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# THE OTHER MALUKU: CHRONOLOGIES OF CONFLICT IN NORTH MALUKU

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One of the longest running conflicts in post-Suharto Indonesia took place in the eastern Indonesian province of Maluku. Centered on the capital of Ambon, the violence began in January 1999 and re-erupted as late as May 2004. Although the Ambon conflict has been examined at length by a variety of people, less attention has been paid to the violence that swept the newly created province of North Maluku from August 1999 through June 2000.<sup>2</sup> It has usually been considered a conflict tangential to

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<sup>2</sup> There are numerous accounts of the violence in Ambon, far too many to mention here. For example, see Gerry van Klinken, "The Maluku Wars: Bringing Society Back In," *Indonesia* 71 (April 2001): 1-26; Jacques Bertrand, "Legacies of the Authoritarian Past: Religious Violence in Indonesia's Moluccan Islands," *Pacific Affairs* 75,1 (Spring 2002): 57-85; Patricia Spyer, "Fire without Smoke and Other Phantoms of Ambon's Violence: Media Effects, Agency, and the Work of Imagination," *Indonesia* 74 (October 2002): 21-36.

the violence in Ambon. This is a mistake. There is no denying that the outbreak of violence in North Maluku was influenced by events in Ambon, but it must be looked at separately as having its own origins and justifications. Furthermore, any attempt to understand the conflict must be based on a firm grasp of how the conflict unfolded across North Maluku in both time and space. The basic outline so often relied upon for academic arguments must be fleshed out.

Although simply constructing chronologies is not enough to explain fully incidents of communal violence, it does represent an important and necessary starting point.<sup>3</sup> Only after documenting the course of events and people's subjective interpretations of those events can we understand why people made the decisions they did to participate (or not) in the violence. We cannot grasp how the conflict in North Maluku reached the level of intensity that it did without a clear understanding of what happened (or was thought to have happened) as violence spread across the province. Realizing the inherent problems in presenting chronologies of violence,<sup>4</sup> I nevertheless seek to provide an in-depth chronology (or chronologies) of the North Maluku conflict based primarily on nineteen months of ethnographic fieldwork in the region during the immediate post-conflict period. This data is supplemented by twelve months of research in pre-conflict North Maluku in 1995–96. I do not seek to present a single account of the violence. Rather I am interested in presenting competing and conflicting versions of events. Examining these subjective chronologies and looking at the conflict from multiple perspectives can aid observers in understanding the course of the violence because these subjective interpretations of events shaped people's decisions and their subsequent actions.

### Competing Explanations

The violence in North Maluku did not last as long as the violence in Ambon, but when it erupted it did so with an explosive ferocity that shocked many. This shock reputedly sparked the formation of the Laskar Jihad, a Muslim militia that inundated the archipelago in May 2000.<sup>5</sup> Despite the pivotal nature of the violence, the North Maluku conflict has received far less attention than the conflict in Ambon. This relative lack of coverage stems in part from a lack of information that left many outside observers with only a basic outline of events. Unlike Ambon, which had a well-developed media, the media in North Maluku was less developed, with only a limited number of weekly papers in circulation when the conflict began. Furthermore, the journalists reporting on the conflict primarily based themselves in Ternate or traveled with Muslim forces in Halmahera. They had little access to, and in some cases little

<sup>3</sup> See Christopher R. Duncan, "The Devil Is in the Details: Representations of Violence in North Maluku, Eastern Indonesia," *Goldsmiths Anthropology Research Papers* (forthcoming).

<sup>4</sup> See Stanley J. Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 317–320; Veena Das, "Specificities: Official Narratives, Rumor, and the Social Production of Hate," *Social Identities* 4,1 (1998): 109–30; Gyanendra Pandey, "In Defense of the Fragment: Writing about Hindu-Muslim Riots in India Today," *Representations* 37 (1992): 27–55.

<sup>5</sup> See Noorhaidi Hasan, "Faith and Politics: The Rise of the Laskar Jihad in the Era of Transition in Indonesia," *Indonesia* 73 (April 2002): 145–69.

interest in, information from other parties in the conflict.<sup>6</sup> As a result, many media reports from the period, whether purposefully or not, were less than accurate, if not outright wrong. Despite this paucity of information, journalists, academics, and others have put forth numerous theories about the origins of the conflict.<sup>7</sup> They have argued the relative merits of instrumentalist approaches that highlight the role of elites versus culturalist approaches that place the violence within the larger cultural and historical context of particular societies.<sup>8</sup>

Many people saw the government's failure to prevent the outbreak of violence in Ambon and then in North Maluku as evidence that powerful members of the military or cronies of former president Suharto were involved. Most of these conspiracy theories focused on provocateurs from Jakarta who wanted to discredit the reform movement.<sup>9</sup> Some have blamed the violence in North Maluku on provocation from local elites fighting over the spoils of government office and regional autonomy.<sup>10</sup> Others claim that certain elements in the military were fomenting violence in eastern Indonesia to deflect attention from investigations into human rights abuses, to bolster their position in a changing Indonesia, or to protect their business interests.<sup>11</sup> In North Maluku, many viewed the participation of individual units or individual soldiers as evidence of this military complicity. Most likely the involvement of military personnel was the action of individual deserters or rogue units.<sup>12</sup> In several cases (according to both Muslims and Christians), it appeared that local commanders in North Maluku were not willing to place their troops in harm's way and opted to take no action at all. The armed forces were in a Catch-22: if they did nothing they were criticized for their failures, if they took action they often were accused of human rights violations.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Some of this disinterest in maintaining objectivity stemmed from religious bias, but it also stemmed from issues of personal safety, as unfavorable reports occasionally lead to attacks on journalists. For one journalist's account of these difficulties, see "Dilema Jurnalis di Wilayah Konflik," *Ternate Pos*, May 15, 2001.

<sup>7</sup> For example, see Nils Bubandt, "Conspiracy Theories, Apocalyptic Narratives and the Discursive Construction of 'the Violence' in Indonesia," *Antropologi Indonesia* 24,63 (2000): 15-32; Gerry van Klinken, "New Actors, New Identities: Post-Suharto Ethnic Violence in Indonesia," in *Violent Internal Conflicts in Asia Pacific: Histories, Political Economies and Policies*, ed. Dewi Fortuna Anwar, Hélène Bouvier, Glenn Smith, and Roger Tol (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 2005), pp. 79-100; George Aditjondro, "Guns, Pamphlets, and Handie-Talkies: How the Military Exploited Local Religious Tensions in Maluku to Preserve Their Political and Economic Privileges," in *Violence in Indonesia*, ed. Ingrid Wessel and Georgia Wimböfer (Hamburg: Abera Verlag Markus Voss, 2001), pp. 100-28; Bertrand, "Legacies of the Authoritarian Past."

<sup>8</sup> Bubandt, "Conspiracy Theories; Van Klinken, "New Actors, New Identities."

<sup>9</sup> Aditjondro, "Guns, Pamphlets, and Handie-Talkies"; "Ambon Bishop Sees 'Diabolic' Scheme," *Reuters*, February 22, 1999; "Gus Dur Menuduh (Islam) Lagi: Dulu ES, Kemarin 'Mayjen K,' Sekarang Islam Kanan, Besok Apa Lagi?" *Aliansi Keadilan*, April 16, 1999. Van Klinken has examined many of these Jakarta-based conspiracy theories and noted that the role of Jakarta was characterized more by ineptitude than manipulation; see Van Klinken, "The Maluku Wars," pp. 8-10.

<sup>10</sup> "Mantan Camat Kao Akui Ada Provokator," *Ternate Pos*, November 2, 1999; "Mencari Pemancing Keruh," *Gatra* 6,12 (February 5, 2000): 64-67; Van Klinken, "New Actors, New Identities," pp. 88-91.

<sup>11</sup> Aditjondro, "Guns, Pamphlets, and Handie-Talkies"; Thamrin Amal Tomagola, "Kemelut di Jakarta, Kematian di Maluku," *Tempo* 28,46 (January 17, 2000): 20; "Army Responsible for Maluku Riots: Tamrin," *Jakarta Post*, February 9, 2000.

<sup>12</sup> There does seem to be some correlation between unrest and the arrival of particular army units, a matter that requires further research.

<sup>13</sup> International Crisis Group, "Indonesia's Maluku Crisis: The Issues," *Indonesia Briefing*, July 19, 2000, p. 8.

Furthermore, the military's desire to profit from the conflict hampered their efforts to stop the violence in North Maluku.<sup>14</sup>

Other scholars have tried to explain the violence as a conflict between indigenous people and migrants. Greg Acciaioli argues that many of the recent conflicts in Indonesia can be reduced to conflicts between indigenes and settlers. He cites North Maluku as one example.<sup>15</sup> At first glance, the conflict in Halmahera appears to support Acciaioli's view. The initial clashes were between Makian migrants and indigenous populations. Indigenous communities had long resented the special treatment that transmigrants received (for example, the provision of schools, roads, electricity, etc.), while longer-settled communities received little development aid. Upon further examination, however, this argument fails to explain the violence outside of Kao-Malifut. It also does not account for the virtual absence of violence directed against Javanese transmigrants. (Media accounts of attacks on Javanese transmigrants in Tobelo and Kao are simply incorrect.) Resentment against perceived injustices in development did play a role in the violence, but this anger was more often vented on material rather than people. For example, in the subdistrict of Ibu in northern Halmahera, Christian Tabaru from the interior destroyed infrastructure in the subdistrict capital (a largely Christian town) to highlight their anger at being left out of development.

I am not arguing that politics and struggles over resources had nothing to do with the violence; rather I am arguing that these explanations of the conflict fail to account for how local people were caught up in acts of violence. For example, Gerry van Klinken argues that the post-Suharto violence in North Maluku and elsewhere in Indonesia was largely the result of struggles among a rising government-employed middle class over limited spoils.<sup>16</sup> However, he neglects to explain why individuals throughout North Maluku who stood to gain little from these struggles took up arms and attacked their neighbors or their own family members in the name of religion. As Mahmood Mamdani notes for Rwanda, even if there was instigation from above, that instigation could only have succeeded if the idea of the violence itself found resonance with the masses.<sup>17</sup> An explanation of violence that relies heavily on manipulation by elites is too simple. It fails to take into account local needs and desires for taking part in, or in some cases initiating, violence.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> For another example of efforts by the Indonesian military to profit from violence and displacement, see Lorraine Aragon, "Profiting from Displacement," *Inside Indonesia* 77 (January-March 2004): 14-15.

<sup>15</sup> Greg Acciaioli, "Grounds of Conflict, Idioms of Harmony: Custom, Religion, and Nationalism in Violence Avoidance at the Lindu Plain, Central Sulawesi," *Indonesia* 72 (October 2001): 80-114.

<sup>16</sup> Van Klinken, "New Actors, New Identities."

<sup>17</sup> Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 7-8; see also Gyanendra Pandey, "In Defense of the Fragment," p. 27; Donald L. Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), p. 230.

<sup>18</sup> Duncan, "The Devil Is in the Details."

