Ethno-religious Violence in Indonesia

*Ethno-religious Violence in Indonesia* illustrates in detail how and why two previously harmonious religious communities can descend into violent conflict. Lasting from 1999 until 2000, the conflict in North Maluku, Indonesia, saw the most intense communal violence of Indonesia’s turbulent period of democratization. For almost a year, militias waged a brutal religious war which claimed the lives of nearly 4,000 people. The conflict culminated in ethnic cleansing along lines of religious identity, with approximately 300,000 people fleeing their homes.

Based on four years of research, including almost one year living in North Maluku interviewing combatants, politicians and security personnel among others, the book provides the first comprehensive account of this violence. The accounts of participants and witnesses give the reader the opportunity to better understand the tensions and fears involved in the conflict and begin to grasp the motives of those who kill large numbers of men, women and children. The book provides numerous examples of how different conflict theories can be applied in the analysis of real situations of tensions and violence, illustrating the mutually reinforcing nature of mass level sentiment and elite agency, and the rational and emotive influences on those involved.

This book will be of interest to researchers in Asian studies, conflict studies and religious violence.

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Ethno-religious Violence in Indonesia
From soil to God

Chris Wilson
For Elly, Aislin and Ciara.

And in memory of the thousands who lost their lives in North Maluku.
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Glossary

*adat*  
Tradition

FKPKHU  
North Halmahera Christian Youth Communication Forum

FPI  
*Front Pembela Islam*, or Islamic Defenders Front

GMIH  
*Gereja Masehi Injili Halmahera*, Evangelical Church on Halmahera

GPM  
*Gereja Protestan Maluku*, or Maluku Protestant Church

Hibua Lamo  
System of binding cultural ties between families in North Halmahera

IDP  
Internally Displaced Person

Laskar Jihad  
Islamic militia formed on Java in early 2000

NHM  
Nusa Halmahera Mineral (mining company operating in Malifut area)

Pasukan Jihad  
Islamic militia formed in North Maluku in early 2000

PDI–P  
*Partai Demokrasi Indonesia – Perjuangan*, or Indonesian Democratic Party – Struggle

PP42  
Government Regulation 42 creating Malifut Sub-District

PPP  
*Partai Persatuan Pembangunan*, or United Development Party

RMS  
*Republik Maluku Selatan*, or Republic of South Maluku separatist movement

TNI  
*Tentara Nasional Indonesia*, or Indonesian National Military
Introduction

Behind a mosque in the remote coastal village of Kao in North Maluku, eastern Indonesia, there lies a large stone grave. The remains of seven warriors rest inside the tomb, all members of the Kao ethnic group who died in a clash with Dutch soldiers in the first decade of the twentieth century. The gravesite holds special significance for Kaos. It is the resting place for both Christians and Muslims, a symbol for the Kaos over the past century of their strong ethnic solidarity, regardless of religious differences. For most of the twentieth century this concord was also representative of the North Maluku community as a whole. In 1999, however, this society, which had long prided itself on inter-religious harmony, descended into bloody religious war.

Devastating communal violence often begins with a series of events that in hindsight could easily have been contained. In August 1999 a small ethnic dispute erupted in a village on the large island of Halmahera, to the east of Sulawesi, marking the beginning of a series of clashes that brought horrific consequences to the entire region. Throughout North Maluku, over 3,500 men, women and children were killed by opposing mobs armed with machetes, spears and bows and arrows. Several hundred thousand people were displaced from their homes, and the fighting destroyed much of the region’s housing and infrastructure.

This book attempts to account for this violence. In particular it seeks to explain five aspects of the conflict: why violence began; how it evolved from a small dispute into a religious war; why it reached such a frightening level of intensity; why it spread across the entire province; and why it ceased. This introductory chapter begins with an overview of the violence and its consequences. The second section gives an overview of the existing literature on the conflict.

The conflict: August 1999 to June 2000

Before August 1999, North Maluku had seen half a century of peace and stability. The region, which until September 1999 comprised two relatively remote districts in the north of Maluku Province, was far removed from national politics. While it did not benefit significantly from Indonesia’s economic boom, North Maluku enjoyed relative self sufficiency and good relations between ethnic and religious groups. Even the onset of terrible religious violence in Ambon in the southern part
of the province in January 1999 (discussed in Chapter 2) caused little damage to
inter-religious relations in the region. Yet, in August of that year, just as North
Maluku prepared to become an independent province and reap the benefits of
Indonesia’s new era of political liberalization and regional autonomy, this
harmony was shattered.

On the night of 18 August 1999 two ethnic communities – the Makians,
long-term migrants to the area, and the indigenous Kaos – clashed in a village in
remote Malifut on Halmahera Island (see Map 3.1).1 As dawn broke and the Kao
village of Sosol lay in ruins, thousands of Makians moved on to and quickly
overran neighbouring Wangeotak village. Three Kao men perished in the fighting.
Two months later, just after the inauguration of North Maluku Province, the Kaos
retaliated, driving all Makians from Malifut and destroying their villages. Because
the Kaos were predominantly Christian and the Makians Muslim, the stage was set
for the large-scale religious conflict that was to sweep through North Maluku,
despite the fact religion had been inconsequential to their initial dispute.

Thousands of Makians fled to the provincial capital, Ternate, where retaliatory
violence erupted, as well as on the neighbouring island of Tidore and some areas of
Halmahera. Mobs targeted not just Kaos, but any member of the Christian
minority. Rioters destroyed Christian houses and churches, while Christians fled
to local police and military compounds. Dozens of people were killed, including a
Protestant pastor on the island of Tidore (his body dismembered and burned).
These riots had a far greater impact than the Malifut incident, sending shockwaves
across the province. From this moment, almost the entire North Maluku commu-
nity divided along religious lines. In a classic ‘security dilemma’, communities
began preparations either to defend themselves or, in some cases, to launch
pre-emptive attacks against their neighbours. Over the following months, violence
spread out across the region, affecting Halmahera, Bacan, Morotai and all the
islands in the archipelago.

The violence reached its brutal peak in December 1999 in Tobelo and Galela
Sub-Districts in north Halmahera, which had almost equal populations of Muslims
and Christians. After fighting began in Tobelo City, Muslims took control of the
town for just one night before thousands of Christians, armed with homemade
weapons and bombs, flooded in from rural areas. Over the next two days, these
Christians expelled the entire Muslim community from the town and surrounding
villages. Perhaps a thousand people died in the carnage, including women and
children. This violence immediately flowed into the sub-district of Galela, where
militia attacks quickly divided the area into exclusively Muslim and Christian
enclaves. During this inter-religious violence in north Halmahera, Ternate also
descended again into fighting, this time between Muslims. After these
intra-Muslim clashes ended, the opposing Muslim factions set aside their differ-
ences in order to retaliate against Christian militias on Halmahera. They sought to
legitimize these assaults by reference to the principles of jihad.

The violence finally ended in July 2000 after the fall of the Christian village of
Duma in Galela, which had resisted attacks for six months. Shortly afterwards, in
response to continuing violence in Maluku and North Maluku, President
Abdurrahman Wahid declared a Civil Emergency in the two provinces. Combatants in North Maluku thereafter faced a more effective response from the security forces. Perhaps more importantly, the violence had segregated Christians and Muslims into separate areas of the province, divided by sizeable military contingents, and continued attacks were untenable for the exhausted militia members.

After almost one year of violence, over 3,000 people lay dead. The populations of many villages had been decimated, and Halmahera was littered with mass graves. Innumerable people from both communities remained in hiding in the dense and vast forests of the island. Statistics distributed in March 2000 by the North Maluku Governor’s Office stated that 2,083 people had by that date died during the conflict. Although the local government restated this figure in 2003 as a final estimate, the actual number of deaths was almost certainly higher. Further incidents between March and June saw large loss of life, most notably attacks on the villages of Duma, Makete, Dokulamo and Mamuya in Galela, and the tragic sinking of the *Cahaya Bahari* passenger ship, in which approximately 500 people drowned.

The official statistics do not include an estimated 250 casualties from violence in the sub-district of Payahe in November 1999, nor do they include casualties among the local Islamic militia, the *Pasukan Jihad* (Jihad Force), who were killed outside their home sub-districts.² According to one leader of this militia, approximately 200 mujahid died in North Maluku.³ By July 2000 between 3,000 and 3,500 had died. The large number of missing persons cited in March 2000 (2,315) suggests an even greater death toll.

