Managing Primordialism in Maluku, Towards Conflict Prevention and A Better Social Life

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Abstract

History has proven that despite different religious identity labels, people have been able to live in harmony, and sharing care and love with each other. The life story of *Domminggus Willem Syaranamual* who was struggling against separatism in Maluku till the end of his life and died on the caring hand of Muhammad Malawat and his family in Mamala village illustrates this point. Primordialism was the basic idea to utilize religion as a reason for a massive rebellion in many places in Maluku for around 3 years starting in January 1999. Almost all aspects of a harmonic interaction between people has been broken since then. The Malino Agreement proved to be the momentum for a "ceasefire" and the termination of physical confrontation between the conflicting communities. However, the impact of the conflict still remains. It is argued that dichotomies fertilize primordialism. This paper employs a couple of cases to study the penetration of primordial practices in Ambon (Maluku). As a former conflict area, these primordial ways of thinking must be managed in an appropriate conflict-prevention strategy for the sake of people welfare, if we do not want the time bomb to explode sometime in the future. Golden time and story that Maluku used to be a land where tolerance and love across religions was cultivated must be succeeded again.

Keywords: identity, conflict, religious-based dichotomy, primordialism, change

Religiosity in Maluku from time to time: an Introduction

Not so many people know Dominggus Willem Syaranamual. By his family name, people wouldrecognize him as Mollucan or Ambones, *orang Maluku* or *orang Ambon*. He was a journalist and a poetwho fought against separatism in Maluku through his papers, until he became suspect being a member of a separatist army and had to escape from one place to another.At the end, in sick condition he ran to Mamala Villagewhere his best friend, Muhammad Malawat, lived.The Muslim family took care of him until his death at end of 1950. He[i], a Christian,was buried in the Muslim village and until now his griefis still there, illustrating that *salam – sarane*[ii] communities in Ambon used to life in harmony without primordial boundaries. His short lifetime had tinged our history that different religious identities were not a barrier for sharing care and love one to another.

However, time has changed. The time when we life now is very different from Domminggus Willem Syaranamual'slife time. The advancement of the sciences has influenced people's interpretation to religion while religion itself, in term of principle and doctrine, has never changed as themessagesof the Quran and the Bible are still same. What happened in the western world, as argued by David Martin, isthat there is a crucial transition from pre-modern to modern, from religious to secular, from religion to political, from church to nation and party, and from traditional or charismatic to rationalized and bureaucratic(Marthin, 2011 in Kaufmann, 2012). Inevitably, thishas a profound impact on the religious atmosphere in Indonesia.The rise of charismatic and radical movements creates"new faces" of religion, followed by various social problems. This type of transformationalso arrived in Maluku a few decades ago and grew stronger during the bloody clash.In short, religious interpretations and identity-labelsbecome more primordial and exclusive.

This paper seeks to visualize the current situation of primordialism in Maluku with a specific focus on Kota Ambon. It will illustratedhow people deal with this new context and whether there are any good strategies to manage this.This analysis will be based uponobservation concerning the security and political situation duringthe

conflict periodup until now.These primary data will be complemented with published literature.

Mapping primordialismin Maluku: a theoretical framework

In general, Moluccan people are strongly attached to their community. This implies a specific sameness that can be observed in thename, clan, place of origin (village)or even religion; things that could be gained inevitably. This sameness can also be constituted by human action. Inevitably, this sameness creates boundaries between an in- and out-group. In addition, these attachments attribute to a specific identity and pride. This corresponds to Rogers Brubakker's idea that sameness manifests itself in solidarity, in shared dispositions or consciousness, or in collective action. The notions of collective identity also imply strong notions of groupboundedness and homogeneity. This implies a high degree of 'togetherness',an ``identity'' or sameness among group members, a sharpdistinction from non-members, and a clear boundary between insiders and outsiders (Brubakker and Cooper, 2000).