### Contributing Factors: Religious and Political Change in Late Twentieth-Century Indonesia

Any discussion of the 1999-2000 conflict in North Maluku must be grounded in the political events of late twentieth-century Indonesia. Many of these developments influenced local events and perceptions in North Maluku and made certain understandings of the violence possible and the violence itself plausible. The growth of reform Islam was one factor. During the early decades of President Suharto's regime, he saw political Islam as a potential threat to his rule and sought to remove it from the political sphere. With the removal of Islam from politics, many Muslims sought nonpolitical arenas in which to operate. Many of them turned to reform Islam with its focus on revitalizing the faith and purging it of local practices.<sup>19</sup> As reform Islam grew in strength, some of its followers began to focus on the perceived threat posed by Christianity and worked to counteract or slow its expansion.<sup>20</sup> When Suharto turned to certain circles of these reform Muslims in the 1990s, some Christians began to fear Islam's growing influence. The resulting religious tensions erupted into violence on numerous occasions, resulting in the destruction of churches or mosques across the archipelago, such as in Situbundo, Tasikmalaya, and Kupang.<sup>21</sup>

These tensions had long been evident in North Maluku. Although Muslims and Christians both constitute approximately 50 percent of the population in central Maluku (Ambon), the numbers are different for North Maluku, where 85 percent of the population is Muslim.<sup>22</sup> Throughout the years religion has often played a role in shaping inter-group relations. Most villages are organized according to religion, with Muslims and Christians living in separate neighborhoods. Furthermore, although marriage across ethnic lines is acceptable in North Maluku, marriage across religious boundaries is more problematic. Religion has also been a frequent source of conflict. The segregation of villages into Christian and Muslim sections frequently leads young men to interact primarily with others from their own religion. As a result, conflicts between young male peer groups often follow religious lines, and in some cases are interpreted as religious-based aggression.<sup>23</sup> Behavior during religious holidays, particularly when Ramadhan coincides with the Christmas and New Year period (called *Tahun Baru* in North Maluku), has also been a bone of contention between adherents of different faiths. It should be noted that religious tension in pre-conflict North Maluku was not simply a Muslim-Christian issue. Conflict between Christian denominations was just as pronounced. The establishment of a new church in a community was, and still is, bound to create friction and can even lead to violence.

<sup>19</sup> See Martin van Bruinessen, "Genealogies of Islamic Radicalism in Post-Suharto Indonesia," *South East Asia Research* 10,2 (2002): 117-54.

<sup>20</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, "Post-Suharto Muslim Engagements with Civil Society and Democracy" (paper presented at the Third International Conference and Workshop "Indonesia in Transition," organized by the KNAW [Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen (Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences)] and Labsosio, Universitas Indonesia, August 24-28, 2003, Universitas Indonesia, Depok).

<sup>21</sup> See Mohammad Zulfan Tadjoeeddin, *Database on Social Violence in Indonesia 1990-2001* (Jakarta: United Nations Support Facility for Indonesian Recovery, 2001); see also Jacques Bertrand, *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict in Indonesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 90-113.

<sup>22</sup> Leo Suryadinata, Evi Nurvidya Arifin, and Aris Ananta, *Indonesia's Population: Ethnicity and Religion in a Changing Political Landscape* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2003), p. 110.

<sup>23</sup> On the important role of young male peer groups in communal violence, see Oskar Verkaaik, "Fun and Violence: Ethnocide and the Effervescence of Collective Aggression," *Social Anthropology* 11,1 (2003): 3-22.

Similarly, within the Muslim community, modernists and traditionalists disagreed over the proper way to practice Islam. These differences occasionally led to rifts in the community.

Prior to 1999, some Christians had grown concerned about what they perceived as the growing Islamicization of Indonesia and North Maluku in particular. They cited the increasing number of Muslim transmigrants being sent to the region as emblematic of the government's strategy. Many Christians in North Maluku believe that the national government allows only Javanese Muslims to take part in transmigration projects bringing people to the region. They also saw evidence of these plans in other government policies, such as the passage of Ministerial Decree 77/1978 that gave the Department of Religion control over foreign aid to Indonesian religious institutions.<sup>24</sup> Many Christians in Halmahera (and elsewhere in Indonesia) saw this decree as a Muslim attempt to usurp their financial support from the West. For their part, some Muslims in North Maluku had also grown wary of the designs of the Christian community. Some followers of reform Islam perceived Christianity and its continued growth as a potential threat to Islam. They saw the Western aid that Christian churches received, as well as the presence of Christian missionaries in the region, as evidence of this threat. These fears of Christianization had long been fed by more radical elements of the Muslim community.<sup>25</sup> Muslims and Christians in North Maluku interpreted the religious violence in Maluku and Central Sulawesi in 1999 as proof of one of these wider conspiracies to either Christianize or Islamicize Indonesia.

Another factor was the changing nature of Islam and Christianity in North Maluku. A study undertaken in the 1980s noted that reform Islam had gained a strong following among Muslim youth in Ternate.<sup>26</sup> Many of these youth had moved to Ternate to attend school and would have returned to their home villages by the 1990s. Most likely many of them would have brought their new Islamic beliefs with them. Not all Muslims were receptive to modernist notions of a purified Islam cleansed of local practices. Local leaders who based their claims to power and status on *adat*, such as the sultan of Ternate, opposed or ignored these efforts. Followers of these leaders also rejected these calls to purge Islam of local *adat* practices. These changes in the Islamic community also affected Muslim-Christian relations. Reformists, in addition to advocating the removal of *adat* beliefs from Islam, also view secularization and western influence as serious threats to Islam. They often see Christianity as the prime example of this influence. In their efforts to institute a more "pure" Islam, modernists are often criticized for being less tolerant of cultural diversity. For example, prior to the spread of reform Islam in North Maluku, many Muslims took part in Christmas and New Year's celebrations, and Christians attended *Lebaran* festivities. However, in 1981 the Indonesian Association of Ulama released a *fatwa* declaring it *haram* (forbidden) for Muslims to take part in Christian holidays, and much of this interaction ceased in North Maluku. The perceived growing intolerance in reform Islam led some Christians to interpret it as a threat to their well-being.

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<sup>24</sup> Keputusan Menteri Agama No. 77 Tahun 1978 Tentang Bantuan Luar Negeri Kepada Lembaga Keagamaan di Indonesia.

<sup>25</sup> See Robert W. Hefner, "Global Violence and Indonesian Muslim Politics," *American Anthropologist* 104,3 (2002): 754-765.

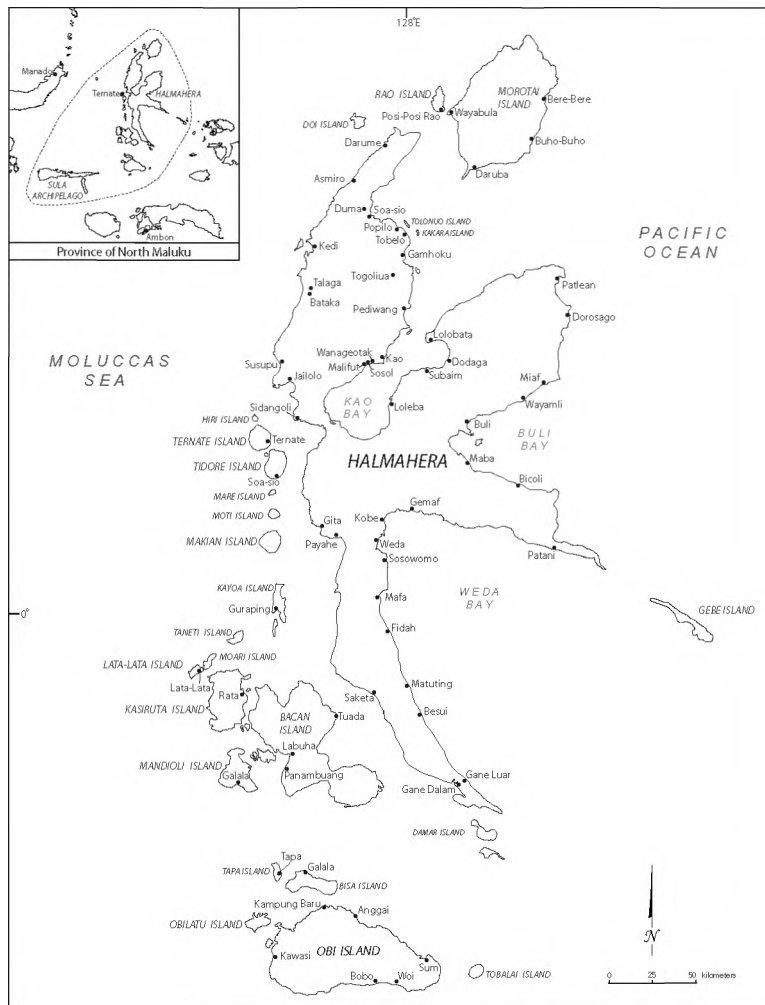
<sup>26</sup> See Christian Kiem, "Re-Islamization among Muslim Youth in Ternate Town, Eastern Indonesia," *Sojourn* 8,1 (1995): 92-127. See also James L. Peacock, *Muslim Puritans: Reformist Psychology in Southeast Asian Islam* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978), p. 16.

It was not only Islam that was changing. There were new influences in the Christianity practiced in North Maluku as well. The Evangelical Church of Halmahera (Gereja Masehi Injil Halmahera, GMIH), the immediate successor of the Dutch mission church, has long held a near monopoly over Protestant Christianity in North Maluku. It remains the dominant church in most of North Maluku, with the exception of Tidore, Obi, and Bacan, which are under the Protestant Church of Maluku (Gereja Protestant Maluku, GPM). However, other Christian churches, such as the Seventh Day Adventists, the Baptist Church of Indonesia, and Pentecostal churches, began making inroads in the region in the last decades of the twentieth century. In their efforts to gain new parishioners, some of these churches vigorously recruited new believers. Although usually focusing on fellow Christians, some were not averse to preaching to Muslims, albeit informally. Many Muslims felt threatened by the expansion of church building that also took place at this time, as each new congregation built its own place of worship. Muslims often interpreted these church-building efforts and the increased proselytization as signs of long-term plans for the Christianization of North Maluku. These new churches were also forcing GMIH to pay more attention to the needs and interests of its parishioners as it competed to maintain their allegiance. I am not arguing that the establishment of new churches radicalized GMIH, simply that it pushed the church into a more proactive role as it lost its monopoly over the Christian community.