The Governor’s Office reported that the violence displaced approximately 250,000 people.⁴ Of these, 199,605 were displaced within North Maluku Province and 48,015 were forced to flee to elsewhere in Indonesia. Given that this figure was compiled several months before the end of hostilities, the final figure was probably higher, although most people had already fled their homes by the time these figures were collated. Most Muslim Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)⁵ were evacuated to Ternate, almost doubling that city’s population to approximately 180,000. Some also sought refuge outside North Maluku in South Sulawesi. Perhaps 15,000 Christian IDPs fled to the Christian-dominated city of Tobelo in north Halmahera. The majority of Christians, however, went to the province of North Sulawesi (see Map 0.1) and were settled by the local government in camps in the cities of Manado and Bitung. In 2005, many IDPs remained in North Maluku and North Sulawesi. Many have settled around their displacement camps in areas such as Tobelo, rather than returning home. Others feel unable to return home because of a lack of government assistance, or because they fear reprisals or new outbreaks of violence.

North Maluku’s infrastructure, particularly on Halmahera, was devastated. According to the March Governor’s Office report, 18,022 houses, 97 mosques, 106 churches and 110 schools were destroyed. The final number of buildings destroyed was undoubtedly much higher. Most villages located in a sub-district dominated by the opposing group were destroyed entirely. Combatants destroyed bridges, telephone poles, fishing boats, warehouses, gardens and other infrastructure crucial to North Maluku’s economic and social life.
4 Ethno-Religious Violence in Indonesia

To some extent, the conflict in North Maluku also affected national politics and society. The intense violence in Tobelo in late December 1999, which involved the deaths of almost a thousand Muslims and was described in often inflammatory terms in the national media, stimulated the formation in Java of a large Muslim militia, the *Laskar Jihad*. This organization, which gained national and international notoriety, became involved in communal violence in Maluku Province, although not, as this study will show, in North Maluku.

**Studies of the conflict and remaining questions**

This book seeks to account for this tragedy. What caused violence to start and to escalate is a question not just for Indonesia, although the social, economic and political costs of the conflict were severe for the immediate region and archipelagic nation, as discussed above. The causes of a violent communal conflict of this magnitude are of relevance to the global community. In addition, the fact that the violence occurred during Indonesia’s transition from an authoritarian political system is a reminder of the pitfalls of rapid democratization and decentralization. Similarly, the fact that most of the violence occurred between Muslims and Christians presents lessons for the relationship between these two communities.

In order to capture the complexity, temporal dynamism and geographical variation within the North Maluku conflict this study is divided into five chronological phases. The phases are essentially new outbreaks of violence, each involving several unique political, economic and social variables. In some cases, these events involved riots by a majority group against local minorities. In others, clashes took place between relatively evenly balanced forces. While each new outbreak was influenced by those preceding it, each also had its own specific dynamics and causes. The events in these five phases defined the trajectory of the conflict as a whole, determining how it began, escalated, spread, was exploited by political actors and ended in religious war. The phases are listed in Table 1.

The following section discusses each phase in turn, beginning with a summary of the existing literature on the events in question. Commentators, the majority of whom are from North Maluku, have compiled a substantial body of literature on

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<th>Phase</th>
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the conflict. However, most studies are short in length and analyze the entire conflict in just a few pages, leaving the reader confused as to which issues were central to the first outbreak of violence, and which to later stages in its development. For this reason, the following discussion of the published literature on the conflict is divided into individual scholars’ analyses of each main event in the conflict, rather than presenting their conclusions as a whole. The majority of studies also suffer from a lack of objectivity: they are written on the whole by local commentators and in many cases by individuals directly affected by the violence. Most present either a Christian or Muslim perspective, allocating blame solely to the opposing religious community.  

The discussion of each phase below will then outline the shortcomings in existing published accounts of the events and point to questions that remain unanswered. Each section will also outline the theoretical frameworks used to help analyze each main development. I have utilized these theories where relevant throughout the study and will introduce them briefly below.

**Initiation – Malifut**

All commentators on the conflict point to the fact that the first violence in North Maluku, that in Malifut in August 1999, erupted just as the local government approved a new sub-district in the area. However, most disagree on how and why the formation of this new sub-district led to conflict. For some, the destruction that took place in August and October was the culmination of growing tension between the two local ethnic communities – the indigenous Kaos and the Makians, who had been moved to the area by the local government two decades before. M. Kordi writes that the economic success of the migrants relative to that of the Kaos caused inequality, jealousy and inter-ethnic tension. The Indonesian sociologist and native of North Maluku, Tamrin Tomagola, takes the long-term tensions argument further, stating that the area of Malifut had become the centre of a struggle between Christianity and Islam on Halmahera. According to Tomagola, Christians believed that, in relocating the Makian community from Makian Island to Malifut in 1975, the local district government had deliberately aimed to halt the southward expansion of Christianity. According to Tomagola, this perception contributed to the level of friction in 1999. 

Others claim that the creation of the new sub-district was in itself a sufficiently contentious issue to provoke hostilities. The presence of a large goldmine in the area, operated since 1997 by the Australian company Newcrest, has led many analysts to conclude that economic competition played a crucial role. Most analysts argue that the two communities fought for control of this resource and the Kaos eventually destroyed Malifut as a means of eliminating competition. Indeed, the Ternate academic, Smith Alhadar, ignores the initial riot in August, claiming that the first violence was that in October, when the Kaos, jealous of the Makians for dominating employment at the mine, attacked and destroyed Malifut. The North Malukan Christian academic, Jan Nanere, asserts, however, that neither gold nor jealousy was the primary contentious issue involved in the creation of the new sub-district. More
importantly, the new sub-district violated long-established ethnic boundaries recognized by the indigenous Kaos.\textsuperscript{14}

Given that the first Malifut incident occurred while the North Maluku elite jockeyed for political power in the new province, most analysts see the initial outbreak in Malifut, and the conflict in general, as connected to this wider political competition. Alhadar writes that ‘just as the administrative wheels began to turn in mid-1999 to split off North Maluku as a province of its own, the conflict began to escalate’, and that the ‘riots must be seen in the context of a government plan at the time to hold local elections for a new provincial parliament in June 2000’.\textsuperscript{15} The International Crisis Group also concludes that the ‘separation of North Maluku … stimulated rivalry by creating the need to elect a new governor and this seems to have been one of the driving factors behind the initial outbreak in Halmahera’.\textsuperscript{16}

Nevertheless, most analysts disagree on how this political competition caused violence on Halmahera, and which individuals were most culpable. Tomagola claims that the conflict resulted in part from the increasingly desperate attempts of the Sultan of Ternate to become governor of the new province.\textsuperscript{17} The Sultan faced a strong challenge for the governorship from the District Head of Central Halmahera, Bahar Andily, who, according to Tomagola, was assured of the support of the majority of the Muslim community, which, according to Tomagola, constituted 87 per cent of the provincial population. The Sultan, although a Muslim, was largely considered to rely on Christian support. Tomagola relates that the Sultan of Ternate sought to shore up this Christian support by promising Christians on Halmahera that the Makian migrants would be removed from Malifut, and claims that this promise encouraged the Kaos to turn to violence when the new sub-district was created in Malifut.\textsuperscript{18} Nanere also argues that the violence in Malifut was provoked by members of the elite in Ternate. However, he does not lay the blame on the Sultan of Ternate, pointing more to provocative statements by the Mayor of Ternate and the head of the bureaucracy (Regional Secretary).\textsuperscript{19} He does not make clear why these individuals sought to cause violence on Halmahera.

Several analysts have argued that political competition was made more volatile by a revival of the long-standing rivalry between the two historic and powerful sultanates of Ternate and Tidore, and that, in supporting the Kaos in their dispute with the Makians, the Sultan of Ternate was thereby attempting to maintain support in the sultanate’s traditional area of influence.\textsuperscript{20} The International Crisis Group argued that ‘on the provincial level, seeds of conflict can be found in the centuries-old political rivalry between the Sultans of Ternate and Tidore’.\textsuperscript{21} Alhadar agreed that ‘Tidore people began to worry that their traditional enemies on Ternate were preparing to revive the cultural dominance they had enjoyed in the past in order to justify a resurgence of their political power.’\textsuperscript{22}

Because North Maluku was still part of Maluku Province in August 1999, most analysts have seen the Malifut clash as a consequence of the inter-religious violence that had gripped the provincial capital, Ambon, for most of that year.\textsuperscript{23} For example, the International Crisis Group reports that, after a resurgence of conflict in Ambon, the violence then ‘spread in October to Malifut on Halmahera Island’.\textsuperscript{24} Jacques Bertrand also claims that the conflict in North Maluku was a
consequence of the ongoing violence in Maluku. Citing Tomagola, Bertrand suggests that not only was Malifut the site of competition between Muslims and Christians for control of Halmahera, but that Christians were concerned about the success of Muslims in national and local politics. According to Bertrand, stories of the violence in Ambon aggravated these tensions. He concludes that ‘it is not coincidental that the violence erupted after months of conflict between Christians and Muslims in other parts of the region’ and ‘thus local issues, while important, provided the trigger and the filter through which tensions at the national and regional level were expressed.’