The aforementioned samenessproduce identity in two ways: as personal and collective identity. Certain sameness factors can combine both of them. Religion, as an example, which is attached to someone personally also functions as an identity for a family, a village, a group or even a nationality. As such, religion can appear as a collective identity and comes to act as another layer of identity. To that extent, collective identity is more influential than personal identity.In other words, religion containsdifferent waysto influence people.It has a strong power to bind the insiders, as well as a framework to exclude outsiders. Like ethnicity and nationalism, religion can be understood as a mode of social organization, a way of framing, channeling and organizing social relations (Brubaker 2011). Kaufmann (2012) argued that religion has a primordial origin, and is deeply rooted in human evolutionary psychology. Therefore it is unlikely to be superseded.Within this frame of thinking, we can see religion as a sensitive and contested concept as it can be employed as a means of provocation for any negative interest of certain people.

It may create a clash of civilizations as the latest phase in the evolution of conflict in the modern world,as argued by Samuel P. Huntington. He defined civilization as a cultural entity. A religious group is a part of the entities that distinguish different level of cultural heterogeneity, wherein religion is the most important element that differentiates civilizations. One of his arguments that civilizations will ultimately clash is that differences among civilizations are not real; they are basic. They are far more fundamental compared to differences among political ideologies and political regimes (Huntington, 1993). This argument leads me to flash back, looking at how nightmaresunfolded in Maluku on 19 January 1999, when my Muslim brothers and sisters came to the end of Ramadhan and entered Syahwal, and when we all celebrated the coming of IdulFitri. Nobody knew that some people were already preparing plans of destruction and mayhem. Being provoked, Muslim and Christian came to slaughter each other, in the name of their identity. Houses were burnt. People who were a religious minority in any village had to escape and were dispossessed from their house and land. Ambon as the main city of Maluku Province looked like a burning city in that night and following days. The bloody January in Ambon spread quickly in to some places in Maluku whereinhundreds of people from both communities died. Many others were heavily traumatized. Dataset ViCIS as stated by Barron, Azca and Susdinarjanti (2012) showed the figure of casualties of prolonged violence in Indonesia, wherein Maluku accounted for2.793 deaths, 5.057 wounded, 18.843 buildings (houses, office, etc) burnt between January 1999 and February 2002. Apart from these destructions, many survivors experienced psychological problems.

It was Muslim-Christian violence as classified by Varshney, Tadjoeddin and Panggabean (2010), but it was definitely not a religious conflict. Many people I met in my field work in seven IDPs camps during 1999 – 2003 were aware of the hidden political interests behind the communal clashes. This is confirmed by different authors, as Barron, Azca and Susdinarjanti re-stipulated Farid Husain[iii]'s argumentin their book that *it was not religious conflict – it was conflict of interest that utilized religion to d the clash*.Pieris (2004) also stated that the destructive and mass-scale violence in Maluku used religious symbols, but was not a

religiously-rooted conflict. Additionally Pieris presented historical evidence that showed religious sentiments were being provoked for the sake of politic and power interest.

During the 3 years of nightmares, government and civil society movements were searching for best practices to overcome these problems. Ultimately, the best way was reached through a peace agreement signed in 12th February 2002 in Malino City, South Sulawesi. After this ceasefire, all kind of large-scale physical violence among community members came to a halt after senior officials from the central and provincial level and some representatives of both "conflicting" communities signed the agreement, even though in some places small scale incidents still occurred.

In his chapter onprimordialism and evolutionary theory, Frank P. Harvey claimed that there is something fundamental about the nature of ethnicity that ties individuals together and provides a sense of communal anchorage and protection lacking in other forms of organization(Harvey, 2010).Unfortunately, the dichotomies at the aftermath of the widespread violent conflict, havestrengthened the penetration ofprimordialism.As it turned out, religion,as part of ethnic entities, proved not only to bind people but also provoked people at the same time. "They" used it as deathly bullet to destroy tolerance, harmony and peace in Maluku. Using this deathly bullet, it is reasonable enough to assume that "the designer" of conflict in Maluku was a smart man[iv]. The ruins of social destruction remain scattered over this province. Narrowed fanatism and primordialism sit among the ruins.