To add to these long-standing religious tensions, the fall of Suharto in 1998 led to a number of changes in the political structure of North Maluku that altered the dynamics of regional politics. In 1999 the Habibie government passed new laws on regional autonomy that transferred a large amount of fiscal and political responsibility to regional governments, including control over revenues from natural resource extraction. Politicians and policy makers in Jakarta saw decentralization as a way to stabilize the country by making government more accountable to local populations. It also addressed demands from regions that wanted more control over their natural resources. The transfer of authority and control over revenues increased the prestige and profitability of local politics. This redistribution of wealth and decentralization of political power has often been cited as a root cause of conflict in post-Suharto Indonesia.<sup>27</sup> In North Maluku, the announcement that the region would become an independent province in 1999 exacerbated the tensions surrounding decentralization. The new province would consist of the island of Halmahera and surrounding islands, such as Ternate, Tidore, Obi, and the Sula archipelago to the southwest (see inset in map 1). The establishment of a new province brought with it calls for changes in other administrative boundaries, in the competition over the location of a new provincial capital, and in the selection of regional officials. The tensions that arose around these issues often mirrored other fault lines in North Moluccan society. For example, the

<sup>27</sup> For discussion of the links between decentralization and conflict in North Maluku, Poso, Sumba, Luwu, and Central Kalimantan respectively, see Nils Bubandt, "Menuju Sebuah Politik Tradisi yang Baru? Desentralisasi, Konflik dan Adat di Wilayah Indonesia," *Antropologi Indonesia* 28,74 (2004): 12-32; Lorraine Aragon, "Communal Violence in Poso, Central Sulawesi: Where People Eat Fish and Fish Eat People," *Indonesia* 72 (October 2001): 45-79; Jacqueline Vel, "Tribal Battle in a Remote Island: Crisis and Violence in Sumba (Eastern Indonesia)," *Indonesia* 72 (October 2001): 141-58; International Crisis Group, *Indonesia: Managing Decentralisation and Conflict in South Sulawesi*, ICG Asia Report No. 60, July 18, 2003 (Jakarta: International Crisis Group, 2003); Gerry van Klinken, "Indonesia's New Ethnic Elites," in *Indonesia: In Search of Transition*, ed. Henk Schulte Nordholt and Irwan Abdullah (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2002), pp. 167-85.

people of Ternate and Tidore, historic rivals, argued over which would be the new provincial capital.<sup>28</sup> Regional political differences were evident in the debate over the question of who would become the first governor of North Maluku. Two of the main local contenders were the sultan of Ternate, Mudaffar Sjah, an ardent supporter of Golkar, and the regent (*bupati*) of Central Halmahera, (the now deceased) Bahar Andili, a Makianese career civil servant aligned with PPP.<sup>29</sup> Thus decentralization exacerbated pre-existing fault lines in North Maluku society, rather than creating new ones.



Map 1: Halmahera and surrounding islands

### The First Stage of the Violence: Kao-Malifut

On January 19, 1999, a fight between a Christian bus driver and a Muslim passenger at a bus terminal in Ambon escalated into widespread violence throughout the city. Although initially a conflict between local Ambonese and migrants, it quickly

<sup>28</sup> "Ribuan Warga Ternate Unjuk Rasa," *Manado Post*, September 9, 1999; "Ibukota Propinsi Maluku Utara?" *Ternate Pos*, July 27, 1999.

<sup>29</sup> "Bursa Figur Gubernur Mulai Hangat," *Manado Post*, September 20, 1999; "Persaingan Dua Sultan," *Gatra* 6,2 (November 27, 1999): 44.



took on religious overtones pitting Muslim “white” forces against Christian “red” forces (the colors refer to the color of the headbands worn by combatants). As the violence spread in Ambon, most of the region that would soon become the province of North Maluku remained calm. A few days later, sparked by events in Ambon, a small confrontation occurred in the town of Sanana on the island of Mangole in the Sula Archipelago. This incident resulted in the deaths of several people and a small amount of property destruction.<sup>30</sup> The violence did not spread, and the Sula archipelago remained peaceful throughout the rest of the conflict. Tensions in North Maluku increased in May 1999 when a document entitled “Protestant Church of Maluku Invasion Map for Ternate” (*Peta Penyerangan Gereja Protestan Maluku [GPM] di Ternate*) began circulating in Ternate. The map purported to show the Christian invasion plans for North Maluku. Local security forces soon discovered that the document was a map from a church report detailing the location of GPM congregations in North Maluku rather than points of attack. Several weeks later, on June 24, a small conflict broke out on Halmahera between the villages of Talaga and Bataka in the Ibu subdistrict between Muslims and Christians influenced by internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Ambon.<sup>31</sup> Neither this fighting, the incident in Sanana, nor the circulation of the “invasion map” created the large-scale impetus for violence that later events did. They were, however, indicative of increasing tensions in the region as IDPs from Ambon arrived in North Maluku with graphic accounts of the violence. At this point most people in North Maluku, both Christian and Muslim, still considered the disputes in Ambon to be an Ambonese problem.

Large-scale violence in North Maluku began in the Kao-Malifut region in northern Halmahera when conflict broke out between Makian transmigrants and the indigenous population.<sup>32</sup> The conflict revolved around the passage of Government Regulation No. 42/1999 that created a new Malifut subdistrict (*kecamatan*) for the Makian in the southern half of the Kao subdistrict (see inset in map 2).<sup>33</sup> The predominantly Muslim Makian had been moved to Halmahera in 1975 when the Indonesian Institute of Vulcanology predicted that the volcano on their home island of Makian was going to experience a major eruption. The government moved everyone on the island (many against their will) to supposedly empty land in the southern half of the Kao subdistrict. Eventually sixteen Makian villages, complete with their original names, sprang up centered around the village of Malifut. As is often the case in Indonesian resettlement

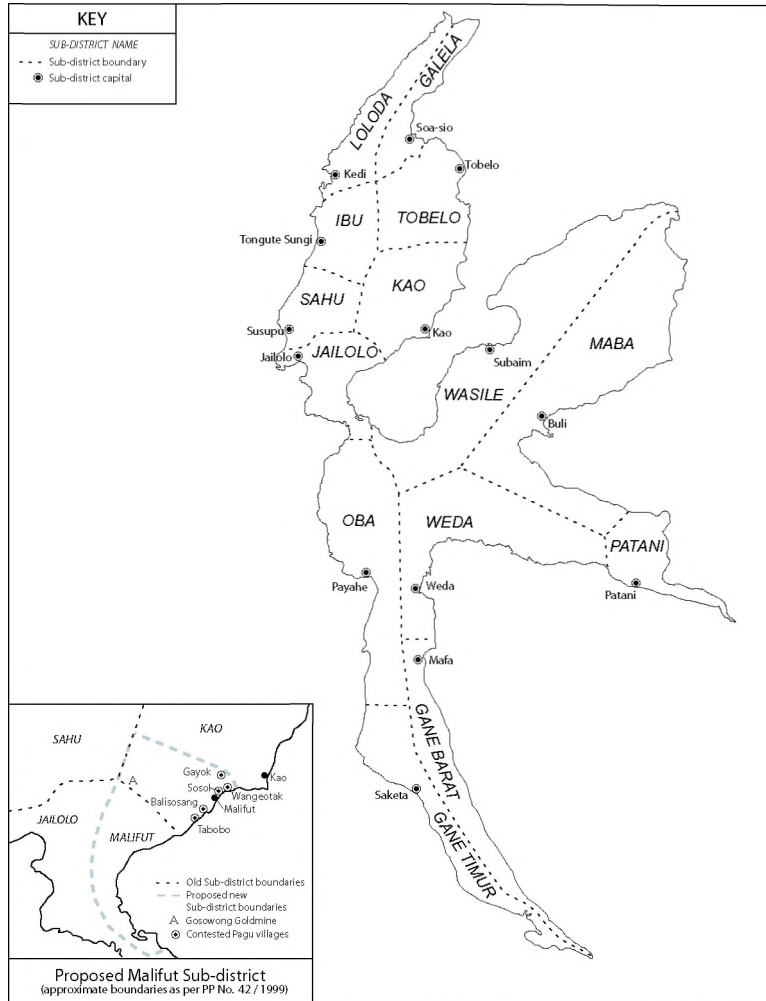
<sup>30</sup> “Ambon Bergolak, Sanana Meradang,” *Ternate Pos*, January 26, 1999.

<sup>31</sup> “Umat Islam Telaga Diserang,” *Media Dakwah* 302 (August 28, 1999): 44; Jan Nanere, ed., *Halmahera Berdarah: Suatu Upaya Mengungkap Kebenaran* (Ambon: Yayasan Bina Masyarakat Sejahtera dan Pelestarian Alam, 2000), pp. 54-56.

<sup>32</sup> The indigenous population of Kao includes the Pagu, Modole, Tobelo Boeng, and Kao Islam. Although exact figures are unavailable, local people in Kao estimate that the Kao Islam make up approximately 10 percent of the indigenous population.

<sup>33</sup> See Peraturan Pemerintah No. 42/1999 tentang Pembentukan dan Penataan Beberapa Kecamatan di Wilayah Kabupaten Daerah Tingkat 2 Maluku Utara dalam Wilayah Propinsi Daerah Tingkat 1 Maluku. The legislation refers to the newly formed subdistrict as Makian Malifut. The new subdistrict is also referred to as “Makian Daratan” and “Malifut.” I use the latter name throughout this article to avoid confusion with the ethnic group name “Makian” and the island of the same name. “Malifut” was the term most often used on the ground during my interviews, and since 2003 the new subdistrict has been officially named Malifut.

schemes, this empty land actually belonged to indigenous groups in the area.<sup>34</sup> In this instance, most of the land was claimed by the indigenous Pagu people, who were less than pleased with its annexation by newcomers.



Map 2: 1999 Sub-district boundaries on the island of Halmahera (approximate)

Over the next twenty-five years, relations between the Makian and their new neighbors were rarely more than cordial. The indigenous people remained upset over the loss of their land and offended by what they perceived as the privileged treatment given to the Makian by the local government. The people of Kao also complained that the Makian had a tendency to steal land by expanding their garden borders every year. Additionally, the Makian were known to use their better understanding of land law to accumulate land from less knowledgeable farmers in Kao and Tobelo. The people of Kao also accused them of being culturally insensitive and religiously intolerant.<sup>35</sup> In

<sup>34</sup> Christopher R. Duncan, "Resettlement and Natural Resources in Indonesia: A Case Study," in *Conservation and Mobile Indigenous People: Displacement, Forced Settlement, and Conservation*, ed. Dawn Chatty and Marcus Colchester (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002), pp. 366-81.

<sup>35</sup> Christians and Muslims from Ternate also made this accusation and claimed that the increasing Makian population in Ternate had changed the social fabric of the island in the last decades of the twentieth century.

response, the Makian argued that the indigenous people were lazy and resented the Makian for their economic and political successes. The political accomplishments of the Makian were as significant as their economic achievements. Several Makian civil servants had attained key positions in regional government prior to 1999, and others were heads (*camat*) of several important subdistricts, including Tobelo and South Morotai. The people of Kao were not the only ones to resent the political successes of the Makian. The resentment was (and remains) fairly widespread throughout North Maluku, spanning both ethnicity and religion. For example, in 2001 an unsigned pamphlet circulated in Ternate and Tidore lamenting the undue influence of the Makian titled "Lets Greet 2002 by Opposing the Makianization Movement" (*Mari Kita Sambut Tahun 2002 dengan Melawan Gerakan Makianisasi*). It should be noted that a large number of Javanese transmigrants were moved into Kao as well during the 1980s.<sup>36</sup> Although much of the land given to them was also taken from local communities, relations between the Javanese, the majority of them Muslims, and the indigenous population remained friendly.

