

The Dynamics of Muslim and Christian Relations in Ambon, Eastern Indonesia

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Abstract

This article will discuss the relationship of Muslim and Christians in Ambon from the period of Dutch colonial government to post Indonesian New Order. I argue the long tension between two religious communities in history strengthen the clash among them from about 1999 to 2002, when thousands Muslims and Christians killed. The centralization of New Order regime and the segregation of religious and ethnic communities challenged the future of harmony in the region.

Introduction

This article will examine the contact between Muslims and Christians in the Ambonese islands from the pre-colonial period to the revolutionary period of the late 1940s (just prior to national independence). Tracing this history will give us an understanding of the dynamics of Muslim and Christian relations under different regimes. This article will analyse the transmigration program under the New Order, which changed the composition of the population in the Ambonese islands from a position of Christian dominance in the 1970s to one of Muslim domination in the 1990s. This change had a significant impact on local politics as Muslims gained access to more key roles. This chapter will also examine the origins of the *Pela* tradition and ethnic relationships based on the *Pela* tradition, noting the changes in this culture over time. It will argue that such cultural changes have impacted religious harmony in the region. Finally, this chapter will discuss the policies of the New Order regime and their influence on local politics. Generally, this chapter will argue that the long-term segregation of the Muslim and Christian communities shaped the tensions and competition between them. State violence and a culture of *premanism* during the New Order period caused frustrations amongst ordinary people. With the end of the authoritarian New Order regime and a new climate of freedom of expression, there was a growth in radicalism and illegal movements in the name of religion.

Early Contact between Muslims and Christians in the Ambonese Islands

By the middle of the fifteenth century, Islam had taken root in the Moluccas through the influence of Muslim traders. The first Islamised regions were Leihitu and Hatuhaha in the kingdoms of Temate and Tidore, where the local people had both economic and political reasons to cooperate (Leirissa, 1975, p. 7). The Muslim kingdoms of Temate and Tidore then Islamised the Ambonese islands from the end of the fifteenth to the middle of the seventeenth century. Islamisation continued more gradually after the coming of the Portuguese and Dutch (Cooley, 1973, p. 120).

Cooley (1973) has noted that the coming of Islam resulted in changes in the local culture. In the indigenous marriage system, the required dowry was a human head as a symbol of individual prowess. This was later altered to rings, jewelry and other allowed items under the Islamic law system (Cooley, 1973, p. 121). Islamisation was to be challenged by the Christianisation of Ambonese communities by the Portuguese during the more than ninety years, from 1512 to 1605. The Portuguese brought Catholicism first to the Northern Moluccas, but encountered a significant challenge from Muslims. They subsequently succeeded in converting elites to Christianity in the Central Moluccas, where there was less resistance. These elites, especially in the central part of the Moluccas on the Ambonese and Lease islands, had not been fully Islamised. When the Portuguese first arrived in the Moluccas, the Muslim Kings welcomed them and the trade they brought in cloves and other agricultural commodities.

However, afterwards, because of differences over economic and religious issues, there were clashes between Moluccan Muslims and the Portuguese and later Dutch-cum-Moluccan Christians (Leirissa, 1975).

Lestaluhu (1988) has detailed these clashes. The first was the Hitu War (1520-1605) between Moluccan Muslims and Portuguese-cum-Moluccan Christians. The Muslim-Christian clashes continued until the coming of the Dutch in 1605. Soon after the Dutch arrival, some 16,000 Ambonese were baptised in the Leitimor and Lease islands in 1605 (Chauvel, 1990, p. 18). The Dutch were to stay on for more than three hundred years until 1942. The Dutch colonial government brought the Protestant religion, which also had influence in the central part of the Moluccas, especially as Dutch policy favoured Christians in gaining access to education and lower administrative positions in government. Chauvel described the discriminatory policy of the Dutch government toward Muslims as follows:

After some hesitation, and the request from the Christian village leaders from Leitimor in 1607, the VOC [*Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie*, Dutch East India Company] adopted the policy that Christianity was seen as a means to promote the loyalty of the population to the Christian rulers. The VOC also attempted, with limited success, to curb the process of Islamisation. Together with the destruction of the Ambonese Islamic 'states' and the elimination of the Moslem elite as independent political actors, this meant that the Moslem community was relegated to a subordinate position in colonial society compared with their Christian compatriots (Chauvel, 1990, p. 20).

