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Post-War Reflections on the Ambon War

Causes, Justifications and Miracles in Christian and Muslim Narratives

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Abstract

Between 1999 and 2004, with reverberations until 2011, several Moluccan islands (Indonesia) faced violent clashes between Christians and Muslims. Based on 79 interviews, this article seeks to understand how people from both religious groups look back at the conflict, 12 years after the Malino II peace treaty was signed in 2002. We identified three major conflict-related themes that continued to come to the fore during the interviews: explanations about causes of the conflict, religion-related justifications of violence and miracle stories. Most interviewees indicated that the causes of the conflict were non-religious, but rather political. Religion-related language however was frequently used to justify violence as self-defense while miracles-stories were often part of war-narratives. Looking back, Christians and Muslims still understood their communities as injured and victimized. The 'right to protect' one's community as a threatened Christian or Muslim community prevailed in most stories although the source of this threat was not always clear.

Keywords

Ambon – Christian-Muslim relations – conflict interpretations – community theory – justifications – miracles – visions

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1 Introduction

On January 19, 1999, riots between Christians and Muslims broke out in Ambon City, the capital of the Maluku province of Indonesia. Soon, these riots turned into a violent conflict between Christians and Muslims that would last for several years. Thousands of people were killed and many more displaced to IDP centers, while others — especially immigrants — moved to safer areas. Gross human rights violations were reported.[1] In this article we analyze how Muslims and Christians in Maluku look back at the conflict after more than a decade. We were interested in what Christians and Muslims were thinking in retrospect about the causes of the conflict and about the role of religion. The material of the interviews shows a 'double mode' regarding the conflict: for most of the interviewees the causes of the conflict were not religious while motivations for battle and the right to defend clearly were.

This 'double mode' makes an interesting contribution to discussions on 'religious violence' as related to particular ways of communal self-understanding. Scholars such as William Cavanaugh, Kim Knott and Matthew Francis have pointed to alternative ways to understand the involvement of 'religion' in violent conflicts, criticizing predominantly western secular discursive frames of 'religion' as source of radicalization, violence or terrorism.[2] Francis for example tries to broaden the scope, suggesting a Durkheimian styled concept of 'the sacred' which he stipulates as "what is dear and non-negotiable". 'The sacred', he argues, is a better concept to analyse what is popularly labelled as 'religion' in 'religious violence'.

In this article we will critically use this line of thinking to understand why, also after more than a decade, many people still pointed to Christian or Muslim identities that were at stake during the war. The material of the interviews shows a strong emphasis on the right or obligation to defend the religious

1 Joseph R. Biden, Henry J. Hide, et al. "Annual Report on International Religious Freedom, 2001, Submitted to the Committee on International Relations," 2001, https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/9001.pdf. Accessed 11 November 2017, 156; Karel Steenbrink and Mesakh Tapilatu, "Moluccan Christianity in the 19th and 20th Century between Agama Ambon and Islam," in *A History of Christianity in Indonesia*, ed. Jan Sihar Aritonang and Karel Steenbrink (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 414; Michael Glass, "Forces Circumcision of Men (Abridged Version)," *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 2013, doi:10.1136/medethics2013-101626, 4.

2 William and Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence. Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Kim Knott, "The Secular Sacred: In-between or Both/And?," in *Social Identities Between the Sacred and the Secular*, ed. and Giselle Vincent. Abby Day, Chris Cotter (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2013); Matthew Francis D.M, "Why the 'Sacred' Is a Better Resource Than 'Religion' for Understanding Terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 2015, 1-16, doi:10.1080/09546553.2014.976625.

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community. Daniel Chirot and Clark McCauley write that the obverse of mass-violence is identification with a loved group — friends, family, village, clan, tribe, class, nation, or religion. In the perpetrator's understanding of a conflict it is this group on whose behalf violence is permitted and even necessary.[3] Hence, "what is dear and non-negotiable" (Francis' terminology) can be understood as the community itself.