The Makian had been lobbying for their own subdistrict for almost twenty-four years before the national government passed Government Regulation No. 42/1999.<sup>37</sup> The newly created Malifut subdistrict would contain all sixteen Makian villages settled in 1975, six villages from the subdistrict of Jailolo to the south (Pasir Putih, Akelamo-Kao, Tetewang, Dum-Dum, Gamsungi, and Bobaneigo), and five Pagu villages from Kao (Sosol, Tababo, Balisosang, Gayok, and Wangeotak). The Pagu people were not pleased with this decision. They had no desire to be ruled by the Makian or to be separated from their indigenous brethren with whom they have traditional ties. The indigenous people of Kao have a strong sense of unity based on their *adat* belief that the four "tribes" (*suku*) of Kao cannot be divided. Many in Kao saw the inclusion of the five Pagu villages in a new Makian subdistrict as an affront to this historical unity, and Kao leaders voiced their strong opposition to the redistricting.<sup>38</sup> The government ignored these protests.

Although the Kao were determined to prevent the redistricting, the Makian were as equally determined to see that it took place. Tensions increased throughout July and August, and were inflamed by Makian actions in Ternate. For example, a group of Makian-Kayoa<sup>39</sup> students from Universitas Khairun issued a threat to the people of Kao over the Ternate branch of Radio Republik Indonesia: "Whoever tries to prevent the implementation of regulation 42/99 will face the Makayoa [Makian-Kayoa] students."<sup>40</sup> These students also held demonstrations in Ternate in support of the new subdistrict. Some in Kao argue that these protests spurred the Makian to violence by convincing them that they had widespread support. Threats of violence led to the cancellation of the inauguration ceremony for the new subdistrict on August 18, 1999.

<sup>36</sup> See Jennifer Leith, "Resettlement, Resources, and Economic Development in Eastern Indonesia" (PhD dissertation, University of East Anglia, 2001).

<sup>37</sup> Some government publications refer to the area of Malifut as the Makian subdistrict as early as 1988; see I.G.N. Arinton Pudja, *Adaptasi Masyarakat Makian di Tempat yang Baru (Malifut)* (Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1989), p. 10.

<sup>38</sup> See for example "Makian-Malifut, Nasibmu Kini," *Ternate Pos*, August 18, 1999.

<sup>39</sup> Kayoa is an island to the south of Makian Island inhabited by Makian.

<sup>40</sup> Suara Peduli Halmahera, Laporan Kejadian-kejadian yang Berhubungan dengan Konflik-konflik yang Bernuansa SARA di Maluku-Utara (Khususnya di Ternate, Tidore, dan di Halmahera) (Pitu, Tobelo: Suara Peduli Halmahera, 2000).

Fighting began the same day. Exactly how the conflict started remains uncertain as both sides blame the other for instigating it. The Kao claim that the Makian attacked two of the recalcitrant villages, Sosol and Wangeotak, and burnt them to the ground. Most Makian assert that the people of Sosol invaded the Makian village of Tahane on August 18 to prevent the redistricting and that they were forced to retaliate. Some Makian, however, say that they invaded the two Pagu villages because people from those villages kept antagonizing them while they worshipped in their mosques or worked in their gardens. The violence continued for three days until the police and army intervened. The fighting resulted in the deaths of several people and the complete destruction of Sosol and Wangeotak. Several hundred IDPs from these villages fled to the subdistrict capital of Kao.

In an effort to prevent further violence, the *bupati* of North Maluku and the sultan of Ternate traveled to Kao on August 21. Kao is part of the traditional domain of the sultan of Ternate, and he is still a revered figure there. The government hoped that he could use his influence to resolve the conflict. During negotiations, the people of Kao expressed their desire that the Makian vacate Malifut in forty-eight hours. The sultan promised to take their concerns to the government, implicating himself as a Kao supporter in the eyes of the Makian, a fact that would become particularly salient later in the year. The security forces set up a barricade between the two groups to maintain the peace while negotiations were underway. Unfortunately, this break in the violence coincided with the announcement that North Maluku would become a new province. Regional leaders switched their focus to the establishment of the new province, taking up such issues as the demarcation of district borders, the selection of a governor, the location of a provincial capital, and so forth. The resolution of the Kao-Malifut dispute was seemingly forgotten. Left to themselves, the people of Kao and the Makian remained at odds, and tensions simmered. During this time the Makian claim they felt threatened by the reputed arrival of armed supporters of the Kao from throughout North Maluku. The people of Kao deny this accusation, although they were also expecting to be attacked at any time. Aware of the possibility of religious instigation due to the violence in Ambon, leaders in Kao assigned Muslim Kao to guard churches and Christians to guard mosques. No such precautions were taken to prevent conflict between the Makian and the Kao.

Years of tension and built-up resentment had taken their toll on the indigenous people in Kao. They saw the destruction of Sosol and Wangeotak as the final affront. Many believed that the Makian had to be removed from Kao and that Malifut had to be burnt to the ground like Sosol and Wangeotak. A group of local elites decided to pursue all available options to achieve the removal of the Makian or, at the very least, the revocation of regulation 42/1999. They settled on three options: diplomacy, the courts, or conflict. In the name of diplomacy, they created "Team Nine," a group of nine local leaders that went to Ternate to argue against the new subdistrict and the continued presence of the Makian. These efforts failed. The Kao blamed their failure on Makian control of the civil service. Pursuing the legal option by contesting the new law in court was prohibitively expensive in a country well known for its corrupt judicial system. For many in Kao, the failure of the first two options left violence as their only recourse. In turning to violence, they considered three possibilities: magical attacks, guerrilla attacks, or a full-scale frontal attack on the Makian in Malifut. Kao leaders interviewed in 2001–2002 claim they implemented magical attacks and guerrilla

warfare, hoping to avoid an all-out assault on Malifut. They gathered everyone from Kao with strong magical power (*ilmu gaib*) and had them use their powers against the Makian. They claim to have had great success. These magical attacks supposedly killed a few Makian every night. They also say they started harassing the Makian in their gardens and in the forest. This reputed violence continued for several weeks. Before they could judge their success and decide whether or not to launch a full-scale attack on Malifut, the Kao say that the Makian attacked them.

The Kao version of events claims that on the Sunday morning of October 24 the Makian invaded Kao. According to this version, a small group of approximately one hundred Makian went to a checkpoint established between the two sides and asked for permission to harvest their copra on the other side of the border. The authorities let them through. They then joined other Makian who had traveled through the interior for a planned invasion of Kao. They were quickly confronted by a small number of Muslims from Kao who had been assigned to watch the border between the two groups. The Muslim Kao held them off until reinforcements arrived after church services had ended. The Kao then launched a counterattack that destroyed numerous homes in Malifut. On October 25, the Kao continued their attacks until the entire population of Malifut fled to Ternate or took refuge at local military installations. Once the Makian were gone, the Kao set fire to all sixteen villages, leaving only the mosques untouched. The Kao were vehement in asserting that they did not destroy a single mosque, despite the Makian destruction of churches in Sosol and Wangeotak in August. The Makian version of the October events claims that once the people of Kao had assembled an arsenal and mobilized enough forces (upwards of seven thousand people from the neighboring subdistricts of Tobelo, Ibu, etc.) from outside of the subdistrict, they attacked without provocation. The attack caught the people of Malifut by surprise, and they were overwhelmed and forced to flee to Ternate.

Several commentators have focused on the role of an Australian-owned gold mine, called Gosowong, opened in the Kao subdistrict in 1997.<sup>41</sup> Thamrin Amal Tomagola claims that tensions over jobs at the mine and control over revenues were a major factor in the outbreak of violence.<sup>42</sup> According to Tomagola, the indigenous people in Kao were upset that the redistricting would place the mine in the new Malifut subdistrict (see inset map 2). He fails to note that regional autonomy legislation would have sent mine revenues to the district, not the subdistrict government. Along these lines, another report claims that the former vice-regent (*wakil bupati*) had suggested that the village of Malifut be named the capital of a new district of North Halmahera, and thus would be in control of mining revenues.<sup>43</sup> The report argues that these rumors contributed to the violence. However, if the provincial government had made Malifut the district capital, it would have received the mine revenues regardless of subdistrict boundaries, making the location of the goldmine a non-issue. These objections do not take into consideration local-level misunderstandings of the legislation. Despite these issues, I feel that the importance of the goldmine has been overstated. During my

<sup>41</sup> Smith Alhadar, "The Forgotten War in North Maluku," *Inside Indonesia* 63 (July-September 2000): 15-16; Van Klinken, "The Maluku Wars," p. 6.

<sup>42</sup> Thamrin Amal Tomagola, "The Bleeding of Halmahera of North Moluccas" (paper presented at the "Workshop on Political Violence in Asia," organized by The Centre for Development and Environment, University of Oslo, June 5-7, 2000), p. 9.

<sup>43</sup> Suara Peduli Halmahera, Laporan Kejadian-kejadian yang Berhubungan dengan Konflik-konflik yang Bernuansa SARA di Maluku-Utara.

research, and that conducted by my Muslim assistants, the gold mine was usually raised as an issue only on our initiative and then shrugged off as unimportant. Indonesian mine staff that we interviewed reported that access to jobs was not a major source of conflict.

Tomagola's other argument, about the resettlement of the Makian in Kao as part of a government effort to block Christian expansion into southern Halmahera, remains rather undeveloped.<sup>44</sup> He bases his argument primarily on the presence of the GMIH Synod in Tobelo to the north. He fails to note that prior to the Makian resettlement, GMIH had congregations throughout the subdistricts of Jailolo to the south and in Ibu to the west of Kao. There were also dozens of Christian communities throughout southern and central Halmahera and had been for several decades prior to 1975.<sup>45</sup> The placement of a large Muslim community in southern Kao would have had little effect on the actual expansion of Christianity in Halmahera. Many Christians in northern Halmahera, however, saw the resettlement of the Makian as another aspect of the Islamicization of North Maluku. It is not just Christians who interpreted it this way. Some members of the Muslim community believe the government placed the Makian in southern Kao in an effort to stop the Christianization of Halmahera.

Despite the religious differences between the Kao and the Makian, Muslims and Christians in North Maluku consistently told me that the violence in Kao-Malifut was a local problem between ethnic groups. The Kao placed an emphasis on the nonreligious nature of events. They noted that their side consisted of both Muslims and Christians. People in Kao often mentioned the competing shouts of "Allahu Akbar" between the Muslim Kao and the Makian during the fighting. The Muslim Kao remained allied with their Christian neighbors throughout the violence in North Maluku, even after the conflict was subsumed by religion. The Kao and Christians in North Maluku argued that the Makian shifted the focus to religion in an effort to gain support from the broader Muslim community in North Maluku, many of whom disliked the Makian. The Makian argument is similar. Although the original dispute was over redistricting, they argue that the Christian Kao turned it into a matter of religion in an effort to gain support for their planned invasion of Malifut. They believed that the use of red headbands by the Kao lends credence to this argument. Although the color red has long been associated with warfare and bravery in Halmahera, it was also the color of the headbands used by Christian forces in Ambon. Makian could point to this similarity and argue that the violence was religiously motivated.