Religious-based dichotomiesas aftermath ofcommunal violence

As mentioned above, huge-scale conflict in Ambon since 1999 just erupted, while the majority of the community was not aware of its signals beforehand.Suddenly, in the night of 19[th]January 1999 people left their home in order to escape from any kinds of persecution. Thesense of insecurity led religious communitiesflee to their own enclaves where they had a demographic majority. As a result, Ambon City became separated into two parts.It was the beginning of dichotomized social life.

a. Segregation and(re)settlement

The population of Ambon city is a multi-ethnic population. In certain corners of the city, people were grouped based on their place of origin. While outside the urban center of the city, villages scattered around the island became flooded with people from single ethnic and religious backgrounds.The majority of these were Christian villages. However, migration movement also sent people to Sulawesi. Nevertheless, Muslims traditionally lived together with the Christian landlord, such as in all villages in Nusaniwe sub-district. Unfortunately, this was the story before January 1999.

Displacement and insecurityforced people to migrate within or outside of Ambon andthis resulted in achange in residence. Mix-religious settlement as well as Muslim-Christian village disappeared. Even those who occupied pieces of land in Nusaniwewhether temporarily and permanently, for years or even for two or three generations, had to flee and later faced serious problems to come back as reported by Adam (2009). Thecity of Ambon was divided into two sites, i.e. a Muslim area and a Christian area.Only one village stayed remained religiously mixed through the conflict period before, and until now. It was Wayame, where the port of Pertamina is located. The rest ofthe villages becamereligious-basedhomogenous settlements in 1999 – 2002 and the number of religiously mixed villages gradually decreased as the violent tension were continuing. Currently there are still a number of villageswhichremain populated by single religious communities. An example is the village of Batumerah, the biggest village in Ambon for Muslims. The same is the case for Christians in the villages in Leitimur Selatan andNusaniwe.

As a result, a heterogeneous housing mode became transformed into religiously homogenous places. Each group remained in its respective enclave, with very limited interaction with the other religion. The city was geographically divided by the line of religion. Only for very urgent livelihood needs, people search and set the way of communication or interaction with the outsider. Such separation automatically influences all aspects of life like education. Some schools experienced the same transformation such as *SMA Negeri 3 Ambon.* Since 2000,

this school became a class, unique for Muslim students and was later being formalized as an independent government-owned school located in a Muslim site.

The same story happened in the health sector where in emergency need,Clinique were built and later, became set up as permanent hospitals. Government offices also experienced a similar situation. However, this was only the case during emergency time. After the security level was strictly controlled by the army and the government after the 2002 Peace Agreement, a normal life again resurfaced in the beginning of 2003.

b. Way of addressing older people

Apart from the geographical segregation, people also were segregated intheir daily social interactions and conversation. Ambones used to have special way to address older men and women. *Bu* was for the man and *usi* was for the woman. Everyone, Muslim and Christian Amboneseused it. Personally, I know so many Muslim women older than me, but I never called them "caca" until end of 1999. Since we were segregated, Muslim friends have their-own way to address: abang for man and caca for woman. SyamsulAmal also mentioned this in his blog (Amal, 2009).This is another illustration how conflict really divided us in a seemingly 'natural' way. Throughout daily conversations, new identities were being created as we lived exclusively with our own religious in-group.

c. Food matter: issue of halal and not halal

It is a matter of fact that Muslims take great attention to the type of food they consume. In this sense, Maluku is no exception. However, this was never an issue before conflict. Just after the segregation took part, food consumption became another sort of dichotomy.

The first time I was confronted with this matter was in July 2003 in a workshop on peace building for high school students, when one of the participants asked me: "where do you get the snack box". Due to a dubious answer coming from me (because honestly I even didn't know who prepared the box), he only drank a glass of mineral water provided within the box. Since this encounter I developed an anxiety about the possibility for our community to be re-united.

This consideration expressed by a 16 years old boy more than 10 years ago, is still continuing nowadays. I am not going to criticize nor judge negatively.I duly understand that this isabout fundamental values of beliefs and indeed personal spiritual convenience. As stated, the issue is understandable and no one can blame it. My purpose to expose this matter however, is to show the truth how primordialistic beliefs have changed the society I belong to.

Balance, a newly emerging face of primordialism in Maluku: the case study

Balance, in this paper, can be defined as providing the same opportunities in strategicpositions and public services. In bahasa Indonesia we call it "*perimbangan*" and I prefer to use it henceforth. Right after the communal tensions when Malukans woke-up to govern the society again, *perimbangan*came up as a crucial notion as well as notification. It has to be taken into consideration in any governing activity. For example, when the governor arranges a government institution, there has to be equal space for representatives of the Muslim and Christian communities. Sometimes it is not a matter of exact balance like fifty – fifty as far as representatives are there.