During the Maluku war, Christian and Muslim communities were threatened and violated *as* Christian and Muslim communities. Perspectives on religious difference reinforced deeply rooted ideas about threatening 'Islamizing' or 'Christianizing' efforts.[4] Within this frame, perpetrators could see their role during the conflict as 'necessary' in order to 'protect' their communities.[5]

2 Economic, Political and Social Tensions Preceding the Conflict

A vast body of literature has been published on the tense context that preceded the Maluku war.[6] Much attention has been paid to conflict-triggers focusing on the economic and political shifts that preceded the eruption of

3 Daniel Chirot and Clark McCauley, *Why Not Kill Them All? The Logic and Prevention of Mass Political Murder* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 75-6.

4 See on 'Christianization': Hasan Noorhaidi, "The Radical Muslim Discourse on Jihad, and the Hatred Against Christians," in *Christianity in Indonesia: Perspectives of Power*, ed. Susanne Schröter (LIT Verlag, 2010), 331; Jon Goss, "Understanding the 'Maluku Wars': Overview of Sources of Communal Conflict and Prospects for Peace", *Cakalele*, 11, (2000), 21-22; K.E. Schulze, "Laskar Jihad and the conflict in Ambon," *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 9/1, (2002), 57.

5 A deeper understanding of this particular point can be provided by an analysis of communal representations of honor and shame, a topic that we have to leave out of our scope here. See Alan Page Fiske and Tage Shakti Rai, *Virtuous Violence, Hurting and Killing to Create, Sustain, End, and Honor Social Relationships* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 77-92.

6 See among others Gerry van Klinken, "The Maluku Wars, 'Communal Contenders' in a Faling State," in *Violent Conflicts in Indonesia Analysis, Representation, Resolution*, ed. C.A. Coppel (London: Routledge, 2006); Patricia Spyer, "Fire without Smoke and Other Phantoms of Ambon's Violence: Media Effects, Agency, and the Work of Imagination," *Indonesia* 74 (2002): 321-361; Jacques Bertrand, "Legacies of the Authoritarian Past: Religious Violence in Indonesia's Moluccan Islands," *Pacific Affairs* 75/1 (2002): 57-85; Jacques Bertrand, *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict in Indonesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Birgit Bräuchler, "Cyberidentities at War: Religion, Identity and the Internet in the Moluccan Conflict," *Indonesia* 75 (2003): 123-151; H.G.C. Schulte Nordholt, *Indonesië Na Soeharto: Reformasi En Restauratie* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 2008); Nils Bubandt, "Violence and Millenarian Modernity in Eastern Indonesia," in *Cargo, Cult and Culture Critique*, ed. Holger Jebens (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press 2004, 2004), 92-117; C. Wilson, *Ethno-Religious Violence in Indonesia: From Soil to God*. (New York, London: Routledge, 2008).

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violence in 1999 as an explanation for social tensions between Christians and Muslims. Some studies also focus on conflict-enhancers like rumours, imagination and knowledge-construction,[7] on the meanings people invested in the violence and "how those meanings shaped their actions during and after the conflict",[8] or on the role of religious organizations.[9] Christopher Duncan's study on the North Maluku conflict (mass violence appeared in North Maluku between 1999-2000),[10] Al Qurtuby's studies on the conflict frames used by both Muslims[11] and Christians[12] and Birgit Bräuchler's work on identity-construction and community-building through internet-use[13] are examples of studies stressing the central role of religious narratives and convictions in enhancing the conflict. In this study we will understand the 'religious' as charged with imaginaries of the community. With 'imaginaries' we point to the complex assemblage of ideas, experiences, memories and language that create structures of belonging and loyalty.

Because the conflict on Ambon has already been studied abundantly, we will only give a very short outline of the conflict map as our concern is to contribute to an understanding of how people look back at the war after more than a decade. We will concentrate on recurrent ideas of 'Islamization' and 'Christianization' that determined parts of the conflict-dynamics. Based on both literature and the interviews, we contribute to an analysis of conflict-narratives. Once people felt their communities were threatened and violated as religious communities, the right to protect was intensely put in religious language. Stories and rumours strongly contributed to the idea of a 'religious war'. It was religion that was at stake as the community's core-frame of belonging. The interviews echo the 'double mode' described above that oscillates

7 Spyer, "Fire without Smoke", 24.

8 Christopher R Duncan, *Violence and Vengeance, Religious Conflict and Its Aftermath in Eastern Indonesia* (Ithaka New York: Cornell University Press, 2013), 5.