As a consequence of the conversions from animism to the monotheistic religions of Islam and Christianity, the indigenous cultures of the Ambonese underwent significant change. Cooley has stated religious institutions changed because of conversion and this influenced other aspects of custom and government (1973, p. 126). However, Cooley misinterpreted the impact of the new religions of Islam and Christianity on Ambonese, suggesting that the conversions took place because of their limited understanding of Islam and Christianity. The reality was that both religions tended to compete for adherents, who were basically searching to advance their own economic and political interests.

The Dutch colonial government made the town of Ambon the centre of their administration in the Moluccas. Here the dominant Christian community had privileged access to jobs such as lower officers in the administration and especially as Moluccan soldiers in the Netherlands army in the East Indies. On the other hand, the Dutch destroyed the Muslims' clove trade in Ternate and Leihitu, and did not give Muslims the opportunity to go to Dutch schools. This discriminatory policy impacted on the level of education that Muslims were able to attain. Muslims commonly had a lower level of education than Christians. This was the case over the long period of Dutch rule.

Furthermore, the Japanese colonial government, after successfully defeating the combination of the *Koninklijk Nederlands-Indische Leger* (KNIL, the Royal Dutch East Indies Army) and an Australian battalion on 31 January 1942, promulgated a new policy towards Muslims and Christians, which was contrary to that of the Dutch (Chauvel, 1990, p. 1974). Muslims regarded the Japanese administration as having similar ideas to their own with respect to the Dutch. Moreover, Muslims gained positions of influence and the freedom to practice their religion, which was very different to the situation under the previous European governments (Chauvel, 1990, p. 184-185). Muslims did not realise that Japanese policy was intentionally aimed at destroying the power of previous regimes. It seemed to give privileges to Muslims to gain their sympathy and to underline to Christians that the Japanese colonial government had 'liberated' them from European control.

The role of Muslim and Christian organizations in the Japanese period was important in shaping a sense of nationalism and a sense of 'identity' as 'Indonesians' and 'Ambonese'. With a different experience to their counterparts in Java, the independence movements in the Moluccas were moderate and had strong local political interests as their basis. On the other hand, Ambonese Muslims attempted to gain political control on behalf of Moluccans living outside the Moluccas. The Japanese colonial government succeeded to some extent in balancing the Muslim and Christian communities with implications for ethno-religious divisions. After independence, Moluccan Christians continued to hold top political positions in the *Negara Indonesia Timur* (NIT, State of Eastern Indonesia) up until the time when the Moluccas was given to the republicans in 1949.¹

¹ The *Front Kedaulatan Maluku* (FKM), which has been associated with *Republik Maluku Selatan* (RMS) ideas of sovereignty, claimed that the United Nations' gift of the Moluccas to the Republic of Indonesia was illegal. They said that it

In 1950, the Republic of South Moluccas (RMS) broke away, attempting to make the Moluccas separate and independent from Indonesia. Finally, the *Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia* (NKRI, Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia) defeated the RMS. Subsequently, separatists came under pressure as the central government of Indonesia set out to create a more balanced population of Muslims and Christians. The Christian majority in the Moluccas was seen by central government as posing a separatist threat.

Certainly, the RMS separatist movement has had a long historical influence on Muslim and Christian relations. Soekarno's government saw the movement as a threat to national unity. Soekarno began a transmigration program whereby people from the heavily populated Java, Madura, Bali and Lombok regions were moved to the Moluccas and other islands (Hardjono, 1977, p. 25-26). Soekarno's transmigration policy was projected as supporting national security, as promoting national integration, and as remedying Indonesia's uneven population distribution (Goss, 1992, p. 87-88). Sainz called this a policy of "Javanisation" of the Outer Islands as [a] means, to achieve "national unity" against separatist tendencies' (1982, p. 10). Certainly, this policy served to reduce the emergence of separatist movements in the Moluccas, by assimilating national traditions and by balancing the Christian and Muslim populations, as most transmigrants were Muslims. However, Soekarno also accommodated Christians by placing them in positions of political panel in the local government.