### **The Violence in Ternate and Tidore**

After the destruction of Malifut, approximately fifteen thousand Makian IDPs arrived in the city of Ternate. The IDPs were less than welcome in Ternate, and the sultan wanted them to continue on to the nearby island of Makian. The majority of the IDPs eventually settled in the southern part of the city, which was already home to a

<sup>44</sup> Tomagola, "The Bleeding of Halmahera of North Moluccas," pp. 8-9. See also "Thamrin Amal Tomagola, Sosiolog: 'Perebutan Wilayah Agama,'" *Sabili* 7,19 (February 9, 2000): 30.

<sup>45</sup> For more on the history of church expansion in Halmahera, see James Haire, *The Character and Theological Struggle of the Church in Halmahera, 1941-1979* (Bern: Verlag Peter D. Lang, 1981), and M. Th. Magany, *Bahtera Injil di Halmahera* (Ambon: GMIH, 1984).

large number of migrants from Tidore and Makian. Once settled, they began sharing stories of alleged Kao atrocities with the local population. The anger and fear generated by these stories, alongside the ongoing violence in Ambon, increased tensions in the city. To exacerbate the situation, the Makian IDPs had poor relations with the sultan of Ternate. They considered him a supporter of the Kao due to his perceived favoritism in the Kao-Malifut dispute. There were also rumors that the sultan had encouraged the Kao to invade Malifut.<sup>46</sup> Many Christians and Muslims in Ternate say that the Makian IDPs began a reign of terror shortly after their arrival, including attacking Kao students at the local university, making threatening phone calls, disrupting church services, and stoning Christian homes at night.

The next outbreak of violence did not occur in Ternate, however, but on the neighboring island of Tidore. In late October a contentious letter began circulating around Ternate and Tidore that shifted attention to the religious aspects of the conflict. It was addressed to the "Head of the Halmahera Synod in Tobelo" from the Synod of Maluku. This letter, commonly known as "Bloody Sosol" (*Sosol Berdarah*), contained plans for the removal of the Makian from Halmahera and the establishment of Christian control over the island and its wealth. Muslim readers saw the letter as evidence of the church's role in the violence in Malifut. It also drew a link between the events in Kao-Malifut and the violence in Ambon. This connection led many Muslims in Tidore and Ternate to believe the letter was genuine. Photocopies of the letter circulated throughout the Muslim community on both islands. The Protestant churches implicated in the letter (GPM and GMIH) denied its authenticity and quickly released statements that decried it as a blatant attempt at provocation.<sup>47</sup>

Despite these denials, news of the letter, or rumors of its existence, continued to spread, fomenting anger and fear in the Muslim community. To ease rising tensions, local officials in Soa-sio, Tidore arranged a meeting on November 3 at which Christian ministers were asked to explain the letter. Officials had invited Reverend Risakotta, the head of GPM in Tidore, but he was reluctant to attend out of fear for his safety. Several Christian leaders who went to the meeting quickly left, they said, due to the anger permeating the large Muslim crowd. Eventually the chief of police went to Reverend Risakotta's home and brought him to the meeting. Before he could finish explaining the letter, the angry crowd attacked and killed him. A riot ensued as the crowd left the meeting, and, augmented by others, they proceeded to burn Christian homes and churches. Local security forces were unable, or unwilling, to stop the rioters. Christians throughout the town took refuge at police or military installations. Eventually the Indonesian Navy evacuated the small Christian community to Bitung in North Sulawesi. When the smoke cleared, nine people were dead, and over 260 homes and three churches were destroyed.<sup>48</sup>

As Tidore was burning, the situation in Ternate, with a larger Christian population, remained tense but peaceful. The tensions and rumors that had accompanied the arrival of the Makian IDPs had led many members of the Christian population to stay in their homes. Some had already left the island or were in the process of leaving. The

<sup>46</sup> "Thamrin Amal Tomagola: Sultan Kena Wiranto Juga," *Gamma* 1,48 (January 26, 2000): 60-61.

<sup>47</sup> Copies of both of these letters and "Sosol Berdarah" are published in Nanere, *Halmahera Berdarah*, pp. 68-76.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

local government did its best to reassure the Christian community that they had nothing to fear. It sent cars with loudspeakers through various neighborhoods telling everyone to remain calm. Despite these assurances, violence broke out on November 6. Christians in Ternate say they were surprised by the sight of hundreds of armed Muslims in the streets wearing white headbands (similar to those worn by the Muslim side in Ambon), ready to attack their homes. Some Christians took refuge in police stations and army bases in the southern parts of the city. Others took refuge in the northern parts of Ternate city controlled by supporters of the sultan. By this point the police and army had been rendered powerless due to their inability or unwillingness to take control of the situation, and they could only guard their own installations. In response, the sultan of Ternate deployed approximately four thousand of his customary guard (Pasukan Adat, also called Pasukan Kuning [yellow troops], due to the color of their traditional uniforms). These Pasukan Adat consisted primarily of ethnic Ternate Muslims from the northern part of the city or from the countryside, where many of supporters of the sultan live. When the violence began, the Pasukan Adat did their best to protect Christians from the rioters. Christian IDPs from Ternate repeatedly pointed out that if the Pasukan Adat had not been deployed, they would have been massacred. These efforts earned the Pasukan Adat a pro-Christian reputation among opponents of the sultan. The Indonesian navy eventually had to evacuate over nineteen thousand people to North Sulawesi and Halmahera. Whatever the original causes of the violence in North Maluku, the discourse of religious difference had subsumed all other explanations by early November 1999.

The riots in Tidore and Ternate mark the point where the master narrative of the conflict definitively shifted from being about ethnicity and redistricting to being about religion for all sides involved. Although the Makian had attributed religious motives to their enemies from the start, others, both Christians and Muslims, had denied these accusations. Prior to the riots in Ternate and Tidore, the non-Makian in the region maintained that the conflict was about a border dispute in Kao-Malifut that was based on ethnic differences. They argued that Makian claims that they were the victims of religious-based violence were simply an attempt to gain support from the larger Muslim community. After the events of early November, however, all sides considered themselves involved in a religious dispute that pitted Christians against Muslims. Stanley Tambiah's notions of focalization and transvaluation are helpful in understanding what happened to the master narrative of the conflict.<sup>49</sup> Focalization occurs as understandings of local conflicts are removed from their particular contexts in time and space. In North Maluku, as tensions increased in Ternate and Tidore and the suspicious letter appeared, local Muslim communities began to set aside the particulars of the Kao-Malifut violence (border disputes, histories of migration, ethnic tensions, feelings of disenfranchisement) and focus instead on the Muslim-Christian aspect of the conflict. Christians did the same after the riots in Ternate and Tidore. The second process, transvaluation, occurs as individual conflicts and disputes are incorporated into a larger, extra-local context. Local conflicts expand to include a much larger number of extra-local adversaries involved in broader and larger conflicts that are only remotely connected to the original dispute. In North Maluku, participants began to see the struggle between local communities as part of a broader struggle between Muslims and Christians throughout Indonesia, including the ongoing

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<sup>49</sup> Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds*, p. 81.



religious violence in Ambon. Some even began to see it as part of a global struggle between the two faiths. Tambiah notes that focalization and transvaluation quickly turn outbreaks of violence into “self-fulfilling manifestations, incarnations, and reincarnations of allegedly irresolvable communal splits.”<sup>50</sup> After Ternate and Tidore, the new master narrative of the violence as a religious conflict quickly became self-fulfilling throughout North Maluku.

### **The Violence Spreads to Central and Southern Halmahera**

After Tidore and Ternate, the violence shifted to Halmahera when Muslims from Makian and Tidore, referred to as white troops (*pasukan putih*) due to their white headbands, moved on to Halmahera, ostensibly to protect Muslim communities there from Christian attacks. However, the small Christian communities in the coastal areas of central and southern Halmahera presented easy targets for the white troops, who now redirected their anger towards them and continued to take revenge for the slights done to the Makian in Kao, slights now seen through the lens of religion rather than ethnicity. With the arrival of these white troops, violence soon broke out between Christian and Muslim communities in the southern and central parts of Halmahera (including the subdistricts of Oba, Weda, and Gane Barat). The small Christian communities in these regions were quickly overwhelmed, and after little resistance they fled to North Sulawesi, Bacan, or Tobelo, or simply hid in the interior. Among those fleeing to Tobelo were IDPs from the village of Payahe in the southern part of the Oba subdistrict. These IDPs brought with them stories of Muslim atrocities (real or imagined) that seized the imagination of Christian communities in Tobelo.<sup>51</sup> These IDPs claimed that during the attack on Payahe Muslim forces brutally murdered a number of children. These stories, whether based on truth or rumor, subsequently had a significant impact upon the conflict. They were (and still are) believed in North Maluku and elsewhere and were (and still are) often cited as justifications for the subsequent violence in the Tobelo subdistrict.

### **Tragedy in Tobelo**

As violence spread across central and southern Halmahera at the end of 1999, the situation remained tense but peaceful in the subdistrict of Tobelo in northern Halmahera. Despite multi-faith efforts to ease tensions, rumors of a “Bloody Christmas” or a “Bloody Ramadhan” had both sides preparing for violence. The steady trickle of IDPs from southern and central Halmahera, with their tales of death and destruction, particularly those from Payahe, exacerbated these tensions. Muslims from Tobelo often cited this influx of IDPs as a main cause of the violence. Some accused GMIH of gathering the IDPs in Tobelo to augment their forces for a planned attack. The subdistrict had a large Muslim population, but the majority of the population was Christian. While the Christian communities were spread throughout the district, the Muslim communities were more concentrated. Most Muslims lived in three places: in

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 192.

<sup>51</sup> For an in-depth discussion of these events in Payahe, see Duncan, “The Devil Is in the Details.”

Tobelo town; north of Tobelo town in the Muslim villages of Popilo and Luari and the Muslim-Christian village of Gorua; and in the Muslim village of Togoliua in the southern part of the subdistrict. A small Muslim community lived in the mixed village of Gamhoku south of Tobelo town, and other small Muslim communities lived on the largely Christian islands of Tolonuo and Kakara off the coast. There were also several largely Javanese transmigrant settlements in the southern part of the subdistrict. The remaining population, particularly in the area south of Tobelo town, consisted primarily of Protestants.