9 Jozef M.H. Hehanussa, *Der Molukkenkonflikt von 1999: Zur Rolle Der Protestantischen Kirche (GPM) in Der Gesellschaft* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2013).

10 Duncan, *Violence and Vengeance*. Duncan's study is predominantly concerned with the violence in North Maluku. The eruption and development of violence in this new Indonesian province (established in 1999) knew a different genesis and different triggers. At the level of justification however and the inclusion of religious language, the case is comparable to the 'Ambon' case discussed in this article.

11 Sumanto Al Qurtuby, "Christianity and Militancy in Eastern Indonesia: Revisiting the Maluku Violence," *Southeast Asian Studies*, 4/2 (2015): 313-39.

12 Sumanto Al Qurtuby, "Ambonese Muslim Jihadists, Islamic Identity, and the History of Christian-Muslim Rivalry in the Moluccas, Eastern Indonesia," *International Journal of Asian Studies* 12/1 (2015): 1-19.

13 Birgit Bräuchler, *Cyberidentities at War: The Moluccan Conflict on the Internet*, (New York, Oxford: Berghahn, 2013), 85-86, 293.

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between clear views on external conflict causes and a religious reading of the conflict. We will argue that the religious understanding of miraculous battle situations and external (Muslim or Christian) threat reveals not so much a view on religious justifications of violence but on strong group-solidarities and belongings. Looking back at the conflict, group solidarities still determined the narratives along religious lines while there was also a popular and clear understanding of the non-religious origins of the war.

3 January 1999

The Maluku province shows a rich mixture of Christian and Muslim communities living side by side with regionally numerical varieties and different (migration) histories.[14] Preceding the eruption of violence in January 1999, social tensions between both groups were on the rise. The Asian economic crisis that started in 1997 in Japan had disseminated swiftly across Asian countries resulting in an enormous inflation of the Indonesian rupiah. This crisis hit Muslims and Christians differently due to different economic positions and functions. Analysts point to a blend of different developments that contributed to the increase of tensions.[15] The economic, social and political conditions were so fragile, Hamdi Muluk and Ichsan Malik argue, that a small provocation could lead easily to violent conflict.[16]

14 Al Qurtuby notes that the relationships between Muslims and Christians had been object of unfair colonial policies in the past: Sumanto Al Qurtuby, "Ambonese Muslim Jihadists", 316. For migration histories, See Gerrit J. Knaap, "A City of Migrants, Kota Ambon at the End of the Seventeenth Century," *Indonesia* 51 (1991): 105-32.; Birgit Bräuchler, "Changing Patterns of Mobility, Citizenship and Conflict in Indonesia," *Social Identities* 23, no. 4 (2017): 446-61, doi:10.1080/13504630.2017.1281468, 450; Schulte Nordholt, *Indonesië Na Soeharto: Reformasi En Restauratie*, 139; Spyer, "Fire without Smoke," 23; Bubandt, "Violence and Millenarian Modernity in Eastern Indonesia," 99; Aris Leo Suryadinata, Evi Nurvidya and Aris Ananta, *Indonesia's Population. Ethnicity and Religion in a Changing Political Landscape* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2003), 153-7.

15 For example: the deportation of Ambonese-Christian gang-members from Jakarta to Ambon City: Aditjondro George J., "Orang-Orang Jakarta Di Balik Tragedi Maluku." Moluccas International Campaign for Human Rights"; http://www.michr.net/orang-orang-jakarta-di-balik-tragedi-maluku.html, accessed 12 April 2016 Spyer, "Fire without Smoke," 26; Jan. S. Aritonang, *Sejarah Perjumpaan Kristen Dan Islam Di Indonesia* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2004), 535. Jozef M.H. Hehanussa, "Understanding Relationships Between Moluccans," in Images of Enmity and Hope, The Transformative Power of Religions in Conflict, ed. Lucien van Liere and Klaas Spronk (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2014), 100.