The Dynamic of *Pela* in the Pre-Colonial and Colonial Periods

The population of the Ambonese islands has been segregated since the pre-colonial period. As stated previously, the Muslims of Ternate and Tidore had successfully Islamised the Leihitu peninsula. However, in the Leitimor (later Ambon city) region, the inhabitants were originally animist-Hindus. The Portuguese converted the Leitimor Hindus to Catholicism and the Dutch converted the rest of the Hindus and a small number of Muslims and Catholics to Protestantism. Herein are the early roots of segregation in the Ambonese islands. The Dutch reinforced this segregation with their discriminatory policies against certain groups in the islands.

The impact of segregation was reduced, however, by a treaty arrangement between the different communities that allowed friendships to be formed. This treaty was based on the *Pela* tradition. '*Pela*' means 'brother' or 'trusted friend' and is a word originally from the Hoamoal peninsula (Ceram) and adopted into the Ambonese language. The original meaning of *Pela* was 'to be finished' (Bartels, 1978, p. 58). *Pela* tradition can be divided into three categories: *Pela Tuni* or *Pela Kerns'*, *Pela Tempat Sirih*; and, *Pela Gandong*. *Pela Tuni* has two categories: *Pela Tumpah Darah* and *Pela Batu Karang* (Huwae, 1995, p. 79). The further analysis will focus on the *Pela Gandong* tradition, which was prominent in discussion during reconciliation attempts in 1999-2002. The *Pela Gandong* tradition is an alliance of two or more people related by marriage, in which they agree to help each other based on family ties. For example, the *Pela* among the regions of the Tamilou, Siri-Sori and Hutumuri² was originally between three brothers from the village of Hatumeten on the island of Ceram, who decided to be in alliance after migrating to their new places in the three villages mentioned (Huwae, 1995, p. 80-81).

Ironically, the oldest and existing *Pela* ceremony was not found in Ceram, but in the mountains of the Leitimur peninsula in Ambon. It was supposed that the Ceramese had adopted the tradition during a time of turbulence between Ambonese communities (Bartels, 1978, p. 80). The actual origins of *Pela* are blurred and there is a lack of strong historical evidence. According to Bartels, it was the subject of speculation in early European writings and not part of 'native explanations' (1978, p. 67). Furthermore, Bartels states that:

was contrary to the spirit of the Linggarjati (25 March 1947), Renville (17 January 1948) and Van Royen Room (7 May 1949) agreements (<http://www.fkm-eiropa.nl/?page=808>, accessed on 6 January 2003).

² During his fieldwork in Tamilou, Siri-Sori and Hutumuri, Huwae found the following rules mentioned by the inhabitants of the three regions: 'It is forbidden to become angry with a *bongso* [younger brothers or sisters]; it is forbidden to marry a *bongso*; it is forbidden to refuse a request from a *bongso*; it is forbidden to lie to a *bongso*; it is forbidden to make fun of a *bongso*; One must help a *bongso* when (s)he is in trouble; One must help and support a *bongso* in busy and difficult times (weddings, deaths, etc.)' (Huwae, 1995, p. 81).

Ambonese explanations of the origin of *pela* ... range ... from factual speculations to semi-mythical accounts. The first are based on historical factors but their elaboration is hampered by the still insufficient access of Ambonese to written historical records. In respect to the latter, it must be remembered that Ambonese, like other people, are ... curious about past events and their chronology. In such circumstances, history often becomes a justification [for] the present situation and [a] basis for ideology (Bartels, 1978, p. 72).