Tensions increased when a segment of the Christian community demanded that all ethnic Tidore, Makian, and Kayoa leave Tobelo subdistrict until the government restored order throughout the province. They believed that members of those particular ethnic groups, rather than Muslims in general, were the main instigators of violence in the region. In return some Muslims demanded that all Ambonese Christians leave town. Neither demand was met. In an effort to calm the situation, a number of provincial leaders, including the sultan of Ternate and the governor, visited Tobelo town on December 7 to meet with local leaders and attend a peace rally.<sup>52</sup> The purpose of the rally was to ensure the peace and to express local concerns to the regional government. Despite the multi-faith emphasis of the meeting, it had overtones of Christian power. As the visitors from Ternate walked to the stage, protesters, mostly Christian IDPs, blocked their path with signs demanding an end to the violence. One sign read: "Muslims are our brothers, but the Makian, Kayoa, and Tidore [people] are instigators [of violence], [they must] 'remove their feet' from Tobelo."<sup>53</sup> A representative from the local *adat* council gave a speech in which he threatened "migrants to the city" (that is, Makian and Tidore) if violence broke out. He also demanded that the government rescind Government Regulation No. 42/1999 that established the Malifut subdistrict. A large group of students from the GMIH theological seminary located in Tobelo also attended the meeting. After marching to the rally in pseudo-military formation, a number of the students gave fiery speeches demanding action. Several other members of the community gave speeches pledging to maintain the peace and to stop any attempts to disrupt inter-religious relations. The rally failed to ease tensions and both sides continued their preparations.

As 1999 came to an end, both sides in Tobelo were expecting to be attacked at any moment. On the night of December 26 the fighting began.<sup>54</sup> Christians claim that Muslims began stoning Christian homes in the Gosoma neighborhood of Tobelo town and they were eventually forced to retaliate. Muslims claim the exact opposite. Regardless of who threw the first stone, the situation quickly spiraled out of control as both sides were convinced that the anticipated attacks had begun. Both sides interpreted the sight of Muslims and Christians taking refuge in mosques and churches as evidence of a mobilization, as both sides had accused the other of stockpiling

<sup>52</sup> For more on attempts by various groups in Tobelo to prevent the violence, see Christopher R. Duncan, "Reconciliation and Reinvention: The Resurgence of Tradition in Post-Conflict North Maluku, Indonesia" (paper presented at the Cornell University Southeast Asia Program Seminar Series, Ithaca, NY, 2003).

<sup>53</sup> Indonesian original: "*Orang Islam adalah saudara kami tapi ethnīs Makian, Kayoa dan Tidore adalah perusuh, 'angkat kaki' dari Tobelo.*"

<sup>54</sup> Several detailed accounts of the fighting in Tobelo are available from both sides. For a Muslim version of events, see Kasman Ahmad and Herman Oesman, eds., *Damai yang Terkoyak: Catatan Kelam dari Bumi Halmahera* (Ternate: Podium and Madani Press, 2000), pp. 54-87. See also Nanere, *Halmahera Berdarah*, pp. 94-102.

weapons in their respective houses of worship. The appearance of people wearing red (Christian) or white (Muslim) headbands also convinced people that the long-expected attack had begun. Once it began, the Muslims, who constituted a large percentage of the urban population, quickly gained the upper hand. Most of the town's Christian population fled to the south where they rallied their forces. The following day red troops from the southern part of Tobelo subdistrict, along with reinforcements from Kao, launched a counterattack.<sup>55</sup> They managed to take control of the town by December 28. Surviving Muslims took refuge in the main mosque in the center of town, where they were rescued by the army and moved to a military base for protection. Fighting also took place to the south of Tobelo town. Christians from neighboring villages attacked the small Muslim community in Gamhoku and killed dozens of Muslims and destroyed their homes.

As the fighting raged in Tobelo, violence broke out between Christians and Muslims in villages north of town as well, including the villages of Gorua and Popilo. Once the Muslims had been cleared out of Tobelo town, the red troops reinforced the Christians north of town and joined the attack on Gorua and Popilo. These attacks began on December 31, and red troops eventually destroyed the Muslim communities in both villages in some of the most brutal fighting of the conflict. Several hundred Muslims died during the fighting, including a large number that were killed in a mosque in Popilo. Those who managed to escape fled either to the local army base, to the subdistrict of Galela, or to the island of Morotai off the coast. Other Muslim communities, such as residents of the village of Luari and Muslims from the island of Tolonuo, fled to Morotai before they were attacked.<sup>56</sup> Another part of the red troops' strategy was to maintain control of the only road that ran between Kao and Tobelo. They wanted to ensure that troops from Kao, who had arrived by boat, could return home safely once the fighting ended. However, the largely ethnic Tobelo Muslim community of Togoliua, located along the highway in the southern part of the subdistrict, presented an obstacle to this plan.<sup>57</sup> A decision was made to remove this complication. Some Christians claim that the Muslims in Togoliua had blocked the road with felled coconut palms and had sent taunts to neighboring Christian communities to provoke violence. Muslims in Togoliua maintain that they were the victims of a preemptive attack that lacked any clear motive other than religious cleansing. The subsequent fighting led to the complete destruction of Togoliua and the death of several hundred Muslims. During the invasion, members of the overwhelmed Muslim community retreated to a mosque in the village that was subsequently destroyed along with most of those taking refuge within. Those Muslims who were able to escape fled into the forested interior, where the pursuers killed many of them. Those who were not killed were captured and turned over to the security forces.

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<sup>55</sup> Although largely Christian, red troops in Halmahera also contained some Muslims (the Muslim Kao), as well as a small number of forest dwellers who were neither Christian nor Muslim.

<sup>56</sup> The small Muslim community on the island of Kakara off the coast of Tobelo was protected by their Christian neighbors. Eventually both sides mutually agreed that the Muslims needed to move to Morotai and wait for the situation in Tobelo to calm down.

<sup>57</sup> Contrary to many news reports, the village of Togoliua is not a Javanese transmigration site. The village of Togoliua consisted largely of Muslim Tobelo from Tobelo town who moved to the south to be closer to their gardens and other North Moluccan Muslims. There is a transmigration site named UPT Togoliua several kilometers to the east of Togoliua, but that transmigration site, like the others in Kao and Tobelo, was left out of the violence.

The day after violence started in Tobelo, it also began in the subdistrict of Galela to the north. The violence in other parts of North Maluku had created tensions between the large Muslim and the equally large Christian communities in Galela. As in Tobelo, there had been multi-faith attempts to prevent conflict. Muslims and Christian leaders had joined together to create the League of Harmonious Families in Galela (Ikatan Kerukunan Keluarga Masyarakat Galela), called Sariloha in the Galela language. Members of this organization traveled throughout the subdistrict attempting to dispel rumors and prevent the outbreak of violence. However, as in Tobelo, these efforts were unsuccessful. When news of the fighting in Tobelo reached Galela on December 26, more attempts were made to ease tensions. These efforts failed, and fighting broke out between Christians and Muslims in the village of Dokulamo on December 27. The Christians in Dokulamo, aided by reinforcements from the nearby Christian villages of Duma and Soatabaru, were able to defeat the Muslims and take the village. Prior to attacking Dokulamo, troops from the village of Duma had already routed Muslims in the neighboring villages of Ngidiho and Gotolamo. In the wake of these clashes, red forces eventually controlled most of the interior of the Galela subdistrict. The majority of the Muslim population retreated to the area around the subdistrict capital of Soa-sio, where they were joined by thousands of Muslim IDPs from Tobelo. Although estimates vary, the violence in Tobelo and Galela most likely led to the deaths of over one thousand people.<sup>58</sup> The vast majority of these fatalities were Muslim. In particular there were two large massacres in Popilo and Togoliua. Images of the massacre in Popilo quickly circulated throughout Indonesia in magazines and on VCDs. These horrifying images of a bulldozer pushing corpses into a mass grave created a sense of outrage across the nation.

The success of red troops in both Tobelo and Galela convinced some Christian elite that they should attack Soa-sio (Galela) to eliminate the last Muslims in the region. The Muslims in Soa-sio were surrounded. Red troops from the interior of Galela controlled the area to the north and west, and red troops from Tobelo had complete control over the Tobelo subdistrict to the south. They planned to sweep into Soa-sio from all directions and destroy the last remnants of the Muslim community. The red troops would then move across the strait to Morotai to secure Christian communities there. However, at this point leaders of the red forces in Tobelo stopped to install traditional war leaders (*kapita*) and to rest and ponder their situation. Some leaders argued that enough blood had been shed. During this lull in the fighting, the Indonesian army established a blockade along the only road between Tobelo and Galela to prevent further violence. The respite in hostilities also provided an opportunity for Muslim reinforcements to arrive in Soa-sio from elsewhere in North Maluku. Once news of the violence in Tobelo and Galela had reached Ternate, some locals decided that they needed to rescue the IDPs in Soa-sio. They commandeered the Pelni passenger ship *Lambelu* to bring the IDPs to Ternate. Although some Muslims claim they only used the *Lambelu* to evacuate IDPs, Christians claim that the *Lambelu* left Ternate with a large number of Muslim fighters to reinforce their brethren in Galela.

<sup>58</sup> For various estimates, ranging from 771 to 3,000 victims, see "Tiga Desa Diserbu, Wanita Diperkosa di Halmahera dalam Semalam 800 Muslim Dibantai," *Republika*, January 4, 2000; "FJP Jelaskan 3.000-an Orang Tewas di Halmahera," *Suara Pembaruan*, January 8, 2000; "Pangdam 16/Pattimura: Kerusuhan Maluku Utara Tewaskan 771 Jiwa," *Kompas*, January 17, 2000.

As the violence slowed, the army took steps to “protect” the local population. These actions included the forced evacuation of Javanese transmigrants from the subdistricts of Kao and Tobelo. Although some Christian communities guaranteed their safety, the army insisted on removing them. The army told some of them that they had to be evacuated to protect them from Makian white troops who were planning to attack them for not joining their cause. The army forcibly removed the transmigrants with little advance notice, often as little as twenty minutes. The army did not evacuate other transmigrant communities in Halmahera and all sides agree that in general the Javanese did not take part in the fighting.

### **Muslims Fighting Muslims in the Streets of Ternate**

In addition to the Christian-Muslim violence that took place in Halmahera at the end of the year, violence broke out again on Ternate. On December 27, residents of Ternate witnessed an outbreak of violence that contradicted the larger inter-religious character of the conflict. The renewed fighting in Ternate pitted the primarily Muslim supporters of the sultan of Ternate against his Muslim Makian and Tidore opponents. Tensions between these two factions had been running high since the riots in November when the sultan of Ternate had re-created and deployed his customary palace guard, *Pasukan Adat* (also known as the yellow troops). The sultan’s forces had become the *de facto* guarantors of order in Ternate after the Indonesian security apparatus had collapsed. During the November riots, these yellow troops had played a major role in protecting Christians and assisting in their evacuation. After the departure of the Christian community, the yellow troops continued to play a major role in maintaining order. Some, however, accused the sultan of using his troops to further his own political agenda under the guise of providing security. Supporters of the sultan said that the yellow troops and a related group called the Sultan Babullah Youth Organization (*Generasi Muda Sultan Babullah, GEMUSBA*) were simply arresting and interrogating provocateurs who were trying to upset the peace. Their opponents viewed it differently. They argued that the yellow troops were using violence and intimidation to silence the opposition. There were even allegations that they kidnapped and tortured members of the Makian and Tidore community who openly opposed them.<sup>59</sup> These abuses at the hands of the yellow troops angered the Makian and Tidore. This anger added to the lingering resentment towards the sultan for his alleged favoritism of the Kao in the Kao-Malifut dispute and his supposed pro-Christian stance.