16 Hamdi Muluk and Ichsan Malik, "Peace Psychology of Grassroots Reconciliation: Lessons Learned from the 'Baku Bae' Peace Movement," in *Peace Psychology in Asia,* ed. N.M. Noor C.J. Montiel (New York: Springer Science & Business Media, 2009), 101.

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On that specific day in January 1999, tensions rapidly erupted into a language of radical difference between Christian and Muslim communities. The tensions were indeed so high that a trivial incident between a Christian bus-driver from Mardika and a Buginese Muslim from Batumerah became 'meaningful' as a principal conflict between the religious communities they represented. Rumors were rapidly spread[17] and the conflict developed swiftly along religious lines.[18] Shortly after, news media started to speak about 'religious violence.'[19]

The conflict saw many paramilitary groups, creating subcultures with strong narratives on Islamization or Christianization and the need to protect their respective communities. Some of these groups already existed before the conflict, like the Christian *Coker*-group, led by Berty Loupatty.[20] Others, like the FKM (*Front Kedaulatan Maluku*, the Maluku Sovereignty Front), saw its light towards the end of 2000. There were several paramilitary groups collectively referred to as the *Pasukan Jihad* (Jihad Forces) and the *Pasukan Kristus* (Forces of Christ). These groups consisted mainly of ordinary people.[21] Paramilitary groups like these were active during the war and their activities further fueled ideas on Islamization and Christianization.[22] Agus Wattimena for example, a Christian militia leader from Kudamati who molded his group into *Laskar Kristus* in 2000, is a case in point. He was depicted by Dutch Television *Twee Vandaag* saying, while referring to Muslims: "They want to destroy Maluku because it's a Christian stronghold. If Christian power is destroyed, an Islamic state appears (…) We have made a commitment: there will be war until the Lord comes (*perang, sampai Tuhan dating*)"[23] Wattimena was killed in March

17 Spyer, "Fire without Smoke"; Erik Meinema, "Provoking Peace. Grassroots Peacebuilding by Ambonese Youths" (Masterthesis, University of Groningen, 2012).

18 C.J. Böhm mcs., "Brief Chronicle of the Unrest in the Moluccas, 1999-2000" (Ambon, 2003); C. Wilson, *Ethno-Religious Violence in Indonesia.*

19 For example: BBC News, "Religious Violence Erupts in Ambon," 1999, http://cdnedge.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/579318.stm, Accessed 12 April 2016; The Economist, "Holy War in the Spice Islands," 2001, http://www.economist.com/node/533080, Accessed 12 April 2016.

20 Muhammad Najib Azca, "Security Sector Reform, Democratic Transition, and Social Violence: The Case of Ambon, Indonesia," Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, 4, at: https://www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Handbook/Dialogue_Chapters/dialogue2_azca.pdf, accessed 11 July 2018.

21 Sumanto Al Qurtuby, "Christianity and Militancy," 6.

22 Bräuchler, *Cyberidentities*, 139; Schulze, "Laskar Jihad," 63.

23 Twee Vandaag, "Molukkers Zweren Te Vechten Tot de Dood," 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WY-fme5NOKA; Accessed 15 November 2017; See also: Tjitske Lingsma, *Het Verdriet van Ambon, Een Geschiedenis van de Molukken.* (Amsterdam: Balans, 2008), 34.

