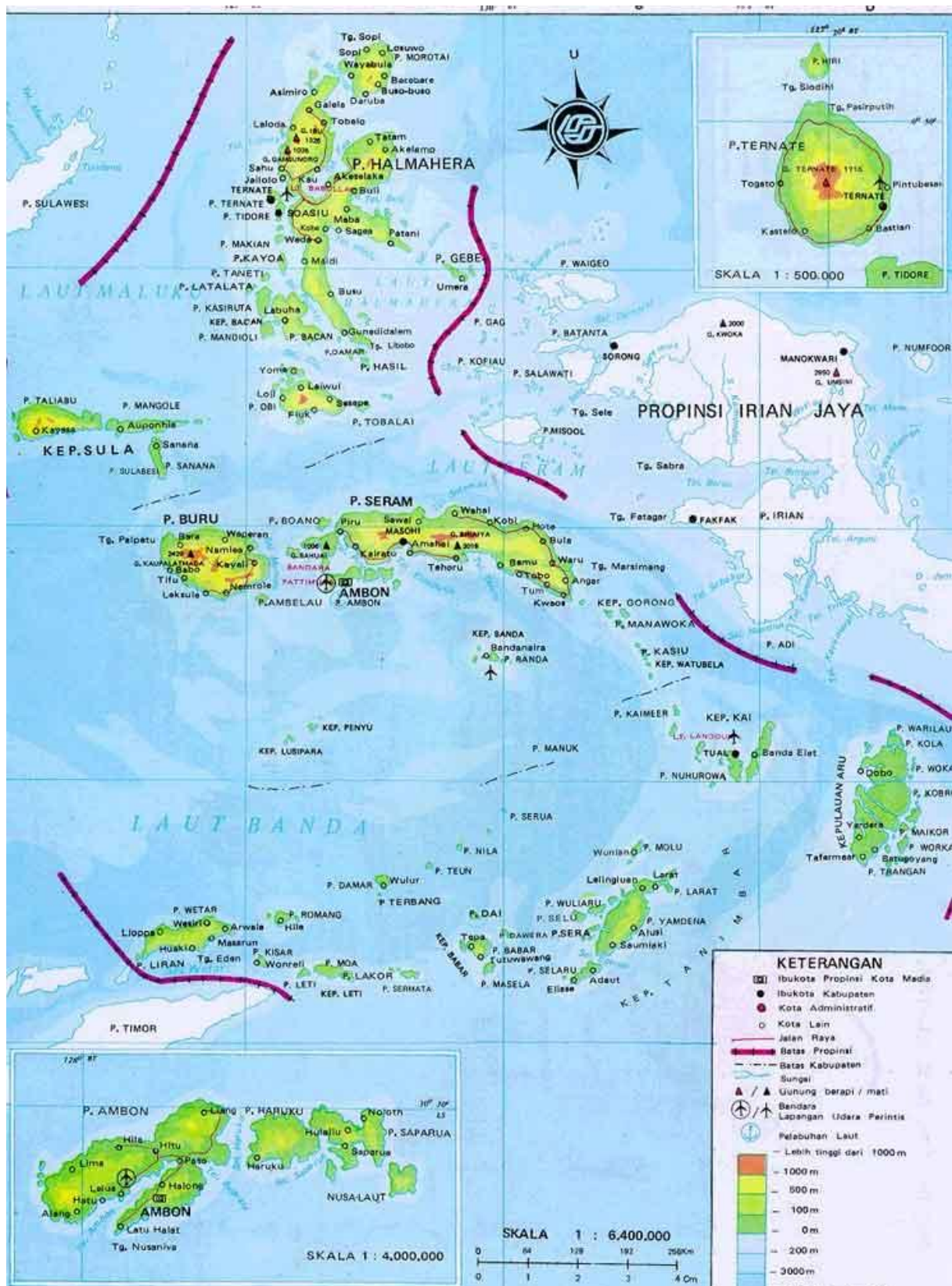
Appendix A



Map 1. Indonesia, by administrative regions, 1998



Map 2. Irian Jaya/West Papua



Map 3. Maluku islands

Appendix B

Date	Event	Location
15 May 1998	Widespread looting, burning and rape in Jakarta	Jakarta
25 May 1998	Religious leaders present report on human rights violations by military	Irian Jaya
28 May 1998	Demonstrations calling for human rights investigations	Irian Jaya
17 Jun 1998	3 non-Irianese transmigrants shot by pro-independence movement	Irian Jaya
23 Jun 1998	Press reports systematic rape of Chinese women during May Jakarta riots	Jakarta
1-6 Jul 1998	Widespread demonstrations in Jayapura calling for independence	Irian Jaya
6 Jul 1998	Military crackdown on demonstrators in Biak	Irian Jaya
11 Sep 1998	Rioting and looting of storehouses in Pontianak	West Kalimantan
22 Nov 1998	Religious riots leave 14 dead and churches burnt	Jakarta
27 Nov 1998	Christians attack mosque in Kupang in retaliation to Jakarta riots	West Timor
4 Dec 1998	Muslims burn church in Ujung Padang in retaliation to Kupang attack	South Sulawesi
24-29 Dec 1998	Looting and burning of Christian homes in Poso	Central Sulawesi
30 Dec 1998	Burning of church in Palu	Central Sulawesi
15-18 Jan 1999	Rioting in Aru between rival Muslim youth gang members	Maluku
19 Jan 1999	Clashes in Ambon begin first wave of Maluku riots	Maluku
20 Jan 1999	Intensification of religious violence in Ambon	Maluku
24 Jan 1999	Military ends violence in Ambon	Maluku
25 Jan 1999	Sporadic violence continues in Ambon	Maluku
27 Jan 1999	Indonesia raises possibility of East Timor independence	East Timor
29 Jan 1999	Separatists and pro-Indonesian groups clash	East Timor

2 Feb 1999	Religious clashes renew in Ambon	Maluku
3 Feb 1999	Growing threat of Timor civil war	East Timor
3-5 Feb 1999	Fighting in Ambon spreads to Seram and Saparua	Maluku
14 Feb 1999	Security forces in Maluku begin utilizing live ammunition	Maluku
22 Feb 1999	5,000 Muslims flee Maluku violence	Maluku
23 Feb 1999	Security forces accused of partiality in Ambon violence	Maluku
7 Mar 1999	100,000 Muslims call for Jihad	Jakarta
10 Mar 1999	Growing threat of Maluku civil war	Maluku
17-20 Mar 1999	Indigenous Dayaks & Malays clash with Madurese immigrants	West Kalimantan
7 Apr 1999	Claims of massacre of at least 25 in East Timor	East Timor
	Rioting in Singkawang kills 12	West Kalimantan