This antagonism led a group of Makian IDPs and some residents from the neighborhood of Kampung Pisang in Ternate, a well-known stronghold of opposition to the sultan, to burn down an old Catholic school used as a headquarters by the sultan’s troops on December 26. On December 27, yellow troops burnt down Kampung Pisang in retaliation. In response to the destruction of Kampung Pisang and spurred by

<sup>59</sup> Forum Komunikasi Masyarakat Propinsi Maluku Utara Makassar, “Bantahan Terhadap Pernyataan Sultan Ternate (Drs. Mudafar Syah) dalam Pemberitaan Tgl 21 & 22 Januari 2000 Melalui Siaran SCTV dan TPI Serta Media Cetak di Indonesia” (letter, January 23, 2000); Tomagola, “The Bleeding of Halmahera of North Moluccas,” p. 4; Smith Alhadar, “Peristiwa Menjelang Kerusuhan Maluku Utara,” *Kompas*, January 15, 2000.

news of the violence breaking out across Halmahera, reinforcements from Tidore rushed to help their Makian and Tidore brethren fight the sultan's yellow troops. These troops from Tidore wore the familiar white headbands worn by Muslim forces in the religious conflict that had been raging across North Maluku for the last two months. Although some have reported that the clash between the white and yellow troops was a clash between the supporters of the sultan of Ternate (yellow troops) and the sultan of Tidore (white troops), this does not seem to have been the case. According to Abu Bakar Wahid Al-Banjari, the eventual leader of the white troops in North Maluku, after Kampung Pisang was destroyed, some local leaders in Tidore met with the sultan of Tidore to ask for permission to invade Ternate. The sultan denied them permission to go as his troops. Despite this lack of approval, the opponents of the sultan of Ternate went to Ternate and fought the yellow troops, but they did so as the Front Pembela Islam di Maluku Utara (North Moluccan Front for the Protection of Islam), not as the troops of the sultan of Tidore. Although many of the white troops were in fact supporters of the sultan of Tidore, they were not fighting in his name, nor at his request.

In the subsequent fighting, white troops, opponents of the sultan of Ternate, engaged in hand-to-hand combat in the streets of Ternate with the mostly Muslim yellow troops of the sultan of Ternate. The battle ended with the defeat of the yellow forces on the steps of the sultan's palace and the surrender of the sultan himself to the sultan of Tidore, who was called in to calm things down on December 29. The sultan of Ternate fled several months later when people, including the sultans of Tidore and Bacan, began calling for his arrest as an instigator of the December violence.<sup>60</sup> Some local Muslims have made claims that the sultan of Ternate sparked the conflict in order to prevent Muslim reinforcements from leaving Ternate and Tidore to aid Muslims in northern Halmahera. They noted that as pleas for aid were coming from Muslims in Halmahera, hundreds of people were involved in intra-religious fighting in Ternate.

### **The Violence Spreads throughout Halmahera and Surrounding Islands**

In the days immediately following the violence in Tobelo, Galela, and Ternate, the conflict spread to other parts of northern and central Halmahera. In the last days of 1999 and the first few days of 2000, every Muslim community in the subdistricts of Ibu and Sahu was destroyed (see map 2). The violence in Ibu was minimal as most of the Muslim communities had fled to Ternate before the outbreak of hostilities due to their small numbers. Fighting also took place throughout the subdistrict of Jailolo to the south of Kao, where Christian communities battled local Muslims along with white troops from Ternate and Tidore before being defeated. In the Loloda subdistrict on the northern tip of Halmahera, fighting broke out in January and February. Red forces were able to take control of the mainland and forced several hundred Muslims to take refuge in Ternate. In contrast, the Muslim communities on the islands of Doi and Damar off the coast of Loloda maintained the islands as Muslim strongholds throughout the conflict. The unrest also spread to central Halmahera when clashes broke out in various villages in the subdistrict of Wasile. The violence in the southern

<sup>60</sup> "Kesultanan Tidore Desak Polri Tangkap Sultan Ternate," *Jawa Pos*, June 24, 2000.

part of Wasile forced a large number of Christian IDPs to flee across Kao Bay to Kao and Tobelo, while the fighting in the northern part forced Muslims to flee to Morotai.

In response to the ongoing strife in Maluku and North Maluku, Vice-President Megawati visited the region in an effort to stop the violence.<sup>61</sup> During Megawati's visit to Ternate, new clashes broke out on the island of Bacan. Reports of how the fighting began in Bacan, again, vary depending on the source. Muslim sources claim it began when someone threw a firebomb into the Al-Khairaat Pesantren in the subdistrict capital of Labuha. Christians claim it began when Muslims began burning down Christian homes in Labuha. The violence eventually spread throughout Bacan, destroying several villages and causing thousands of Muslim and Christian IDPs to flee to the district capital, North Sulawesi, or Halmahera. The government eventually established an IDP camp in the village of Panambuang on Bacan to house approximately 3,500 Christian IDPs from Bacan and neighboring Gane Barat. Violence also broke out on the nearby island of Mandioli, forcing Christian IDPs from the village of Galela to flee.

In February the violence spread to the island of Morotai off the northeast coast of Halmahera. Southern Morotai had been tense since thousands of Muslim IDPs from Tobelo and Galela had arrived in the last days of 1999. Widespread rumors said that both sides were planning an attack. At the end of February, clashes broke out in and around the subdistrict capital of Daruba. The Christian community fled to the nearby air force base, where they were housed for several months. The unrest spread up the east and west coasts of Morotai, and several Christian villages and Christian neighborhoods in the South Morotai subdistrict, as well as several villages in the North Morotai subdistrict, were destroyed. Thousands of Christian IDPs joined those from Daruba at the air force base. Others fled to the nearby island of Rao, where several thousand IDPs from all over Morotai were concentrated in the village of Posi-posi Rao. Muslim forces from Morotai threatened to invade Rao several times, but never did. A local Chinese merchant hired a company of Marines to guard the island, and their presence prevented any large-scale attack. Furthermore, the village head of Posi-posi Rao had insisted that no one launch attacks on Morotai from his village for fear of retribution. Those who wished to take part in the fighting had to travel to Halmahera and join red forces there. These efforts ensured that Posi-posi Rao remained peaceful throughout the conflict. Other parts of the province were not so fortunate. In mid-February the unrest spread to the island of Obi to the south of Halmahera. Between February 17 and March 3, clashes took place in seven villages on Obi and the nearby islands of Tapa and Bisa, leading to the complete destruction of several villages. This period of fighting ended with an attack on the largely Christian village of Bobo on the south coast that was repelled. These attacks forced several thousand people, primarily Christian IDPs from Obi, to flee to Tobelo, North Sulawesi, Tanimbar, and Papua.<sup>62</sup> During this same period, several villages were destroyed in fighting in Gane Timur in southern Halmahera.

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<sup>61</sup> "Government 'Will Not Wash Its Hands of Problems' in Maluku," *Jakarta Post*, January 26, 2000.

<sup>62</sup> Violence broke out again on the island of Obi in late May and early June of 2001 in the villages of Bobo and Woi.

### Arrival of the Laskar Jihad and the Final Phase of Violence

As the unrest spread throughout North Maluku, developments were taking place in Java that would affect the final phases of the conflict. The destruction of the Muslim community in Tobelo in December 1999 grabbed the attention of the Muslim community throughout Indonesia. On January 4, the ICMI-owned newspaper *Republika* ran its frequently cited article about the violence in Tobelo: "Three villages invaded, women raped, 800 Muslims massacred overnight."<sup>63</sup> Muslims throughout the nation were shocked by the savagery of the violence in Tobelo and angered by the government's seeming inability or unwillingness to address it either there or in Ambon. They were further convinced of President Wahid's inability to handle the situation when he drastically downplayed the number of fatalities in Halmahera, claiming at one point that only five people had been killed.<sup>64</sup> Muslim leaders called for the government to take action.

Within days, these appeals for action culminated with a large demonstration in Jakarta that called for a jihad to save Moluccan Muslims. In response to this call for a jihad, the Laskar Jihad was formed on January 30, 2000.<sup>65</sup> The Laskar Jihad was the paramilitary wing of the Forum Komunikasi Ahlus Sunnah wal Jammah (Communication Forum for the Followers of the Sunnah and the Community of the Prophet, FKASWJ), headed by Ja'far Umar Thalib, a Muslim preacher who had spent time in Afghanistan.<sup>66</sup> Although founded in 1998, the FKASWJ did not announce the existence of its paramilitary wing until after the violence in Tobelo. The Laskar Jihad began publicly recruiting volunteers to send to eastern Indonesia and established training camps in several parts of Java. At a rally in April, titled "Jihad: A Final Effort to End the Christian Moluccan Uprising" (*Jihad: Upaya Terakhir Mematahkan Gerakan Pemberontakan Kristen Maluku*), Thalib announced that three thousand Laskar Jihad members were ready to depart and a further seven thousand were in training.<sup>67</sup> After the rally, Thalib marched on the presidential palace with his supporters, where he demanded to meet with President Wahid to discuss the crisis in Maluku. Wahid agreed to see him and five of his associates (including the leader of the white troops in North Maluku, Haji Abu Bakar Wahid Al-Banjari), but he threw them out of his office after five minutes of discussion.<sup>68</sup>

After this meeting, the national government made some perfunctory moves to shut down Laskar Jihad training camps in Bogor and elsewhere. In May, however, despite

<sup>63</sup> "Tiga Desa Diserbu, Wanita Diperkosa di Halmahera dalam Semalam 800 Muslim Dibantai," *Republika*, January 4, 2000. This article is consistently cited by other news sources (for example, "Troops Evacuate Maluku Refugees," *Jakarta Post*, January 5, 2000; "Indonesia Powerless in Face of Islands at War," *Sydney Morning Herald*, January 5, 2000). It is also cited in church-based reports for its role in inciting the violence (for example, "GMIH Halmahera Report 3: Peta Kerusakkan Wilayah Jemaat-jemaat Kristen Di Halmahera" [Tobelo, GMIH, January 1, 2000]). *Republika* frequently ran provocative stories about the conflict. See for example, "Kepolisian Benarkan 216 Transmigran Dibantai di Mesjid Maluku Utara," *Republika*, January 17, 2000; "Umat Islam Mulai Terisolasi Massa Merah Kembali Serang Galela," *Republika*, January 12, 2000. For more on *Republika's* penchant for provocative journalism, see Greg Fealy, "Tall Stories: Conspiracy Theories in Post-Bomb Indonesia," *Inside Indonesia* 74 (April-June 2003): 6-8.

<sup>64</sup> "Konflik Maluku Mulai Reda, Gus Dur: Korban Galela Hanya Lima," *Republika*, January 14, 2000.

<sup>65</sup> International Crisis Group, "Indonesia: Violence and Radical Muslims," *Indonesia Briefing*, October 10, 2001, p. 13.

<sup>66</sup> For more on the Laskar Jihad, see Hasan, "Faith and Politics."