The earliest *Pela* tradition was given brief mention in Ridjali's *Hikayat Tanah Hitu*, which Bartels (1978) considers to be the oldest written source discussing this alliance. In 1495, there was an unbreakable tie between the King of Ternate, Zainul abedien, and Pati Tuban, the ruler of Hitu kingdom. They declared by a ceremonial oath that they along with their territories would have an eternal friendship and alliance. This *pela* was merely a promulgation of the *raja* (king) of Hitumessen, which was accepted by the Hitu people (Bartels, 1978, p. 73). However, during the Dutch period, the Hitu with the support of the Ternate kingdom defended their interests in the face of Dutch pressure. The alliance was pragmatically employed by both rulers to preserve their political and economic interests. Subsequently, differences in policy regarding the Dutch arose between them. Ternate adopted a non-aggression approach toward the Dutch. The Hitu lost their ties with the Ternate kingdom.

The *Pela* was also meant as a treaty between Muslims and Christians. It was probably not originally an inter-religious treaty, but because of the subsequent Christianisation of parts of the Ambonese islands by the Portuguese and Dutch, the treaty became an inter-religious one. This was a crucial development in the *Pela* tradition, especially in the first five or six decades after the Dutch arrival (1605-1656). Many of the *Pela* alliances entered into between Muslims, non-Muslims and pagans have continued until today (Bartels, 1978, p. 15).

The New Order Centralisation of Development and Politics

During the New Order period, the *Pela Gandong* tradition was merely a symbol of religious harmony in the Ambonese islands. It was promoted in tourism brochures by a national government proud of the harmony between multi-ethnic and multi-religious Indonesians. However, more transmigrants were coming to the Moluccas under the sponsorship of the central government so as to foster development, national unity and national defense and security (Goss, 1992, p. 88). Many came voluntarily from Java, Sumatra and Sulawesi to the transmigration projects in Ceram, other regions in the Moluccas and to the capital city of Ambon. In the capital, the proportion of Christians in the population changed from 60 per cent in the 1970s to 52 per cent in the 1990s. This was the result not only of a rise in the number of new Butonese, Buginese, Makassarese and Javanese migrants coming to the city, but was also the result of an increase in number of Ambonese Christians emigrating to Java after facing difficulties in finding work and making a living during the 1990s. Of course, non-indigenous Ambonese did not hold to the *Pela* tradition, which continued to influence the thought of young indigenous Ambonese. Transmigration and the growing urbanisation of indigenous Ambonese were important factors in bringing about a change in Ambonese culture during the 1990s.

Ambonese culture was also drastically changed by of the New Order's centralisation of government. The traditional local leadership was remodeled along Javanese lines based around the concept of the *lurah* (head of village). In the longer term, the king and traditional leaders lost privileges and the respect of their communities. According to New Order policy, the only official political ideology was that of Pancasila. Soeharto succeeded in suppressing the power of local political figures, by eliminating the essence of their political identity and the basis for their power.

However, local cultural expressions resurged after the fall of Soeharto. President Habibie's government gave more opportunities for local politics and local political identities when the government introduced a regional autonomy policy. Unfortunately, the euphoria of regional autonomy was to result in the strengthening of the indigenous community against migrants. Thus, the Ambon conflict can be seen as the product of regional political dynamics in this period of transition in Indonesian politics. In the city of Ambon, most Muslims live in the coastal areas around Batu Merah. They are migrants from South and Southeast Sulawesi, Java and Sumatra. Muslims also came to live in the middle of Christian areas in Ambon. As has been indicated, during the Colonial and the Soekarno periods Leitimor became a Christian region. However, the structure of the population changed once the New Order introduced its transmigration policy and open up Ambon city for Muslim urban settlement. Furthermore, the central government openly pushed this development as part of its ambitious transmigration policy.

As these socio-political changes were occurring in Ambon, religion became an identity similar to race with respect to competition for local political and government positions and in the context of social policy. Muslims' perception of Christian domination in local government and in shaping public policy from colonial times to the second decade of the New Order government impelled local competition. On the other hand, Christians also perceived an Islamisation of the local bureaucracy to have occurred particularly during the last years of the New Order from 1992-1997.³ According to Shrieke, 'religious competition,' between Muslim and Christian 'races' became New Order policy in order to ensure the Moluccas remained under the control of the New Order regime. The central government politicised issues relating to Muslim and Christian interests. Bureaucratic positions became a site of competition between the two communities. The elections for governor amplified political and religious divisions: if a Muslim became governor, then a Protestant had to be the vice-governor or secretary. In the context of such developments, there was a transfer of economic resources from local indigenous Ambonese to urban Muslims. Suparlan (2001, p. 8-9) suggested that the 'unnatural' demographic change from Ambonese Christian dominance before the 1980s to migrant Muslim dominance in the 1990s was a cause of the conflict of Ambon. Suparlan used Burner's model of 'the dominant culture' to explain the Ambonese situation:

BBM people are dominant in the city of Ambon. From a demographic perspective, they are the majority compared to the indigenous Ambonese. Socially, economically and culturally, they dominate the public places and markets where the indigenous Ambonese are merely consumers; and politically both in the local and national arenas they have gained control in fashioning political policy and in determining natural resources distribution in Ambon and the Moluccas (Suparlan, 2001, p. 8-9; translation mine).

However, contrary to Suparlan's analysis, it was actually the Chinese and only a few middle-class Muslims, who dominated the retail market. The migrant Muslims (BBM) controlled only the traditional markets, which require a low level of labour skills and a limited capital. Middle and high-level investments were still controlled by the Chinese, Jakarta businessmen and foreign investors (Aditjondro, 2001).

The Consequences of New Order Development in Ambon

The centralization occurring under New Order development in the village of Soya Atas (as outlined in Pariela's (1996) study) is a good illustration of the impact of government development on *adat* (local culture). The Soya Atas village is one of the original villages in the five regions of Soya, a part of the Ambon city region. There are four new settlements at Kayu Putih, Baru Bulan, Karang Panjang Waihoka and Karang Panjang Puleh, where outsiders from a variety of ethnic groups, including Javanese, Butonese (Southeast Sulawesi), Chinese and Southeast Moluccas have lived (Pariela 1996, p. 108). Except for the Chinese, most outsiders were Muslims, who worked as traders and office workers (government and private), while Soya Atas villagers were mostly Christians. Soya Atas villagers were peasants who cultivated cloves, nutmeg and coconut cash crops as well as cassava, taro and sweet potato for household consumption (Pariela 1996, p. 108). Government development programs in this village gave advantages to outsiders rather than the indigenous population. Pariela explains that:

Most of the development programs, in fact, were determined and funded by the government. Despite the fact that the Soya Atas people have enjoyed modern transportation and communication as the result of development programs, generally, these facilities seem to be useless especially in relation to pushing forward the economic activities of these people. This is because the facilities do not themselves have a direct stimulation effect on the productive economic behaviour of the people (Pariela 1996, p. 117).

The alienation the Soya Atas indigenous community experienced as result of New Order development paralleled that in other parts of Ambon. However, Pariela did not give any reasons as to why the indigenous Soya Atas people seemed to be reluctant to improve their agricultural practices, so as to compete with the Butonese migrants or to become traders like the outsiders. However, there were reasons why they did not do so. The transfer of land ownership from the indigenous Soya Atas people to the outsiders had an impact on consumption patterns.

³ Concerns were also evident at a national level regarding the tensions that were mounting in Ambon as a result of the changes that were taking place in the 1992-1997 period, particularly as a result of Christians' sense of marginalisation (Djiwandono 1999, p.100-106).

In making reference to Rostow's theory of consumption (1971) Pariela suggests that 'people had already jumped to the fifth stage of high mass consumption, whereas in fact, they were still living in the second stage 'the pre-conditions for take-off' (1996, p. 113). Indigenous Soya Atas people were described by Mearns and Healy (1996) being as 'lazy'. Mearns and Healy's analysis related the city of Ambon, where indigenous Ambonese worked as government officers and the outsiders (migrants) worked in the informal sector. He explained the situation as follows:

Ambonese Christian self-representation during interviews and in conversations often has echoes of colonial myths of the 'lazy native'. Ambonese have said to me on many occasions that they generally prefer to work in offices, and government offices if possible. They have characterised themselves and their youths as lazy and disinclined to do manual labouring... By contrast, in terms of stereotyping, Ambonese Christians and Sulawesi migrants both represent the Butonese and Buginese to be much more inclined to take hard manual work and to be entrepreneurial and careful in the manner of earning their living (Mearns and Healy, 1996, p. 99).