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2001. Goals and means differed between these groups and some competed within the same 'religious field'.[24]

The *Laskar Jihad* became the strongest Muslim militia, consisting mainly of Javanese Muslims and established after the massacre of more than 400 Muslims by Christians in Tobelo in December 1999 that enflamed sentiment throughout Indonesia.[25] Due to the reluctance of political and military leaders in Jakarta, who allowed the *Laskar Jihad* to interfere in the Moluccan conflict, two or three thousand members of this group arrived in Maluku in May 2000.[26] They managed to obtain professional weapons[27] and financial support in collaboration with some people from the military.[28]

The Christian-Muslim divide not only played an important role in distinguishing between friend and foe, but also in understanding what was going on. At first, communal tensions were not caused by religious differences as such, but by economic, political and social disputes that swiftly became entangled with the religious affiliations of the different communities. Muslims and Christians accused the other party of having started the war[29] and of organizing violent attacks on their respective communities. According to Al Qurtuby, age-old narratives of communal violence between the two religious groups were reactivated.[30] Narratives on Christianization and Islamization were spread and encouraged people to understand the defense of their communities as principle struggle for survival and as a religious obligation.[31] Grisly stories about atrocities circulated in local pamphlets, on the Internet[32] and through gossip[33] while Video CDs were spread with cruel images.[34] Christians painted walls in their areas with apocalyptic images of destruction and a

24 Badrus Sholeh, *Ethno-Religious Conflict and Reconciliation: Dynamics of Muslim and Christian Relationships in Ambon*, (Masterthesis, Canberra: Australian National University), 47-48.

25 Duncan, *Violence and Vengeance*, 90-1.

26 Michael Davis, "Laskar Jihad and the Political Position of Conservative Islam in Indonesia.," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 25/1 (2002): 12.

27 Hasan Noorhaidi, "Faith and Politics: The Rise of the Laskar Jihad in the Era of Transition in Indonesia," *Indonesia* 72 (2002): 148.

28 Muhammad Najib Azca, "In between Military and Militia: The Dynamics of the Security Forces in the Communal Conflict in Ambon," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 34/3 (2004): 444.

29 Al Qurtuby, "Ambonese Muslim Jihadists," 13.

30 Al Qurtuby, "Ambonese Muslim Jihadists," 16-25.

31 Al Qurtuby, "Ambonese Muslim Jihadists," 13.

32 See Bräuchler, *Cyberidentities at War*.

33 See Spyer, "Fire without Smoke."

34 Schulte Nordholt, *Indonesië*, 141.

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suffering Jesus.[35] In this situation of fear and battle, the economic, social and political jumble that created tensions between both groups were vague or absent. During the war, many considered the clashes to be a religious war. Al Qurtuby writes that of the fifty ex-Moluccan jihadists he interviewed from 2010-2011, 92% was still convinced to have been involved into a "religious war" and 92% argued that the reason to engage in jihad was "to defend religion and Muslim communities."[36] Similar research that Al Qurtuby conducted among Christian former combatants, showed comparable results for the reasons of conflict: 90.2% argued that they got involved "to defend religion/Christianity and the Christian community" while 76% believed that the war was religious.[37]

For the North Maluku conflict, which had a different genesis but knew similar conflict-enhancing elements, Christopher Duncan has shown how especially a story of child killings encouraged people to understand the conflict as fundamentally a conflict between religious communities.[38] Infanticide was seen as a direct attack on the whole of the community and its religion. The Maluku civil war became a religious war with Muslims and Christians referring to religious bonding-symbols and ideas of after-life, martyrdom and purification[39] encouraging braveness and sacrifice during the fights. Because of the language people used during combat, the symbols they were wearing, hymns they were singing, slogans they were using, the narratives, tales and rumors they were spreading and the conflict-encouraging role of some religious leaders and organizations, many analysts agree that the Maluku war was indeed "about religion" and that the goals of the conflict were religious. This argument is convincing and goes especially for the frames used by conflict actors during the conflict. During the war, justifications of violence were often based on cruel actions of the opposing party. As such, war-narratives were part of (digital) reports, stories, gossip, and rumors and were linked to frames of religious and historical dichotomies. Sociologist Randall Collins writes about rumor as a "widespread contagious excitement (…) full of fear and tension"[40] The 'tipping point' of the conflict depends partly on the frames in which these rumors can find a fruitful ground. Collins continues to argue that if groups are

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35 Nils Bubandt, "Pamphlets and the Politics of Paranoia in Indonesia," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 67/3 (2008): 789-817; Patricia Spyer, "Blind Faith. Painting Christianity in Postconflict Ambon," *Social Text* 26/3 (2008): 11-37.