There is therefore a range of, often conflicting, explanations of the start of the conflict. Despite these conclusions, a clear picture has not been provided as to why the dispute had a violent, as opposed to a non-violent outcome. Under the process of pemekaran (literally ‘blossoming’, but more appropriately ‘division’), the Indonesian government has, since 1999, created a large number of new sub-districts and districts and several provinces, but very few have descended into violence as a result. It is not clear what lent this case such a highly affective character. Why did violence become accepted as necessary and/or legitimate by large sections of each community, when it had been largely absent from North Maluku before this incident?

Did the creation of the new province of North Maluku, and the ensuing competition for political power, play a major role in stimulating violence, as most analysts have suggested? It is not apparent how important, comparatively, were the political changes occurring at the national and local levels. To what extent did several decades of authoritarian rule lay the foundations for the violence in North Maluku in 1999 to 2000? How important was the transition from an authoritarian to a democratic political system in 1998 and 1999? For example, it is not clear whether the military or other individuals or groups central to the New Order regime of President Suharto provoked violence in order to retain power, as has been suggested in the case of conflicts in other areas of Indonesia. Answering these questions may provide an answer to the question of why the violence occurred when it did.

The Kao–Makian relationship itself requires examination. Did the two communities have a history of antagonism and/or violence and if so for what reason? Did inequality or other long-standing social, political and economic structures such as segregation and prejudice create the conditions for violence? It is unclear how important religion was in this incident that was to eventually ignite religious war in the region. For example, it remains conjecture that Malifut had become the front line in ongoing religious competition between the Protestant Church and Muslims in North Maluku. In what way did the ongoing religious violence in nearby Ambon (discussed in Chapter 2) contribute to the dispute?

The human agency involved in these riots has not yet been adequately uncovered. Analysts have discussed the broader socio-political environment without identifying the actions and motivations of those involved. The existing literature on the conflict does not make clear why the Makians sought an autonomous sub-district in Malifut and why the Kaos mobilized and resisted in such an emotive manner. Were only local people involved in the initial incident, or were people
from outside the area present, and, if so, did they intentionally or otherwise provoke violence? It remains uncertain whether district government officials incited violence in Malifut or why they would have an interest in doing so, particularly given that the area produced a large amount of revenue for the local government.

I will argue in Chapter 3 that the initial violence in North Maluku was not connected in any significant way to either competition for political power at the provincial level or the conflict in Ambon and religious animosity. The violence centred around two primary issues – the control of territory and government partiality. Several theoretical frameworks are used in this analysis. The literature on social movements, particularly that on counter-mobilization, explains how a conflict might unfold when an under-represented community perceives its rights or interests to have been undermined by the mobilization of a rival community which has apparent government support. I will refer to Monica Toft and others to elucidate why and how competition over territory can lead to violence, and the theory of Donald Horowitz on the impact of invidious group comparisons. The chapter highlights a weakness in the ‘economic causes of civil war’ or ‘greed’ thesis, and other models of conflict based on quantitative datasets. The analysis demonstrates that, while lucrative natural resources may be present in a conflict area, they are not necessarily central to the outbreak of violence. This illustrates the danger in imputing too much weight to the presence of objective conditions for conflict without allowing for the importance of subjective understandings and human agency. Even in those cases with clear economic agendas, material considerations alone do not to lead to violence, but only do so in combination with issues more commonly classified as ‘grievance’.

Escalation – descent into religious conflict

In just a few weeks, the violence in North Maluku escalated from a localized dispute over land into violence targeted at any member of the opposing religion. Most analysts agree the violence took on a religious character only after the distribution of a forged letter ostensibly sent from the Protestant synod in Maluku to the Protestant Church in North Maluku. The letter, entitled ‘Bloody Sosol’ after one of the Christian villages destroyed in Malifut, appeared to be planning for the Kaos’ attack on Malifut. Further, it purportedly proved that the attack was part of wider a strategy of ‘Christianization’ of North Maluku. Most commentators conclude that this letter provoked rage among Muslims in Ternate and Tidore, leading them to attack Christians alongside whom they had lived for years. For example, Alhadar states the letter ‘was signed by Rev. Sammy Titaley … it urged Christians to convert Muslims, who were described as “ignorant”. Little wonder people on Tidore were provoked.’ The assumption that this letter provoked anti-Christian rioting in November has not been questioned.

While the letter was clearly forged, its provenance has remained uncertain, and therefore the intentions behind it are unclear. Alhadar raises the possibility that the letter was disseminated by individuals connected with the former New Order
Yet he and most other analysts give only scant consideration to the letter’s origin. Indeed, Bubandt maintains that it is important not to analyze the letter just as a means of riot instigation. He claims that the origin of the letter is not as significant as understanding how and why it was believed by so many. In addressing this question, Bubandt stresses the significance of the ‘social and discursive universe within which ordinary people are mobilized during conflict’. In post-Suharto Indonesia, there prevailed a discourse of conspiracy and paranoia, with which the contents of the letter resonated. In Bubandt’s opinion the first violence in Tidore was a ‘spontaneous reaction to the rumour about a Christian conspiracy rather than a long planned assault’.36

Yet the origins of and intentions behind this letter are surely crucial to understanding the escalation and trajectory of the conflict. If the ‘Bloody Sosol’ letter was not from the Protestant Church, who wrote and disseminated it and for what reason? The apparent impact of the letter must also be critically re-examined. Was, as most analysts claim, the wider Muslim community really provoked into violence by it and other forms of propaganda? If so, it is not clear whether intervention by parties with an interest in a wider dispute was necessary to achieve this outcome. Was there either an existing animosity between Muslims and Christians in North Maluku, or a more radical religious ideology that played a role in this widening of the violence? No commentator has yet adequately explained why the large numbers of national security personnel present in the district capitals did not halt the riots.

Several analysts have documented how and why small incidents of relevance to only a very restricted group of people (such as individual disputes or crime) can rapidly evolve into sectarian violence. Detailed case studies in other regions demonstrate that the descent into sectarian violence often follows intervention by actors with an interest in a wider, more emotive conflict. Stanley Tambiah’s concepts of ‘transvaluation and focalization’ and Paul Brass’s ‘institutionalized riot systems’ shed much light on the transformation of the Malifut clash into a religious conflict.37 As conceived by these scholars, certain actors portray minor incidents as having major communal significance in order to gain political or other advantage. The use of such concepts will assist in demonstrating how the North Maluku conflict changed in character and escalated to a much higher level of intensity.

However, the analysis presented in Chapter 4 also cautions against overemphasizing the importance of propaganda in the escalation of conflict. Propaganda is sometimes disseminated to make communal rioting appear as a sudden eruption of anger, as my analysis demonstrates was the case in the anti-Christian rioting in Ternate. The rioting was carried out by those seeking retaliation for the destruction of Malifut, facilitated by individuals with a political interest in sectarian tension, rather than by those provoked by propaganda. Once rioting started in Ternate, numbers swelled for several reasons: the security forces failed to act against rioters, convincing people that they could act with impunity; excitement spread, particularly among young men; and for some, the targeting of
churches and other elements of the violence appeared to confirm that this was indeed religious conflict.

**Dispersion – spread across the province**

In late 1999 and early 2000, following the riots in Ternate and Tidore, violence broke out in almost every area of North Maluku. Chapter 5 examines how violence spread throughout the province to previously unaffected areas, by focusing on the cases of Tobelo and Galela Sub-Districts. There are several reasons for this focus: Tobelo witnessed the most intense violence in the entire conflict; the area was the location of the largest population centres on Halmahera; and the area possessed relatively equal Christian and Muslim populations. During the terrible violence in Tobelo and Galela, combatants frequently targeted defenceless people, including women, children and the elderly. In many cases, corpses were mutilated and disembowelled. This practice was sometimes followed by the consumption of the body parts, particularly the hearts, of victims.