Basically, the notion of *perimbangan*is comparable to the affirmative action that has to be delivered to those who are structurally discriminated when they don't have access to public services. We can hereby refer to the experience of black people in South African during the apartheid regime,a regime based on racial segregation that committed huge human rights violations. As a reaction, civil movementsraised up with international support to demand affirmative action by government. In Indonesia we have also affirmative action for women groups who were systematically discriminated due to the patrilineal characteristics of society.Fortunately,the government policy has been channeling women politics, education, health service, practical politics, bureaucratic position and others equally to male group as their partner. In fact, affirmative action doesn't fit to Maluku case, at least for two reasons.

Firstly, there is no impediment of access that structurally systemized against a certain group or certain community. What happened in Maluku had nothing to do

with opportunity to access any public service but it is about capabilities and competences which areto certain extent different among social groups.This has a clear link to colonialism in Maluku where certain group gained more proper treatment than other. In general, the Christian communities were treated as "golden boys", by which they could get better education. Based on this status, they had better access to decent jobs. This preferential treatment continued after colonialism. No one was aware of this discourseuntil the 1999 conflict took place and the debate started. Put simply, it was about a different social status by different groups of Malukanorigin and which originated in colonialism. So, *perimbangan* should not be the notion. ThamrinElly, a community leader, wrote an interesting article about history of *perimbangan*. I saw from his short article that *perimbangan* has been a political mean. He argued that politics of *perimbangan* cannot solve all problems in Maluku.

Secondly, comparing to affirmative action, *perimbangan* is not formalized as a blue-print of government policy.However it was strongly mainstreamed into the governing system after the signing of the peace agreement in Malino City in South Sulawesi. The agreement, called Malino Agreement, consists of 11 points. None of the 11points that agreed by Muslim and Christian representatives clearly mentioned the word of *perimbangan*. It was just implicitly hidden in the eleventh point[v]. This was the beginning of the primordialistic word.11 years later a daily newspaper called Siwalima conducted a forum for reflection on theMalino Agreement. In that forum, as it has been published, Prof. ThonyPariela who was one of community representatives who signed MalinoAgreement, stated that *perimbangan* was not mentioned in the peace agreement and that it is not relevant to the current situation of Maluku. MohNourTawainella, a cultural leaderandFahmySalatalohy(both are Muslims) who are young intellectual person had a similar way of thinking (Siwalima, 2013).

Recent figure of primordialismin Malukuafter 14 years passed: the specific case

Where has this primordial thinking penetrated? The answer can be found in any site, any field where power and leadership are demonstrated, including politics. Religious sentiments have become a vehicle to reach political interest. At provincial level, candidates for the governorship have to consist of a Muslim-Christian pair. Turning down to district level we would find some compromises, depending on the size of each community. In predominantly Muslim districts like Buru, Tual, SeramBagianTimur, the bureaucracy and political office are ruled by Muslims. While in Maluku Tenggara Barat and Maluku Barat Daya where Christian arethe majority, it is the Christians who are in power. Both scenarios cannot be deployed in the districts with a relative balance between Muslims and Christians.These include Ambon Municipality, Maluku Tengah District, SeramBagian Barat, Buru Selatan, Maluku Tenggara and KepulauanAru. However, to a certain extent provincial people put too much consideration and effort to get *perimbangan* or at least representatives in certain districts. Based on this case study, Christian group somehow, is not so expressive. When any formation is 100% occupied by Muslim, the Christian will not outspokenly raise any question. But it will be questioned if it goes the other way around. At provincial level, each group will pay all efforts to have the representatives (*perimbangan*).

The word of *perimbangan*also has been manipulated during the succession of the governor election in 2013. Apart from mixed-religious candidate for governor and vice governor as a "hidden criteria", the issue of the Muslim's turn to become governor was being put on the table. In some occasions, that issue was delivered as if it should be compromised. Shockingly, one of the former commissioners of the election board who had to be independent in the electoral process articulated such a message. He stated that Maluku already had a Christian governor for two governing periods (2003 – 2008 and 2008 – 2013) and that now, this is Muslim's turn.As I do in another part of this paper, let me declare that it is not my intension

to criticize that concern. That fact is presented here just as a case to study about how deepprimordialismhas penetrated in this province.