However, both Mearns and Pariela were trapped into a stereotyping of indigenous and migrant (outsider) peoples and lost sight of the main problem of centralisation under the New Order. Soeharto's cronies exploited natural and mining resources and tragically controlled the price of that important agricultural product-Moluccan cloves. Indigenous Ambonese made gains in the peripheral commodity sectors and even in the government sector. However, the strategic political sectors were monitored by Soeharto's administration. Soeharto systematically constructed the segregation and stereotyping of the indigenous and the outsider communities through a policy of economic development, which defined the country according to industrial stages. Additionally, Mearns' argument assigning Christians as being 'lazy natives' was contrary to the reality in Soya Atas. According to Pariela, Christians were hard-working peasants striving to make a living.

In fact, many Muslims were equally poor and in a similar socio-economic category to Christians. They were also the victims of New Order development policy. Mearns' argument that Muslims had usurped Christians' domination in local politics, especially after Governor Akib Latuconsina's administration, assumed that this first Muslim governor in a Moluccan province had a policy of favouring Muslims. In fact, Latuconsina did not assist ordinary Muslims, but rather aided his clan and cronies.⁴

The New Order development model in the Moluccas was based on a patrimonial structure, which had a patron-client relationship between the central elite as the patron and the local elite as the client (Leirissa, 2000). Leirissa stated that:

During the New Order, the patrimonial relationship between central and local elites was well preserved, because they gained advantage from the alliance. The national elite channelled material advantages to the local region and, on the other hand, the local elite guaranteed the relationship for their own advantage (Leirissa, 2000, p. 56).

Ambon in the Post-Soeharto Transition Period

The changing national political dynamics after the fall of Soeharto and the political pressure on the Indonesian armed forces (TNI) to return to barracks also influenced the situation in Ambon. The TNI attempted to adapt to the spirit of *reformasi*, which expected the security forces to become more professional, to restructure, and to eschew involvement in politics. However, the rise in number of areas of conflict under *reformasi* and the transitional regimes from Habibie to Megawati has been linked by observers with a renewal of national security policy returning the TNI to a prominent role. The change in the role and structure of the TNI is one factor contributing to the outbreak of the conflict. However, changes in the local culture transiting from a traditional system to modernity also contributed to the continuance of the conflict. For example, within Christianity and Islam, past religious practice was purified of its animistic elements and replaced by a monotheistic faith, which believes in one God. In the *Makan Patita* [a traditional meal] reconciliation ceremony, animistic practices such as the drinking of blood and praying to stone and wood is called *Jahiliyah* (barbaric, uncivilised) by Muslims and is regarded as contrary to the Bible among Christians.⁵

⁴ Irwan Patty, a Muslim community leader from Ceram, interview by author, 10 August 2002.

⁵ Muhammad At-Tamimy, Commander of Laskar Amar Ma'rif Nahi Mungkar, interview by author, 4 August 2002.

Old animistic traditions have been displaced in favour of modern beliefs and a rational culture as part of a process accommodating the demands of capitalism in a new Ambonese economy (Bartels 1977, p. 326). Particularly amongst younger generations, older animistic traditions have been forgotten.

A further factor is the political instability, which occurred after the regime change from Soeharto to BJ. Habibie. The fall of Soeharto led to wide-ranging reforms in the structure of national politics. The new national elite, which has emerged has a 'reform' approach to national policy and is favourably disposed towards the political accommodation of regional demands for autonomy. The centralisation of the New Order was replaced by a decentralisation accommodating demands that local (*pribumi*) human resources be fully utilised. The resurgence of local government created regional tensions. The filling of some bureaucratic positions by migrant people under the New Order had alienated indigenous Ambonese, who remained in the majority in the local government.

The issue of the Islamisation of the government bureaucracy surfaced as a consequence of the important role played by ICMI in national politics from 1992 to 1997. A perception spread amongst Christians that an Islamisation of the local bureaucracy was occurring, while Muslims claimed that Christians had maintained their dominance. Under the Akib Latuconsina and Saleh Latuconsina governorships, some strategic positions in the government, traditionally in Christian hands, were transferred to Muslim hands, for example, the new head of the Department of Education and Culture was a Muslim.