Most local analysts concur that Christians initiated attacks against Muslims in Tobelo after being provoked by the preceding months of violence elsewhere. Tomagola writes that the ‘initial attacks (in Tobelo) were launched simultaneously by the Christians’. Alhadar agrees: ‘in response to Muslim attacks on Christians in Ternate, a coalition of Christian tribes in northern Halmahera around Tobelo and Galela on 26 December attacked Muslims living there, eventually resulting in the loss of probably thousands of innocent lives.’ Ahmad and Oesman relate that local Christians, helped by thousands of Christian IDPs from the violence in November, attacked and drove Muslims from Tobelo. According to these authors, Christians launched the attack so as to remove any obstacle to their control of the valuable economic potential of the sub-district.

The International Crisis Group also claims that Christians initiated the violence, although motivated by security concerns rather than anger. The group’s report states that in Tobelo ‘local Christians went on the offensive against the local Muslim minority … fuelled by rumours of planned “cleansing operations” on both sides’. Bubandt also concludes that ‘conspiratorial fears that the opposing side was planning their wholesale eradication motivated the Christian attacks on Muslim villages in Tobelo.’ Contrary to this majority view, Jan Nanere claims that local Muslims initiated the violence in Tobelo Sub-District, having planned the attack after the successful expulsion of Christians from Ternate. According to Nanere, because they were the minority in Tobelo, Muslims had arranged for reinforcements to arrive from their co-religionists in Ternate and Tidore. However, this assistance did not arrive (with tragic consequences for Tobelo Muslims) because of violence that broke out at the same time in Ternate.

As most analyses of the violence in Tobelo are derived from sources in Muslim-dominated areas such as Ternate, the widespread conclusion that Christians initiated violence in Tobelo must be reassessed. Did Christians launch pre-emptive attacks against Muslims and for what reason? To what extent were the attacks a consequence of the ‘reframing’ of the conflict in religious terms by actors
in Ternate? It is uncertain how important were local animosities and interests in places such as Tobelo and Galela in the spread of violence compared to the religious tension engulfing the region. It is also necessary to uncover who played a role in the spread of violence to Tobelo and Galela, and how and why the violence was so intense in this area, which was previously characterized by inter-religious harmony.

Chapter 5 demonstrates that a feeling of insecurity prevalent among both religious communities was crucial to the outbreak of violence. The chapter begins with a discussion of two bodies of conflict theory known as the (physical) Security Dilemma and the Societal Security Dilemma. A synthesis of these two theories provides several insights into the spread of violence to Tobelo and Galela Sub-Districts. Concerns among both communities exacerbated one another, causing increased belligerence between Muslims and Christians and increased legitimacy for the more militant actors in society. My analysis suggests it was these concerns that pushed the two communities towards violence, and neither community deliberately sought to launch pre-emptive attacks.

That said, in my discussion of the violence in these sub-districts I have attempted to move away from attributing cause solely to the security dilemma. While this situation certainly stimulates rising militancy, human agency is essential to any complete explanation: it is the acts of militants and other individuals, some of them unintended, which explain the terrible events. It is harder to explain the atrocities witnessed in the two areas. In attempting to do so I will use the arguments of Natalie Zemon Davis, R Scott Appleby and Mark Juergensmeyer. I do not agree with the apparent conclusion of these and other authors that the nature of religion necessarily facilitates extreme violence more than ethnic, class or other ideologies. However, I do conclude that religious sentiment exacerbated the atmosphere of anger and fear that characterized Tobelo in December and did play a role in much of the brutality that occurred.

Political exploitation – intra-community conflict

Commentators have paid little attention to the apparent paradox of intra-Muslim violence which took place in Ternate at the same time as inter-religious conflict engulfed the rest of the province. Those commentators who have addressed these events conclude that they were the result of political competition, and assert that the Sultan of Ternate and his palace guards were directly responsible for this clash. Tomagola maintains that, like the conflict in Malifut, the violence in Ternate also resulted from the Sultan’s failing attempt to assume dominance in the new province. Other commentators suggest that a rising swell of animosity had built up against the Sultan largely because of the aggressive behaviour of his traditional guards towards migrants. The International Crisis Group asserts that the violence against the Sultan and his traditional guards occurred because he had been labelled anti-Islamic for protecting Christians during the earlier November riot. Alhadar recounts that, after hearing that Christians had massacred Muslims in Tobelo, Muslims in Ternate attacked the Sultan’s guards, whom they accused of siding...
with Christians in the earlier riots. Muslims from Tidore, angered at the destruction of houses owned by Tidore migrants in Ternate, and fearful of a resurgent Ternate sultanate, also mobilized against the Ternate Sultan. According to this argument, the Sultan of Tidore was directly responsible for this mobilization that overthrew the Sultan of Ternate.

This intra-Muslim violence clearly demonstrates the existence of several layers to the North Maluku conflict. Religion was certainly not the only divide along which violence was fought. Yet the responsibility and agency involved in the riots requires further examination. The almost universal blame placed on the losing party in this conflict, the Sultan of Ternate, and the total absolution of those who subsequently assumed power in the province as a result, suggest a critical reappraisal of the clashes is required. Was this conflict a direct outcome of the Sultan of Ternate’s support for Kaos and Christians and the way his traditional guards treated Makians, Tidores and other migrants? Or was it directly connected to the struggle for political power in the province? If the violence was a symptom of elite-level competition, to what extent was it a manifestation of the long-standing rivalry between the two sultanates?

Contrary to most analyses, I conclude that several political rivals of the Sultan of Ternate exploited the emotions aroused by the wider conflict in the region in order to undermine the Sultan’s increasing political dominance. The chapter will also utilize the claims of Jack Snyder, Paul Brass and Steven Wilkinson that members of the elite often stimulate sectarian animosity for political purposes.

**Religious war – ethnic cleansing in the name of God**

In an era in which militant Islam has become such a focus of attention, the large Muslim militia formed in North Maluku in 2000, and its campaign against Christian villages on Halmahera, have received surprisingly little analysis. Most observers of the conflict agree the militia was formed in response to the killing of Muslims in Tobelo and elsewhere. Several analysts claim the militia was joined by members of the *Laskar Jihad*, the Java-based militia formed after the Tobelo violence. Tomagola asserts that a fourth surge of violence began in May 2000 ‘with the arrival of around 8,000 Lasykar Jihad from Ambon, South Celebes and Java’. The International Crisis Group claims that *Laskar Jihad* advisers ‘introduced a centralized command for the local jihad’.

No analyses of the North Maluku conflict provide detailed information regarding the formation, constitution, funding and leadership of this militia, however. Was the militia assisted by large numbers of fighters from outside the province or was it primarily or exclusively local? Which national or regional radical Muslim organizations were involved in the militia, if any? For what reason did the militia’s two main operations in the areas of Malifut and Galela have such different outcomes, with a marked lack of success in the former and the successful destruction of several large Christian villages in the latter? Finally, the literature on North Maluku contains few explanations of why the militia disbanded in June 2000 even though Christians continued to control the large sub-districts of Tobelo and Kao.
What were the primary motivations of the militia personnel? To what extent were the Pasukan Jihad and Christian militias in Kao and Galela motivated by religion? To what extent did sentiments of jihad motivate Muslim militia members (for example a desire to defend Muslims and/or spread the Islamic faith in North Maluku)? The chapter begins with a theoretical discussion of the capacity of religion to mobilize people for violence. It then demonstrates that the militia was almost entirely local in composition and goals and no external militias became strongly involved in the conflict. The fact that no external militia became involved in the conflict is explained by the overwhelming numerical dominance of Muslims in the region. The analysis will conclude that, while many other influences are perhaps more important than religion in provoking violence, religion cannot be discounted completely as a motivation for those involved, or as a means of facilitating collective action.

**Additional questions**

Several other general questions will be addressed throughout the book. In particular, a further question concerns why the conflict was possible. In a state long characterized as authoritarian in its response to security threats, why did national security forces not manage to control the violence? This question is particularly pertinent with regard to phases of the conflict during which small numbers of rioters faced large numbers of armed security personnel, and particularly when the latter possessed adequate intelligence that rioting was imminent. It is unclear whether these forces lacked the necessary capacity or political will to deal effectively with the riots. To what extent did national factors such as democratization and the military’s loss of influence nationally explain their lack of resolve? It also remains to be seen whether the security forces provoked, became complicit in, or exploited the violence in North Maluku as commentators have claimed they did elsewhere in Indonesia, and if so, for what reasons.