20 Apr 1999	Bombing of mosque in Jakarta	Jakarta
21 Apr 1999	Revenge bombing of church in Ujung Padang	South Sulawesi
11 May 1999	Pro-Indonesian militias go on rampage in Dili streets	East Timor
12 May 1999	End of first wave of Maluku riots	Maluku
7 Jun 1999	Indonesian parliamentary elections	Jakarta
23 Jul 1999	Riots in Ambon begin second wave of Maluku riots	Maluku
15 Aug 1999	Muslim accusations of Western and Israeli involvement in Ambon	Maluku
4 Sep 1999	Increasing violence in Dili	East Timor
	UN-sponsored referendum overwhelmingly supports independence	East Timor
10 Sep 1999	Militias target Christians in East Timor	East Timor
17 Sep 1999	Civil war plot in East Timor revealed by military defector	East Timor
20 Sep 1999	UN peacekeepers arrive in East Timor	East Timor

8 Oct 1999	Demonstrations calling for removal of armed forces from Ambon	Maluku
20 Oct 1999	Indonesian presidential and vice-presidential installation	Jakarta
21 Oct 1999	End of second wave of Maluku riots	Maluku
3-4 Nov 1999	Religious clashes in Tidore begin third wave of Maluku riots	Maluku
6-11 Nov 1999	Clashes in Tidore spread to Ternate	Maluku
7 Nov 1999	East Timor refugees raped in camps	West Timor
16 Nov 1999	Mob attacks Christian rehabilitation centre	Jakarta
27 Nov 1999	Bodies of murdered priests discovered in mass grave	East Timor
2-4 Dec 1999	Muslim masses attack Christian villages and churches in Seram	Maluku
22 Dec 1999	Disagreement between Muslim & Christian employees spark off riots in Buru	Maluku
26 Dec 1999	Accident between Christian driver and Muslim youth renew riots in Ambon	Maluku
27 Dec 1999	Muslims attack churches and Christians in Ternate	Maluku
28 Dec 1999	Christians destroy Muslim village in Halmahera	Maluku
30 Dec 1999	Revenge attack of Christians on Muslim village in Haruku	Maluku
5 Jan 2000	10,000 refugees flee Maluku violence	Maluku
6 Jan 2000	Threat of violence against Lampung churches	South Sumatra
7 Jan 2000	100,000 Muslims renew call for Jihad	Jakarta
10 Jan 2000	Sectarian clashes in Luwu leave 4 dead and 100 houses burnt	South Sulawesi
11 Jan 2000	Gang violence in Bacau	East Timor
16 Jan 2000	Official estimates of refugees number 76,234	Maluku
17 Jan 2000	Official estimates of buildings destroyed number 7915	Maluku
	Muslim mobs ransack Christian homes, businesses & churches in Lombok	West Nusa Tenggara