The dichotomies, in many ways, have reinforced primordial thinking in Maluku.It has been mainstreamedin power and leadership formation, for two reasons and purposes. Firstly, somehow people pursue the strategy to create a leading group within the spheres of governance, politics and economics. Subsequently, members of this elite constellation put their representatives instrategic power positions.Once the chair has been occupied, more opportunitiesare grabbed by their group mates.

Secondly, some people belief that only those from inside their community have concern or can communicate any concern of their-own community. Christians cannot talk in public about the interest of Muslims, and*vice verse*. As a consequence, there must be somebody to represent their group in any public matters. Somehow each community is covered by a fragile membrane, and one community is hereby the opponent to the other.Outsiders cannot touch this membrane because it may be broken.Entering inside the opponent's realm is impossible.I encountered one interesting case, the beginning of this month where someone clearly asked me and other people in a meeting, to consider whom will exactly represent the interests of his community[vi]. In this kind of cases, people just compromise the entire situation, only to have a representation of their own group.

Ultimately, thiscreates a '*compromistic* community' which hinders true sustainable development. Because of these *compromistic* manners, it is impossible to find right person for the right position. However, it will not be a serious problem if the unavoidable compromise is put at the same track with capacity building strategies. The most crucial problem however, is that these practices are not healthy for social cohesion,because they have potency to reserve hidden tensions among communities.

Change!It's a way forward

Conflict has changed the face of Ambon (Maluku) in many ways.Maluku has become a primordial society. This is rooted in a communal conflict which was believed not to be a primordial conflict.Whatever it was, we thank God that the

violent conflict was not prolonged. However, we still have to work and pray for the future because the impact of this destroying clash is possibly eternal.The primordial ways of thinking that people perform could carry the seeds of another kind of tension in the future.

I would argue that the government has made a big mistake by continuing the segregation which was cause by a violent conflict. Government, if not state, has failed to deliver a sustainable security system as a strategy to avoid segregation and other kind of dichotomies that I assumed are breeding grounds for primordialism. This is worsened with the radical transformation of religion from a pure belief to an identity, even when it is a layered identity. Consequently, nowadays we seethat primordialviewpoints are being mainstreamed widely. I do have an anxiety if the original face of Ambon (Maluku) as the most tolerant "land" performed in a poly-ethnic community will resurface again. Ambon is a fragile zone with a latent primordial-based conflict.

Together, Muslim-Christian people have to be courageous breaking-up their own dichotomy membrane and let integration and cohesion flourish among them. There must come a massive change of mind, in terms of perception and religious practice, as well as identity. The change has to start from the government and other stakeholders, which need to be more conflict-sensitive and peace-responsive.Within this is development era, a narrow-minded practice like *Perimbangan* has to be dropped. It should not be longer occupy the brain of government officials and other stakeholders. Question like "how many Muslims", "how many Christians" in any formation has to be replaced by the question "who is capable", "who is compatible". Only then will development be more sustainable, herebygravely reducing the possibility of mass violent tensions, for the sake of a better future for Maluku.

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i For detail about DominggusSjaranamual, please visit this link:
https://www.facebook.com/rudifofid/posts/10204037346229893
ii*Salam-sarane* is local terminology: salam is for Muslim while sarane is for Christian
iii He was one of mediator of Malino Peace Agreement for Maluku
ivWho are "they" and the smart man? Until now government still keeps it as secret from us. It is not that important, anyway. Live the life in daily basis, in secured situation is the most important.

[v] The point stated:

"MendukungrehabilitasikhususnyaUniversitasPattimuradenganprinsipuntukkemajuanbersama. Karena itu, rekruitmen dan kebijakan lainnya dijalankan secara terbuka dengan prinsip keadilan dan tetap memenuhi syarat keadilan."

[vi]In a meeting to discuss a penalty for *someone,* oneof our colleagues raised a primordial point to consider: "if this person is quit, his successor is not (his community), no one will represent (his community)'s concern in that district" (for ethics reason let make him anonym)

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