The impact of the Asian Financial Crisis on Ambonese communities was actually not as severe as that experienced by other communities in Java. This was because the price of cloves increased over this period. Furthermore, during the conflict religious, ethnic and political identities interacted to varying degrees. In the early stages of the conflict, the issue of ethnicity dominated local politics. It influenced the political approach not only in the period of the conflict, but also in the three years after the conflict. The local bureaucracy was in the hands of the 'sons of the soil' (*pribumi*, or indigenous,) peoples. They took over the positions in the bureaucracy and the private sector previously held by migrants during the New Order. Therefore, as understood at the popular level, the conflict was the result of competition between indigenous Christian and Muslim urban communities over access to economic, political and social resources (Suparlan, 2001: 2). This competition was inflamed by the rhetoric used at the time.

The term '*kotor*' (dirty) was used of people who work in non-office and non-government jobs. Urban Muslims used this term before the conflict to describe rural Christian peasants. It was, as Mearns (1996) has described, a means of distinguishing Muslims and Christians in their work activities and economic culture. It contests Weber's finding of Protestantism's spirit of Capitalism. In Ambon, Muslims had a Capitalist spirit. It was, as Turner (1974) and Binder (1988) have described, an Islamic ideology and culture that was equivalent to the West's approach to development.

Furthermore, the national tensions in the last decade of the New Order contributed to the tension in Ambon. Christians in Eastern Indonesia responded to the Situbondo and Tasikmalaya riots in 1996 and 1997 interpreting them as exemplifying a discrimination against minority Christian groups, which was condoned by the state. Then there were the riots in the Rengasdengklok, West Java, in 1997 followed by the Ketapang, Jakarta, riots in 1998. All of these riots were directed against Christians, who were assumed to playing a dominant role in the Indonesian economy.

Conflict and Current Social Segregation

The transition of Indonesia from the New Order to *Reformasi* period turned into a chaotic country of the Republic of Indonesia. The ethnic and religious conflicts occurred in Maluku, North Maluku, Central Sulawesi, West Kalimantan and Central Kalimantan. Maluku, North Maluku and Central Sulawesi were shifting from ethnic to religious conflicts. Initially the issues of the conflict were protests against migrants who are mostly Muslims from Java and South Sulawesi and Southeast Sulawesi. However, the conflict became framed in religious terms as Christian and Muslim gangs and militia groups took on major roles. For example, Berthy Loupatty chaired a Christian gang called Coker and Ongen Sangaji was a Muslim gangster commander who sent Ambonese Muslims from Jakarta to Ambon in the end of December 1998 prior Eid al Fitri. Ongen operated an Ambonese Muslim gang in Jakarta to work as debt collector and other 'dirty' jobs. From 1999, both Berthy and Ongen instructed his gang members to attack Churches and Mosques respectively, which inflamed tensions between religious communities. Muslims and Christians used to live in the same regions before the conflict.

But after more than three years conflict, they choose to stay separated. Muslims prefer (feel safe) to stay in Muslim villages and Christians stay in Christian villages. In the long term, the segregation has reduced the process of reconciliation. Muslims and Christians only meet each other in public places like government offices and markets. Government and local NGOs attempt to strengthen partnership and cooperation among Muslims and Christians in some programs. However, the sentiments against other groups still continue in government positions and local elections. Local leaders mobilised local community based on religious groups to get political supports in local and national elections. In 2008 governor elections, incumbent Karel Ralahu successfully managed Christian and Muslim votes by asking a local Muslim leader to run as a deputy governor. Ralahu was totally supported by PDIP cum Malukan Protestan Church (*Gereja Protestan Maluku*, GPM) won the 2008 elections. Dirk Thomsa analyses the 2008 governor elections that:

Commitments to either the Christian or the Islamic faith had always been major sources of social identity in Maluku, but it was only in the later years of the New Order that these commitments had become more and more politicised, especially in the context of increasingly tense competition between the two communities over key posts in the bureaucracy. Now that a new political system was about to be crafted, these politicised religious identities spilled over into electoral politics. Most significantly, political parties – emasculated for decades, but now destined to become the most important vehicles to achieve formal political power – took on a decidedly religious character in Maluku (Thomsa 2009, p. 4).