A further question considered throughout this study is what is known as the ‘free-rider’ dilemma. Why did individuals and communities across North Maluku choose to risk their own death and the destruction of their property, especially when collective action by others was likely to provide benefits to them even without their participation? Did coercion, financial incentives or other factors play a role in their decisions to take part in the conflict? How important were ethnic and religious loyalties in mobilizing people to risk their lives?

**Structure of the book**

The rest of the study examines in depth these peaks of violence across the region, some involving one-sided pogroms against minorities, others more evenly balanced clashes between two heavily armed militias. I discuss in detail the factors behind each phase, their interconnectedness and also the way each new event expanded the issues being fought over and drew in a greater range of participants. The book will explore the conditions in the region before the conflict and the
causes of the initial violent incident. It will also illustrate how and why the violence rapidly evolved from a local border dispute into province-wide religious conflict. Each chapter critically evaluates prevailing assumptions about the phase of the conflict under discussion.

Chapter 1 outlines the analytical approach taken in the study. It discusses two lines of analytical debate that are often implied in the conflict literature. The first involves the relative importance of elite leadership and mass-level factors in violent conflict, and the second concerns the relative role of rationality on one hand and emotion and identity on the other in motivating combatants. The chapter suggests that in sometimes presenting these phenomena in dichotomous terms, many current theoretical models do not adequately capture the complexity of internal conflicts. The chapter also discusses how, when analyzing an entire conflict involving a number of events and spanning a considerable time period and geographical space, the analyst must consider a great deal of temporal and geographical variation.
This book seeks to account for the bloodshed and destruction in North Maluku from 1999 to 2000. It explores why violence broke out in a region which had seen decades of peaceful coexistence between ethnic and religious communities. It also seeks to explain the trajectory of the conflict: why it transformed from a local dispute into religious violence; how and why the initial incident sparked death and mayhem across an entire province; and, finally, why it ended as abruptly as it had begun. Within these primary foci are several secondary, yet crucial questions. The study examines what motivated those involved and how organized the violence was. It asks whether religion and religious identity played a major role in the violence. It seeks to explain how such devastation could happen in a state which for generations had harshly prevented large-scale domestic disturbances, as well as where responsibility lies for this tragedy.

This chapter outlines the analytical and methodological approach taken to answering these questions. The analysis presented throughout this book is based on two main considerations – the need to recognize first the complex interaction of structural influences and human agency; and second the dynamism and geographical variation involved in violent conflict. A detailed account of a single case of large-scale violent conflict requires an inclusive approach – one that recognizes the mutually influential role of elite agency and socio-political conditions, and of instrumentalism, emotion and identity, and that pays close attention to changes over time and to local detail.

Lines of debate in conflict study

Elite agency vs. mass phenomena

A central debate in conflict study concerns the relative importance of elite instigation versus mass-level phenomena in the onset and trajectory of violence. Within this debate are several key questions relevant to this study: is violent conflict most often spontaneous or coordinated? How causally important is any provocation and organization that does occur before riots and other violent events? Why do ordinary community members follow their leaders into conflict?

Time and again commentators have uncovered what appears to be intentional
instigation of violent conflict by powerful individuals seeking to gain or retain power or economic advantage.\textsuperscript{1} V. P. Gagnon asserts that in the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s, a wide coalition of ‘conservatives in the Serbian party leadership, local and regional party elites … orthodox Marxist intellectuals … and parts of the nationalist army provoked a conflict along ethnic lines’.\textsuperscript{2} He concludes that ‘violent conflict along ethnic cleavages is provoked by elites in order to create a domestic political context where ethnicity is the only politically relevant identity.’\textsuperscript{3} John Mueller has argued that supposedly ‘ethnic’ war is more often the action of thugs employed by members of the elite to instigate conflict.\textsuperscript{4} When several theorists pointed to what they saw as an upsurge in New Wars since the end of the Cold War, a key component of this new type of conflict was the economic predations of elites. These elites do not enjoy wide societal support, unlike ‘old wars’ which were characterized by widespread support for the ideologies espoused by leaders.\textsuperscript{5}

Some elite-based theories of violent conflict have strong intellectual foundation in the Resource Mobilization/Social Movements literature. Social Movements theorists claim that because discontent and grievance are almost always present in society, they cannot adequately explain mobilization.\textsuperscript{6} More important to the emergence and success of a social movement is an increase in available resources. Members of the elite who are able to organize money and labour efficiently, and frame the group’s goals, are crucial to the emergence and sustainability of a viable social movement.\textsuperscript{7} John McCarthy and Mayer Zald quote Turner and Killian, that ‘there is always enough discontent in any society to supply the grass-roots support for a movement if the movement is effectively organized.’\textsuperscript{8} Doug McAdam argues that this focus on the importance of the elite in the Social Movements school stemmed from a belief that politics, in America as elsewhere, is fundamentally oligarchic. The vast majority of people enjoy little influence or power, while a small group of the elite control political, social and economic life.\textsuperscript{9}

For some analysts, therefore, elite agency can be considered the main cause of violence, with little explanatory weight resting with the conditions prevalent before violent conflict. Benjamin Valentino asserts that ‘the remaining permissive conditions necessary for mass killing have been relatively common across states, culture and time. Even when leaders with an interest in violence have found such conditions absent, it has been remarkably easy to create them.’\textsuperscript{10} In his thesis, small numbers carry out the violence and little societal support is necessary – all that is required is for the wider population not to physically oppose the killings.\textsuperscript{11} For Valentino, ‘the search for the causes of mass killing should begin with the capabilities, interests, ideas, and strategies of groups and individuals in positions of political and military power.’\textsuperscript{12}

Conversely, many analysts of conflict eschew this focus on the behaviour of leaders to show the importance of mass-level phenomena. In this view, violence is seen as largely spontaneous, stemming from the strain built up by unjust, unequal or otherwise contentious structural conditions. This tension is eventually ignited into violence, often by small incidents. Some of the social structures commonly seen as causing, or at least facilitating, conflict include: economic and political inequality;\textsuperscript{13} a lack of networks that span the ethnic or religious divide;\textsuperscript{14} and a
country’s reliance on extractable natural resources. Sudden changes in long-standing socio-economic and political structures are also frequently seen as important causes of conflict. Examples include: the feelings of insecurity associated with the collapse of national order; and changes in the relative socio-economic situations of two ethnic or religious communities. The motives and actions of the participants in conflict are largely determined by prevailing structural conditions.

The Security Dilemma concept is a particularly influential structuralist explanation of collective violence. With origins in International Relations Realist theory, the Security Dilemma concept claims that in the absence of any overarching authority communities may become wary of the intentions of other groups. Accordingly, one or more of the groups may take measures to ensure their own security, thereby threatening the other group, which in turn takes similar measures. Despite the absence of any real intention to initiate violence, this insecurity spiral may none the less lead to conflict.

Another prominent general explanation of conflict based on the presence of mass-level phenomena is the concept of Relative Deprivation. Associated most closely with Ted Robert Gurr’s Why Men Rebel, Relative Deprivation asserts that aggression results from frustration. Gurr argued that two main forms of deprivation are important causes of frustration – decremental relative deprivation (from declining capabilities) and aspirational relative deprivation (where aspirations increase but the capabilities for achieving these goals do not rise accordingly). The greater the intensity of deprivation, the greater the violence.

Taking a more synthetic approach to the role of elites and mass-level phenomena, but still very much emphasizing the importance of the latter, is the work of Donald Horowitz. Horowitz writes that riots can be located anywhere along a spectrum of organization from highly coordinated to spontaneous. However, he generally gives causal precedence to mass-level sentiment. In his two classic texts of conflict study, Ethnic Groups in Conflict and The Deadly Ethnic Riot, Horowitz presents a common theme – that conflict stems ‘above all from the struggle for relative group worth’. Riots will invariably enjoy wide support and legitimacy within the community. ‘What the evidence shows is that most riots seem to be unorganized, partially organized and partially spontaneous, or organized by ephemeral leadership that springs up to respond to events as they happen, often suddenly. Most riots, in other words, consist of angry violence.’ Violence thus produces organization, perhaps more than vice versa … Most of the time, organization seems to take a back seat to passionate killing. ‘The amalgam of purpose and brutality reflects the spontaneous quality of riot behaviour, which proceeds not in response to government orders but in response to the heat of the moment and the feelings of the participants.’