<sup>67</sup> "Laskar Menggertak, Gus Dur Terancam," *Forum Keadilan* 9,3 (April 16, 2000): 76-77.

<sup>68</sup> "Enam Wakil Laskar Jihad Maluku Bertemu Presiden," *Kompas*, April 6, 2000.



presidential instructions to prevent their departure, an estimated three thousand Laskar Jihad members left for Maluku and North Maluku from Surabaya after announcing they would do so. Some Laskar Jihad troops arrived in North Maluku, where they played a much smaller role in the conflict than they did in Ambon.<sup>69</sup> Upon their arrival in North Maluku, they joined with local white troops. The white troops' main focus by this point in the conflict was to avenge the killings in Tobelo and return Muslims to their homes in Tobelo and Malifut. To achieve these goals, they had to retake the subdistricts of Kao and Tobelo. Their initial strategy was to attack Kao from the south via Jailolo and to attack Tobelo from the north and northeast via Galela and Morotai respectively. The plan required additional white troops to make the short crossing from Ternate to Jailolo and sweep north, destroying the red troops in Kao, something they had been unable to accomplish in the early months of 2000. Local security forces did not agree with this plan and in a rare show of force made an effort to stop the departure of white troops. The ensuing confrontation left seven people dead.<sup>70</sup> The opposition from the armed forces led the white troops and their new Laskar Jihad allies to focus on sending fighters to Galela, from where they could attempt to retake Tobelo.

The reinforced Muslim troops in Soa-sio, Galela focused on defeating the last pockets of red troops in the subdistrict. Once they defeated these villages, they would be able to concentrate on Tobelo. Over the course of April and May, most of the remaining Christian communities were destroyed in a series of attacks. Survivors fled to Tobelo or retreated to the village of Duma, where they decided to make their last stand. Army blockades prevented large-scale reinforcements of the red troops advancing from Tobelo or elsewhere and left the people in Duma to fend for themselves. They had numerous opportunities to leave and in several instances were offered safe passage. They did not take these opportunities and over the course of several community meetings decided to stay and fight. The white forces were equally determined that they be removed from the region.

The fate of Duma had significance for both Muslims and Christians. On a strategic level, it was the last remaining holdout of Christians in Galela. Thus the future of the village, either its destruction or its defense, became a rallying point for both sides. Furthermore, the people of Duma and Christians from neighboring villages who were now taking refuge there had played a major role in the violence since it began on December 27. Red troops from Duma, in particular, had been involved in attacks on Muslim communities throughout Galela in late 1999 and early 2000. Many Muslims considered them the main instigators of the violence in Galela and accused them of committing a number of atrocities. Both sides were also aware of Duma's historical significance. Duma is considered the birthplace of Christianity in the region. Dutch Protestant missionaries had acquired their first North Moluccan converts in Duma in 1896. The missionary who had overseen these initial conversions was buried in the

<sup>69</sup> The International Crisis Group reports that the Laskar Jihad sent a team to Ternate and Tidore in February 2000 and decided that local forces were adequate and they should concentrate on Ambon and Maluku. See International Crisis Group, *Indonesia's Maluku Crisis*, p. 7, n. 46. The Laskar Jihad's high media profile and overstated claims led many outside observers to give them credit for the work of local Muslim militia. For a similar example from Central Sulawesi, see International Crisis Group, *Indonesia Backgrounder: Jihad in Central Sulawesi*, ICG Asia Report 74, February 3, 2004 (Jakarta: International Crisis Group, 2004) p. 18.

<sup>70</sup> "Halmahera Masih Membara," *Forum Keadilan* 9,6 (May 14, 2000): 70-71.

village cemetery. As a result, Christians viewed it as a place they had to defend, while Muslims singled it out for destruction.

In late May and early June, white forces launched a number of unsuccessful assaults on Duma. The white troops finally ended the standoff with a successful attack on June 19. Some accounts (both Christian and Muslim) claim that they were aided by elements of the military. Over 150 people, including many women and children, were killed, as the Christians were defeated. The death toll among the attackers remains undocumented. The small number of soldiers stationed in the village was unable to prevent the attack, and reinforcements were unable to intervene because white troops had blocked the road. As news of the fighting at Duma reached Tobelo, red troops attempted to launch a retaliatory raid on Soa-sio, Galela. Several thousand red troops advanced on Soa-sio from the south until they were stopped at the army checkpoint on the Tobelo-Galela highway. After extended negotiations, during which several people were shot by the armed forces, the red troops reluctantly returned to Tobelo. Muslims now controlled virtually all of the subdistrict of Galela, while red troops controlled the subdistricts of Tobelo and Kao.

Any discussion of the North Maluku violence must mention the disappearance of the passenger ship *Cahaya Bahari* on June 29, 2000, as it was the last large-scale loss of life related to the conflict. The severely overloaded passenger ship left Tobelo harbor on June 28, bound for Manado in North Sulawesi. Most of the passengers were IDPs from various parts of Halmahera, including a large number of survivors from Duma in Galela. The destruction of Duma and the circulation of an invasion map, purportedly found in the bag of a slain Laskar Jihad member, had created a large amount of panic in Tobelo. Many people were trying to get out of Tobelo as soon as possible to avoid the rumored attack. According to local sources, the boat, originally designed for 250 passengers, left Tobelo harbor with more than 550 people on board. The ship was last heard from on June 29, reporting that it was taking on water and its pumps had failed. Search and rescue operations were launched, but after more than three weeks of searching only ten survivors were found. The lack of debris led many in Tobelo to believe that the fate of the *Cahaya Bahari* was no accident.<sup>71</sup>

The events in Duma and the continuing violence in central Maluku led President Wahid to declare a state of civil emergency in Maluku and North Maluku on June 27, 2000. By declaring a state of civil emergency, the government and security forces could close the region to nonresidents, establish naval blockades, impose curfews, and conduct household searches for weapons.<sup>72</sup> The government thought these actions would enable the armed forces to establish control over the two provinces. The level of violence in North Maluku decreased sharply after the implementation of the state of civil emergency (the same was not true in Maluku). According to Muslim sources, their plans for a major attack on Tobelo lost support and were eventually canceled once news reached Galela that President Wahid had declared a civil emergency. However, the end of large-scale violence was more a result of the situation on the ground than any changes in government policy or military capacity. The removal of the last red

<sup>71</sup> Some relatives of those lost have traveled as far as Mindanao to meet with representatives of Abu Sayaf and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front to search for information regarding the ship's fate.

<sup>72</sup> International Crisis Group, *Indonesia: Overcoming Murder and Chaos in Maluku*, ICG Asia Report 10, December 19, 2000 (Jakarta: International Crisis Group, 2000), p. 10, n. 32.

pocket in Galela essentially left the two sides in their separate corners. Neither was strong enough to defeat the other. The red forces in Tobelo were unable to launch a large-scale attack on Galela due to the military blockade and thus were largely in a defensive mode. Nor were the white forces in North Maluku strong enough to launch a successful attack on Tobelo. Furthermore, Muslim attempts to invade Kao from the south had failed several times and further attempts had been abandoned.

In the end, several thousand people were killed and over 220,000 were displaced during the violence. Those displaced by the violence sought refuge in a number of places based largely on religious identification. North Moluccan Muslims fled primarily to Ternate, Galela subdistrict, southern Morotai, and Bacan. Ternate housed the largest concentration of North Moluccan IDPs, with an estimated one hundred thousand Muslim IDPs from various parts of the province. Additionally a number of Javanese transmigrants from Kao and Tobelo were returned to Java. The Christian diaspora was more widespread and covered at least four provinces (North Maluku, Maluku, North Sulawesi, and Irian Jaya). Within North Maluku, Christian IDPs were concentrated in the subdistricts of Tobelo and Kao, and on the island of Rao off the west coast of Morotai. The subdistrict of Tobelo held the largest concentration of Christian IDPs in North Maluku, with some estimates as high as sixty thousand people originating from all parts of the province. Outside of North Maluku, approximately 35,000 IDPs, mainly Christians, fled to the province of North Sulawesi.<sup>73</sup>

The destruction of Duma was the last major outbreak of violence in North Maluku, but the situation remained volatile for several more months. The first serious in-situ efforts at reconciliation, spearheaded by local communities in Tobelo, began in October 2000.<sup>74</sup> Only in 2001 could a significant number of IDPs return to their homes on Halmahera.<sup>75</sup> Small-scale skirmishes continued to take place across the region, but these were isolated events. Many in North Maluku viewed these later outbreaks of violence, such as the attacks and killings in Loloda in 2001, and in Tobelo, Galela, and Morotai in 2002, as attempts by the military to prolong the civil emergency. The longer the violence lasted, the longer the army could profit from the unrest.<sup>76</sup> By the end of 2001, many began to see the presence of the armed forces, rather than future clashes between Christians and Muslims, as the largest threat to peace and stability. The government eventually lifted the state of civil emergency in North Maluku in March of 2003.

## Conclusion

From the above account, it should be evident that no single meta-narrative can explain the violence in North Maluku. To explain the conflict in the dichotomous terms

<sup>73</sup> Christopher R. Duncan, "Unwelcome Guests: Relations between Internally Displaced Persons and Their Hosts in North Sulawesi," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 18,1 (2005): 25-46.

<sup>74</sup> For more on the reconciliation process in Tobelo, see William Ruddy Tindage, "Damai yang Sejati: Kajian Teologis-komunikasi tentang Rekonsiliasi di Tobelo, Kabupaten Halmahera Utara, Provinsi Maluku Utara" (MA thesis, Universitas Kristen Indonesia Tomohon, 2005).

<sup>75</sup> Christopher R. Duncan, "The Politics of Going Home: The Future of Internally Displaced Persons in North Maluku," *Cakalele: Maluku Research Journal* 11 (2005): 81-108.

<sup>76</sup> For a similar case in Poso, see Aragon, "Profiting from Displacement."

of Muslims versus Christians, or locals versus indigenes, oversimplifies a far more complex issue. Ethnic and religious antagonisms were simply two of the most pronounced fault lines, and they fit well with the meta-narratives of other conflicts in Indonesia at the time. Such oversimplifications do nothing to enhance our understanding of events. The roots of the North Maluku conflict were numerous, and local perceptions and justifications for the conflict changed over time. These changing perceptions affected how the violence was actualized and subsequently justified at the local level. A more productive exercise is to examine the various chronologies of the conflict put forth by victims and perpetrators in an attempt to see why they took part in the violence and how it affected them. Each episode of violence followed a chain of events that shaped people's understanding of the conflict and the intensity of their involvement. For example, most commentators fail to mention the role of IDPs in the spread of violence other than noting the role of the Makian in the unrest in Ternate. IDPs exacting revenge upon local Christian or Muslim communities for injuries suffered elsewhere represented a key factor in the spread of the violence across the province. One atrocity or supposed atrocity became the basis for another. Only through documenting this course of events and these changing justifications can we hope to understand how and why people made the decisions they did to participate (or not) in the violence. There is no doubting the subjective nature of these accounts, but it is these subjectivities that provide insight into the causes and consequences of the conflict.