In the elections of 1999, 2004 and 2009 political parties also took advantages by quoting religious sentiments to obtain grass roots support. For example, a Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) parliament member said in the 2004 campaign said that ‘without their humanitarian support from 1999, Muslims could have a trouble in managing their life in the conflict against Christians’.⁶ The sentiments against Christian communities were common topics raised by Muslim parliament candidates in the campaign. The segregation also works in religious life after the conflict.

Mujahidin Ambon, a name of Muslim fighters in Ambon conflict, continue to operate in Ambon (as well as Poso) represented by Ambon veterans married local Muslim women or local Muslims trained in Mujahidin camps. They built Qur’anic Teaching (*Taman Pendidikan Alqur’an*, TPA) and continued to work in traditional markets. They sell herbals and maintain former local Mujahidin commanders in weekly or monthly religious circles. Some Mujahidin Ambon imprisoned in Porong, East Java said that they still have a bad feeling to get unfair treatment and will continue their mission to fight against Christians. They said that ‘Detachment 88, the police anti-terrorism team, only targeted Mujahidin while the Christians who killed Muslims are free. It is really unfair’.⁷ Laskar Jihad also maintains their veterans in Qur’anic Teachings and Mosques managed by *Salafy*’s teachers. They recruited local Muslims and practice their own Islamic teaching interpretations which are different from common Muslim Sunni interpretations. The critiques of *Salafy*’s teachers to local Muslim traditions as *bid’ah* and *Syirk* responded negatively by local Muslims. The radicalisation of Ambonese Muslims are among challenges of how current Muslim interpretations and practices in Ambon could instigate future conflicts.

Conclusion

A long-term segregation of the Muslim and Christians' communities existed in the Ambonese islands even before European settlement. For example, segregation existed between Islamised Ambonese on the Leihitu peninsula and the Leitomor community, who at that time embraced animism. The latter community then converted to Christianity during the Portuguese, and particularly during the Dutch, periods. The discriminatory policy of the Dutch disadvantaged Muslims and favoured Ambonese Christians economically and in terms of educational opportunities, widening the segregation gap. The higher average level of education of the indigenous Ambonese compared with that of their Muslim counterparts enable them to hold them political office and positions in the bureaucracy in the post-independence period. It was supposed that the *Pela* tradition was an important instrument, which could be used to harmonist both religious communities. However, the *Pela* tradition was originally not intended to reconcile religions, but was to be merely the basis of an alliance in times of war and a basis for economic cooperation between two or more *negeris*.

⁶ Interviews in Ambon, July 2004

⁷ Mujahidin Ambon, Porong, East Java, interview by author, 27 July 2012.

However, the New Order used it as a symbol of the harmony between Muslims and Christians in the Ambonese islands. Thus, it was a fragile basis upon which to build strong relations. This became apparent with the changes in the population structure as a result of the centralizations of government policy, especially during the New Order period, when large numbers of transmigrants came from Java, Sumatera and Sulawesi to the Ambonese islands. The proportion of Muslims and Christians in the population changed from Christian domination in the 1970s to Muslim domination in the 1990s. This change was not only in terms of the overall population, but also increasingly paralleled the composition of the government bureaucracy in the central Moluccas. In Ambon city, the rise in transmigration and urbanization marked by the coming of the Butonese, Buginese, Makassarese, and Javanese migrants changed a Christian majority situation to one where there was more of a balance between the Muslim and Christian populations. In the last decade of the New Order, the Asian financial crisis and difficulties in the local economy impacted on Ambon city, resulting in the outbreak of anti-Christian riots in outside Ambon. This created a resistance in Ambon city amongst Christians against Muslims and against the central government. This resistance grew in the later period of the Soeharto regime and erupted into violence after the Soeharto regime fell.

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