Reflecting the organization–spontaneity divide within conflict study, some theorists have asserted that different cases of communal violence can be characterized as either elite-led or mass-led. Stuart Kaufmann concludes that mass-led conflict results when mass hostility and fear triggers spontaneous outbreaks of violence. In elite-led violence, elites ‘intentionally cause both mass hostility and
a security dilemma. David Keen also distinguishes between ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ conflicts. Underlying much of the literature on the role of elite instigation and mass-level conditions in causing violence is an assumption that elites are removed from the ‘irrational’ influences operating at the societal level. When elites organize violence, they do so for rational political or economic reasons, not because of rage, injustice or prejudice. Mass-level conflicts stem from less rational sources, however – frustration, hostility and fear. The motivations of those who organize and engage in violence represent a second major analytical question informing this study.

Rationality vs. affect and identity

When considering what factors are most likely to motivate participants to carry out violence, analysts often emphasize one of two types of motivation – the rational calculation of interests (utility maximization or instrumentalism) or emotional and/or identity-related factors. Proponents of rational choice sometimes recognize the role of emotion in conflict, and those espousing affective explanations allow a degree of instrumentalism in the violence. Yet most analysts give causal precedence to one or other form of motivation.

A number of analysts have presented persuasive accounts of violence grounded in the theory of Rational Choice. Despite the spontaneous and irrational appearance of conflict, these commentators point to the rationality of those involved, suggesting that political, economic or other interests are concealed by the rhetoric of grievance and identity. While recognizing the role of ethnic solidarity and emotion, some conclude that these phenomena are ultimately the product of material competition. Susan Olzak asserts that competition increases as migration or other factors bring groups into contact in an environment of declining resources. In this situation, ethnic identity becomes more salient, events seemingly attached to ethnicity take on a far greater significance and spontaneous collective action along ethnic lines is promoted. When explaining why some communities seem to be targeted more than others in collective violence, even when other groups compete more strongly for economic goods, Olzak asserts that this paradox is due to different forms of competition between different groups.

A major question facing the proponents of rational choice is what is known as the ‘free-rider dilemma’. Even if one accepts that the decision to go to war is based on a calculation of one’s personal interests, why would individuals and communities choose to risk their own death and the destruction of their property when collective action by others will provide them with the same benefits even without their participation? James Fearon and David Laitin provide several explanations, strongly grounded in instrumentalism, of why actors sometimes engage in violent conflict when it is clearly of low utility maximization. First, they point to the fact that violent behaviour is rare – inter-ethnic cooperation is the norm. This stability is maintained by ‘inter-ethnic policing’ in which communities monitor the behaviour of their own members so as to avoid the catastrophe of violent conflict with another group. Any conflict that does occur is largely explained by information
failures and commitment problems between two parties meaning they are unable to reach a negotiated settlement.\textsuperscript{34}

As discussed above, several observers have concluded that, in many cases of conflict, elites have provoked tension and violence with clear goals. Elites are seen as provoking or organizing violence so as to undermine political or economic rivals, reach or retain political office or prevent fractionalization of their community during elections. Gagnon asserts that the ethnic violence in the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s was ‘a purposeful and rational strategy planned by those most threatened by changes to the structure of economic and political power’. Rational motives also appear to drive many ordinary participants in violence. Stathis Kalyvas claims that ‘a key motive (in civil war violence) is settling private scores.’\textsuperscript{35}

For some, including Benjamin Valentino and Kalyvas, even the intense violence and atrocities common to civil war have strategic or instrumental roles. Kalyvas asserts that much of the violence in civil war is coercive, carried out by governments and insurgent groups to control populations and eliminate defection.\textsuperscript{36} Similarly, Valentino has concluded that ethnocide and genocide are often last resorts designed by a small group of powerful leaders to deal with minorities seen as threats to national security.\textsuperscript{37} He provides the example of how Hitler and the Nazi leadership, believing Jews to be a threat to Germany and allied with Communism, only attempted their mass extermination after attempts to remove them from the country by emigration and deportation had failed.\textsuperscript{38}

For other observers, however, the barbarism of violent conflict, as well as the high risk and low return involved in participation, indicate that more emotional and psychological influences are at work than rational utility maximization. Chaim Kaufman claims that Rational Choice faces a problem explaining ethnic conflict because it does not recognize the power of communal attachments.\textsuperscript{39} Many theories of conflict assert that violence results from the fear or anger caused by insecurity, inequality or injustice. The fear central to the Security Dilemma concept and the frustration associated with Relative Deprivation are two examples discussed above. Roger Petersen has identified four emotions which commonly lead to violence – fear, hatred, resentment and rage – each emerging in different situations and motivating attacks on different groups.\textsuperscript{40} For example, fear predicts that a threatening group will be attacked. Hatred and resentment predict a long-held enemy and a higher status group respectively will be targeted.\textsuperscript{41}

Some analysts have claimed that questions of identity play the pre-eminent role in eliciting the emotional responses necessary for violence. In this view, members are driven to conflict by threats or insults to their ethnic group’s identity and will put themselves at risk in order to benefit the wider community. Ole Waever \textit{et al.} asserted that threats to a community’s distinctiveness caused by government policies, immigration, or the actions of another cultural group, are often the primary cause of rising tension and conflict.\textsuperscript{42} For Stuart Kaufman, the source of conflict lies in the ‘myth symbol complex’ of a group’s identity. ‘A group mythology that justifies hostility is a precondition for violent ethnic conflict’ and ‘ethnic appeals
are successful in producing extreme violence only if the group also fears that its existence is threatened.\textsuperscript{43}

A number of quantitative studies of civil war have recently taken a strong position in the instrumentalism–affect divide. In 2001, Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler suggested that two contrasting explanations for civil war existed – the ‘political science explanation’, based on the presence of sufficiently acute grievances, and an economic theory explanation based on the opportunity to rebel.\textsuperscript{44} After carrying out econometric modelling on a large data set of civil wars they concluded that ‘objective grievances’ (measured by ethnic and linguistic diversity, political repression, political exclusion and inequality) had little bearing on the outbreak of civil war.\textsuperscript{45} Far more important were opportunities to rebel, particularly ‘economic characteristics’ (such as the availability of finance most commonly from primary export commodities, a high proportion of unemployed young men and slow economic growth).\textsuperscript{46} In Collier and Hoeffler’s terminology, greed is more important than grievance in causing civil war.

\textbf{Synthesis}

The section above identified two questions central to the study of conflict – how important, comparatively, are elite leadership and mass-level factors in causing conflict?; and are those involved in violence motivated by instrumental calculation or emotional influences and identity factors? As discussed, to some extent two debates have crystallized around these questions in the conflict literature. While few theorists exclude the role of either elite instigation, group-level factors, instrumental calculation or emotion in violent conflict, many give strong causal precedence to one form of phenomenon.\textsuperscript{47} Yet, as anyone who has approached the inductive analysis of a single case of conflict will attest, theories based too strongly on the role of either structures or autonomous actors fail to capture the complexity of large-scale violence. Both conditions and human agency play some role in leading to violent conflict.

Some violent events are clearly more organized than others. Yet giving overwhelming analytical weight to either elite leadership or mass-level factors leads to several deficiencies. Without detailing the human actions involved, intended and unintended, it is difficult to explain why one situation of, for instance, inequality or insecurity leads to violence while others do not. While influenced by the surrounding context, it is the motives and actions of individuals and groups that translate that situation into violent conflict. Perhaps more importantly, neglecting the human agency in the tragedy of violent conflict removes accountability from the actors most responsible. Human agency is necessary to translate structures into conflict. For example, political inequality may exist for decades without causing violent conflict until the exploitation of that inequality by certain actors stimulates a violent response. Yet denying the influence of ideational, political and economic structures on the actions of individuals and groups also precludes a complete understanding of a conflict. The provocations of elites, or the violent actions of a small number of militants or criminals, are
unlikely to cause large-scale conflict in the absence of material and ideational structures of insecurity, injustice or prejudice.

This is not to attempt to undermine those theories outlined above. All have identified social mechanisms that undoubtedly shed light on conflict processes in a range of cases. But the detailed analysis of any one conflict requires a more synthetic approach that recognizes the mutually constitutive nature of elite agency and structural conditions and instrumentalism and emotion.48 Members of the elite are as much a part of their societies and influenced by the same prejudices, loyalties and other ideational and material structures as their followers. There is no clear demarcation between society and the state. In Indonesia, district and sub-district government officials, as well as national security personnel, represent not only the state but also their own ethnic and religious community. In addition, individuals from various levels of authority have a major influence on conflicts, further confusing any neat demarcation between elites and society.