19 Jan 2000	Border clashes in East Timor	East Timor
21 Jan 2000	Inquiry over role of military in Lombok violence	West Nussa Tenggara
24 Jan 2000	Megawati visits Maluku	Maluku
25 Jan 2000	Rioting in Dili	East Timor
31 Jan 2000	UN Commission reports systematic violence by Indonesian security forces	East Timor
	Muslim protesters stone churches	Yogyakarta
6 Apr 2000	10,000 Muslims demand Muslim army be sent to Maluku	Jakarta
	Training begins for Laskar Jihad	West Java
17 Apr 2000	Christian churches and homes burnt in Poso	Central Sulawesi
5 May 2000	Military shootings in Irian Jaya	Irian Jaya
7 May 2000	3,000 Laskar Jihad members arrive in Ambon	Maluku
9 May 2000	Further 200 Laskar Jihad members arrive in Maluku	Maluku
12 May 2000	Students protest for Suharto to be put on trial	Jakarta
15-20 May 2000	38 killed and 100 injured in fresh violence in Ambon	Maluku
16 May 2000	Additional 600 Laskar Jihad members enter Ambon	Maluku
19 May 2000	Appeal to UN for intervention	Maluku
	Flooding claims 125 refugees' lives	West Timor
20 May 2000	Security forces in Maluku implement shoot-on-sight orders	Maluku
23 May-4 Jun 2000	Sectarian violence in Poso claims 211 lives	Central Sulawesi
25 May 2000	Laskar Jihad rejects calls to leave Maluku	Maluku
26 May 2000	Students clash with security forces over Suharto trial	Jakarta
29 May 2000	Bombs found in 3 churches in Medan, one explodes	North Sumatra

31 May 2000	Sectarian clash in Poso 50 killed and 100 wounded in Halmahera	Central Sulawesi Maluku
12 Jun 2000	Pope condemns attacks by Muslims on Christians in Maluku	Maluku
20 Jun 2000	Official reports of refugees due to religious violence number 705,482	Various
21 Jun 2000	152 Christians killed and 160 wounded in Halmahera	Maluku
22 Jun 2000	200 killed in fighting in Ambon	Maluku
23 Jun 2000	2 houses burnt in Poso	Central Sulawesi
27 Jun 2000	Civil emergency declared in Maluku Christian Max Tamaela replaced by Hindu I Made Yasa as commander	Maluku Maluku
30 Jun 2000	3,000 additional Laskar Jihad members arrive in Ambon <i>Cahaya Bahari</i> disappears with 500 Maluku refugees on board	Maluku Maluku
1 Jul 2000	Muslims forced into ghetto and attacked	East Timor
3 Jul 2000	10 survivors rescued from sunken <i>Cahaya Bahari</i>	Maluku
4 Jul 2000	Pattimura University in Ambon destroyed 3 Christian villages in Ambon destroyed	Maluku Maluku
6 Jul 2000	Renewed clashes between Dayaks and Madurese in Kumai Christian village in Ambon destroyed	Central Kalimantan Maluku
7 Jul 2000	Defence Minister blames Laskar Jihad for ongoing Maluku conflict	Maluku
8 Jul 2000	Foreign Affairs Minister warns international community not to interfere	Maluku
10 Jul 2000	124, including 29 security personnel, arrested over Poso violence Limited isolation imposed in Maluku	Central Sulawesi Maluku
11 Jul 2000	Muhammadiyah calls for national unity	Jakarta
13 Jul 2000	Arms sweep intensified in Maluku	Maluku

17 Jul 2000	President admits need for limited international aid in Maluku	Maluku
	Laskar Jihad declares futility of civil emergency in Maluku	Maluku
18 Jul 2000	Military admits some troops involved in continuing violence	Maluku
19 Jul 2000	547 refugees die in camps	West Timor
20 Jul 2000	1 killed and shops burnt in Poso	Central Sulawesi
24 Jul 2000	UN peacekeeper killed in border clash	East Timor
26 Jul 2000	UN urges crackdown on militias operating from refugee camps	East Timor
30 Jul 2000	Muslim villagers attack Christian village in Ambon	Maluku
31 Jul 2000	Ultimatum issued to Ambonese Christians to leave or be killed	Maluku
	Irian Jaya & North Sulawesi refuse entry to refugees	Maluku
1 Aug 2000	Indonesia approves plans to close refugee camps	East Timor
	Car bomb attack in Jakarta	Jakarta
	Irian Jaya allows refugees to land	Maluku
	Christians killed in Muslim attack on village in Ambon	Maluku
3 Aug 2000	Riots in Ambon leave 11 wounded	Maluku
4 Aug 2000	2,000 refugees from Christian village in Ambon evacuated	Maluku

Appendix C



Photograph 1. Destroyed area of Gambus market, Ambon, Maluku



Photograph 2. Burnt church in Ambon, Maluku



Photograph 3. Burning of the business center in AJ Patty Street, Ambon, Maluku



Photograph 4. A destroyed village in East Timor.



Photograph 5. A rioter in Lombok.