In many conflicts, therefore, it is difficult to distinguish between leadership and mass-level influences in the genesis and trajectory of violence. Indeed, as Paul Brass, Donald Horowitz and others have demonstrated, many conflicts are best understood as a combination of orchestration and chaos.49 Organized mobilization often descends into a mélange of spontaneous acts, and, similarly, random acts of violence often become more coordinated as influential individuals take charge. Before and during violence, much takes place in this grey area between state and society and between leadership and impulse. By investigating this area, and the interaction between mass sentiment and elite leadership, a more complete understanding of events is possible. It also becomes possible to answer the question of why people follow their leaders into violence.

Attempting to explain a conflict by reference to either rational interest or emotional outburst alone is also problematic. Conflicts often involve a striking complexity of issues. While Chaim Kaufman and others are correct in criticizing a focus on pure instrumentalism for missing the ties and emotions of identity, it must also be recognized that rational calculation does motivate some actions in conflict. Yet other actions do seem simply to be the venting of rage, and have a consummatory nature, being ends in themselves.

Any group will contain different sub-groups with varying identities and motives. In most violent events, various sections of a crowd will have quite different motives for participating, some affective in nature, others more interest-based. Certain sub-groups will have a much greater attachment to the larger group identity than others. Some may be acting with reference to the past (i.e. taking revenge for a past affront) and others acting with a future goal in mind (i.e. to eradicate economic competitors). In many cases, some individuals and groups will have known of planning behind a riot or clash, while others will believe they are part of a spontaneous event. Finally, as discussed further below, as the riot or conflict goes on, new interests and emotions develop, and identities change and harden.

Further, the motivations of two opposing groups, both of which must be taken into account when analyzing a conflict, are likely to involve different mixes of
rationality and emotion. Conflict is fundamentally the result of interaction, and two opposing groups will almost certainly be driven by different motives. One indicator of the maelstrom of issues usually involved in conflict situations is that members of distinct communities and even different members of the same community often have different conceptions of the real causes of the violence. Some members of one community may claim that it was their economic marginalization that led to conflict, while other members blame rising radicalism. Meanwhile, members of the opposing community may point to entirely different causes, such as political rivalry.

Yet the analysis of a conflict cannot stop at ascertaining which actions are instrumental and which affectual. Individuals approach a conflict situation with mutually reinforcing rational and ‘irrational’ motives. Case studies invariably demonstrate that actors in a conflict situation simultaneously face a range of economic, political, emotional and identity-related influences upon decision making. These influences do not exist independently of each other but constantly reiterate or intensify the importance of one other. For example, Anthony Regan writes that economic, political and identity-related factors were ‘mutually reinforcing’ in motivating Bougainvilleans in their separatist conflict with Papua New Guinea. While mining revenue was important in this struggle for independence, these economic interests cannot be separated from a political struggle stimulated by years of marginalization and a sense of separate identity among the people of Bougainville.50

Nor in many cases is it feasible to give causal precedence to either form of motivation. The direction of causation between the two phenomena is more multi-directional than many theorists propose. Identities and passions constantly shape interests and vice versa. It is therefore necessary to illustrate the ways in which social conditions shape the identities, interests and actions of actors, the manner in which their actions alter the surrounding structure and in turn how this changed structure changes the interests, identities and interactions of actors. As Horowitz writes, ‘an amalgam of apparently rational-purposive behaviour and irrational-brutal behaviour forms the leitmotiv of the ethnic riot.’51

Several theorists have presented accounts of violent conflict that synthesize elite agency and social structures. In a wide-ranging study on the connections between the transition from authoritarianism to democracy, Jack Snyder concludes that nationalist conflict is likely when elites feel threatened by democratization.52 In an attempt to survive the democratic transition, elites appeal to ethnic solidarity and mobilize followers through small networks and the state bureaucracy. However, he also suggests some prevailing conditions that facilitate this elite instigation. Exclusionary nationalism is likely to occur and succeed when economic development is low, when citizens lack the skills for political participation and when democratic institutions, such as political parties and a professional media, are weak but the bureaucracy remains strong.53

In addition to recognizing the mutually constitutive role of elites and mass level phenomena, it is also necessary to consider the interaction of emotional and rational influences on both elites and masses. Badredine Arfi presents a strong argument regarding the connection between the identities and interests of elites and prevailing structures in the onset of violent conflict. He asserts that it is the
rapid construction of a belligerent communal identity by elites that causes violent conflict. Changes in social identities destabilize patterns of inter-ethnic relations. It is identities that determine whether an actor seeks to reach a negotiated settlement or risk conflict. Arfi argues that three social structures are important in the construction of a belligerent social identity. Salient historical memories play an important role in the definition of ethnic groups and the nature of inter-ethnic relations. The structure of ethnic cleavages, such as territorial distribution, reinforces identities. State institutional arrangements constrain actors and empower those with resources. While asserting that elites construct aggressive social identities, crucially Arfi argues that ‘the above social structures are not just tools in the hands of self-serving elites but also constitute the agency of elites.’ The ‘existence of these social structures enables and constrains such a role.’

Only by recognizing the importance and interplay of both elite agency and societal factors, as well as emotion, identity and interest, can the analyst answer several central questions in the study of conflict: to what extent are those elites actually creating or merely following mass-level sentiment?; why did they come to believe that organizing violence was a profitable means of achieving their agendas?; and why do members of society uncritically accept the provocations of their leaders? This last question is particularly pertinent in those situations where involvement in clashes holds a high risk of substantial cost and little likelihood of reward. Anthony Lake has asserted that the question of why constituents follow their leaders into violent conflict is the most central question in conflict study today.

Therefore this study proceeds with the assumption that conflict must be understood as the result of human agency, in many cases provocative and Machiavellian, which both shapes and in turn is influenced by a range of mutually exacerbating political, economic, emotional and identity-related factors. Conflict situations are influenced at various levels spanning agency and structure – individual, sub-communal, communal and inter-communal or structural. The individual level involves the various personal interests, identities, emotions, psychology and prejudices that contribute to violent outcomes. The sub-communal level involves those collectivities of actors such as paramilitary groups, militias, criminal networks, ethnic or religious organisations, political factions and powerful economic actors. These actors often pursue competing agendas and hold varying attitudes towards neighbouring communities as well as ideas about the legitimacy, efficacy or necessity of violence. Their actions invariably play a central role in rising tension and the outbreak of violence. The communal level of analysis concerns the impact of communal solidarity and community identity, as well as the threats to the community that cause or escalate conflict. The structural level involves those systems and patterns of political power, economic distribution and inter-communal relations (and changes in those structures) that influence a social outcome. It is necessary to examine the interplay between actions and patterns at all these levels.

Rather than disaggregating and studying separately the emotional and material aspects of violence and the role of organization and spontaneity, as recommended by some theorists, I believe a full explanation of a conflict will be found in the interaction of these elements. What I am suggesting is an approach to the study of
conflict that best explains the devastation involved in a protracted conflict such as that in North Maluku, as opposed to a single theory of conflict that synthesizes all the factors described above. This approach allows us to witness how instrumental and identity or affective motivations help set the stage for one another, and how elites and other important actors and mass-level structures shape each other. In providing a number of examples of these dynamics this approach holds wider relevance for the study of conflict.

**Dynamism and geographical variation**

Accounting for this complexity becomes more difficult when dealing with a conflict that involved several different events across a wide geographical area and lasted a substantial period of time. By their very nature, conflicts are highly volatile. Analysts sometimes fall prey to adjudging prominent characteristics at the apex of a conflict, such as the economic exploitation of local populations or religious prejudice, to self-evidently indicate the ‘causes’ of that conflict. Often the analyst may be on steady ground in this judgement. Even conflicts that involve several different events in different areas may follow the same logic throughout their duration. Often, conflict appears to take on a self-perpetuating character as refugees flee to neighbouring areas with stories of barbarity that anger their ethnic kin. Subsequent riots are often a direct consequence of preceding violence, as revenge attacks are launched and rumours and misperceptions abound. As Stanley Tambiah puts it, ‘ethnic riots form a series, with antecedent riots influencing the unfolding of subsequent ones.’

However, many communal conflicts do not follow the same logic throughout their course. Communal conflicts often transform over time in terms of the actors involved, the issues being fought over, the goals of the participants and the strategies and means used to achieve these goals. Conflicts sometimes evolve from clashes that have criminal origins into wider sectarian violence or vice versa. In some cases this transformation reflects the multitude of interests and issues that are present in the conflict situation. A particular issue that did not play a direct role in triggering conflict may come to the fore after the violence has started, sometimes superseding the initial contentious issues.

New issues sometimes emerge during a conflict as a result of actors exploiting existing chaos to pursue economic or political agendas. Communal or ethno-nationalist conflicts sometimes evolve into criminal, rent-seeking operations. Several case studies of inter-religious violence in India demonstrate how members of the elite have portrayed relatively minor incidents as sectarian in order to obtain political advantage, thereby dramatically widening the scope of a conflict. The different riots and clashes that constitute a conflict may also differ in degree of spontaneity – one or several may be spontaneous eruptions of anger, while the other(s) may be more planned and organized.

Issues central to violence may also vary depending on locality. Ethnic, religious or class cleavages at the local level may influence whether different areas descend into violence. These local factors, therefore, play an important role in determining
the path of the conflict as a whole. As Stathis Kalyvas suggests, ‘actions “on the ground” often seem more related to local or private issues than to the war’s driving (or master) cleavage.’ Kalyvas claims that, on close inspection, civil wars often reveal themselves as numerous local conflicts, with local rivalries becoming enmeshed in the wider dynamic. In turn, these local cleavages have ‘a substantial impact on … the content, direction, and intensity of violence’.65

Ken Young has demonstrated this in his study of the violence in 1965 in Kediri, Java, which appeared to be driven by the anti-communist sentiment that had swept across the country following the apparent Communist coup attempt in the capital. Following the dramatic events in Jakarta, members of the national Islamic organization, Nahdlatul Ulama, attacked members of the Indonesian Communist Party and their sympathizers in many areas of Indonesia. The Kediri violence appeared to be no exception. However, Young asserted that numerous other local dynamics were also at play, including tensions between migrants and local communities, between devout Muslims (santri) and Muslims more open to traditional practices (abangan), as well as grievances over land reform and class-based issues.66 As Kalyvas states ‘analysis of the dynamics of civil war (how and why people join or defect, how violence takes place, et cetera) is impossible in the absence of close attention to local dynamics.’67

To fully grasp the true nature of a conflict one must therefore identify and analyze the points of transition within it. For example, at what point did the violence become sectarian in nature, and, more importantly, was this transition intentional and if so what motivated those who were instrumental in it? Above all, it is necessary to differentiate between the issues and actors which are foremost in the initial stages of a conflict and those that only become salient later. Likewise, it is necessary to account for the differences as well as interconnections between the violence in different areas in a conflict zone. Comparative theories of conflict based on secondary sources and not on close qualitative examination are at risk of confusing these factors and thereby drawing erroneous conclusions about causation.

The following study of the cause and trajectory of the North Maluku conflict therefore divides the analysis into the five phases mentioned in the introduction: initiation; escalation; dispersion; political exploitation; religious war. This approach goes some way to disentangling the many factors influencing a protracted conflict involving a series of events across a wide area. By dividing the analysis into these phases, one can separate those factors crucial to the outbreak of violence from those that only came to be central to the violence over time. In addition it better explains why this conflict escalated into widespread religious war. While these phases may not transfer directly to other conflicts, the general framework is likely to be broadly applicable elsewhere.

**Researching violent conflict**

The considerations regarding the study of communal violence discussed above also determined the research methodology adopted in this study. I have focused solely on the case of North Maluku rather than attempting a comparative study
with other conflicts in Indonesia or elsewhere. This approach enabled me to present a more detailed and thorough case study and better uncover the range of issues and the agency involved in the conflict. I make limited reference to other cases of conflict so as to avoid taking them out of their context, which might result in misleading comparisons and conclusions.

I have attempted through qualitative research, primarily field interviews, to obtain insight into the perspectives of those involved in the events leading up to the violence and of the combatants themselves. I conducted interviews with members of almost all major ethnic groups and both religious communities involved in the violence. Interview respondents included ordinary villagers, townspeople, politicians, businesspeople, community and religious leaders, militia members and leaders, and military and police personnel. All interviews were carried out in the Indonesian language (Bahasa Indonesia).

I carried out nine consecutive months of fieldwork in North Maluku. This research was focused on four sub-districts (Tobelo, Galela, Kao and Malifut) and one municipality (Ternate), and the capital of Central Halmahera District (Tidore). While violence took place in many areas of the province, these sites were chosen for their centrality and importance to the wider conflict. The Kao/Malifut area was the location of the initial outbreak of violence. Tobelo and Galela saw the most intense violence and had the largest Christian populations in the province. Ternate and Tidore were chosen because of their status as district (and in the case of Ternate, provincial) capitals. Ternate was also the main economic and political centre and most populous city in the province and most heterogeneous in terms of ethnic groups. Importantly, it was also because of events in Ternate and Tidore that the conflict developed from a local ethnic dispute into a province-wide religious conflict. In addition, I carried out several months of interviews and searches of secondary literature in other areas of Indonesia, including Manado, North Sulawesi, Bandung, Yogyakarta and Jakarta.

Underlying this qualitative methodology is a focus on the importance of the social interaction of individuals, groups and communities. In this sense, I follow the Symbolic Interactionism school of Herbert Blumer. In its simplest form Symbolic Interactionism has three main premises. First, Symbolic Interactionism suggests that people act towards things based on the meanings those things hold for them. The second and third premises of Symbolic Interactionism suggest that the meaning of such things arises from, and subsequently changes as a result of, social interaction. Therefore, rather than focusing on the apparently obvious meaning of issues and objects central to the violence, I have attempted to ascertain the real import of these factors to the people involved. These different foci lead to quite different conclusions about conflict. For example, while the goldmine in Malifut was highly sought-after by both parties because of its material benefit, and therefore may appear to the outside observer to have been integral to the outbreak of violence, close examination of the motives of those involved indicated this material competition was less important than a range of other factors. Likewise, the ‘Bloody Sosol’ letter disseminated in Ternate appeared to be important in instigating the ensuing anti-Christian rioting. Yet
interviews with those involved showed that this propaganda had little impact on Muslims in the city.

I have used newspaper reports infrequently. Most local newspapers, such as the *Ternate Post*, carried very subjective reports of the violence and in many cases emotional and provocative accounts of events. National newspapers have been used occasionally, although often their accounts of events in North Maluku were based upon local newspaper reports or telephone interviews and in many cases reported what appears to be incorrect information. While newspaper reports do have some discursive impact on local communities during conflict, this influence was far smaller than the spread of rumours, movement of refugees, propaganda of elites and other more direct manifestations of the conflict situation.

Several methodological difficulties come into play when researching violent conflict. The rhetoric of participants and members of the elite often masks more than it illuminates. Because of the sensitive nature of the topic, respondents are often reluctant to discuss their experiences. Most members of society are seeking to assign the conflict to the past, are fearful of reigniting inter-communal tension, suffering retribution or prosecution, and are often not inclined to talk about the conflict with strangers. People often portray events during the conflict in a manner that is favourable to themselves and to their ethnic or religious community. Carrying out research several years after the events in question also presents an additional problem in that people have often finalized their version of events and in some cases now believe that version fervently. To circumvent such problems I have tried to develop relationships within all relevant ethnic and religious communities and assure people of my objectivity regarding the events. In addition, I have attempted to ‘triangulate’ sources, obtaining several different accounts of the same event from opposing sides in the conflict.

Conclusion

This study provides a more detailed explanation of the tragic events in North Maluku than can be found elsewhere. It explores the conditions in the region before the conflict and the causes of the initial violent incident. It also illustrates how and why the violence rapidly evolved from a local border dispute into province-wide religious conflict. The study critically evaluates prevailing assumptions about the outbreak and trajectory of the violence.

I argue that it is crucial to analyze this conflict at four different levels, individual, sub-communal, communal and structural. The study does not focus solely on the political, economic or identity-related aspects of the conflict but seeks to demonstrate the ways in which numerous agendas, concerns and relationships and, crucially, human agency interacted to shape outcomes. I have divided the conflict into phases to capture its temporal dynamism and geographical variation. My analysis of each phase sheds light on the trajectory of the conflict as well as salient issues and agency. The examination of successive phases of the conflict, each with distinct characteristics, allows the identification and use of the most relevant and helpful theoretical concepts from the wider study of violence.
Chapter 2 examines the background to the conflict, including the history and social structure of North Maluku since the fifteenth century and the major changes that occurred in Indonesia and in the immediate region in the years immediately prior to the conflict. The chapter discusses the history of inter-religious relations in Indonesia and North Maluku more specifically, illustrating how tension had risen over the previous two decades between Muslims and Christians. It discusses the factors behind this development and covers the acceleration of inter-religious violence across Indonesia, including the terrible carnage in Ambon which began in January 1999.