36 Al Qurtuby, "Ambonese Muslim Jihadists," 12.

37 Al Qurtuby, "Christianity and Militancy," 324.

38 Duncan, *Violence and Vengeance*, 67, 130.

39 Wilson, *Ethno-Religious Violence in Indonesia*, 192-3; Al Qurtuby, "Ambonese Muslim Jihadists," 11. Al Qurtuby, "Christianity and Militancy," 324, 329, 334.

40 Collins, *Violence*, 118.

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already gathered, rumor claims that violence has already happened and use "ritualistic offenses" like attacks on sacred places and stories about sexual mutilations. The emotional contagion draws upon itself and counter-narratives are not accepted as authoritative. Collins describes the content of rumor as a ("is just like a") Durkheimian symbol; an identity-marker of the mobilized group creating strong group-borders. 'Religious identity' in this respect, became a 'hot' reference-point around which solidarities and narratives were organized. This context of fear and categorical distrust could create perspectives on violent others and wounded selves,[41] and facilitates what Collins analyses as situations of "forward panic"[42] resulting into what Horowitz earlier observed as "malevolent frivolity."[43]

On February 2002, after several grassroots peacebuilding initiatives and governmental efforts, the Malino II agreements were signed by representatives of the warring Muslim and Christian parties under the leadership of Jusuf Kalla, by then Coordinating Minister for People's Welfare and by Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, who was Coordinating Minister for Politic and Security Affairs.[44] The agreement was an attempt to stop the violence, restore the law, to strengthen Indonesia as a unitary state (against separatist tendencies) and to order the Maluku islands back under the Indonesian law.[45]

During the civil war, both sides committed atrocities. Many religious leaders encouraged the conflict while some tried to negotiate for peace. Already during but mainly after the war, NGOs and local communities[46] organized reconciliation programs and interreligious dialogue.[47] 'Bikin panas pela' (warming

41 Diane Enns, *The Violence of Victimhood* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University, 2012), p. 147.
42 Collins, *Violence*, 74, 100.
43 Donald L. Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 114.
44 John Braithwaite, "Maluku: Anomie to Reconciliation", In *Diminishing Conflicts in Asia and the Pacific: Why Some Subside and Others Don't*, ed. Anthony Regan Edward Aspinall, Robin Jeffrey (London and New York: Routledge, 2013). 43. See also: "The Moluccas Agreement in Malino (Malino II) Signed to End Conflict and Create Peace in the Moluccas", at: https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/ID_020214_Moluccas%20Agreement%20in%20Malino%20%28Malino%20II%29.pdf, accessed: 01 April 2018.
45 Donald Weatherbee, "Indonesia: Political Drift and State Decay." In *Brown J. World Affairs* 23/9 (2002), 28.
46 Martin Björkhagen, "Understanding Illiberal Peace-Building: An Analysis of Conflict, Peace and Reconciliation in North Maluku Province, Indonesia." (Lund University, 2016), http://lup.lub.lu.se/luur/download?func=downloadFile&recordOId=8566187&fileOId=8566, Accessed 20 November 2017.
47 See Sumanto Al Qurtuby, "Peacebuilding in Indonesia: Christian-Muslim Alliances in Ambon Island," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 24/3 (2013): 350.; I. Malik, M. Pattinaja,

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up the bond between villages) ceremonies have been performed to reconcile Muslims and Christians.[48] For North Maluku, Duncan shows how shortly after the conflict many reconciliation-efforts were organized but with little success of healing the wounds of both communities. Al Qurtuby notes that many Maluku Muslims are still unwilling to live side by side with their Christian neighbors. Publishing his article in 2015, he writes about a "time-bomb" if this issue is not solved.[49] Religious leaders continue to argue for a faith-based peace.[50] Since the Malino II agreement, violent incidents have still been reported, some leading to short clashes between Christians and Muslims,[51] although without repeating the religious conflict-frames of the war.

Our concern here is to understand how Muslims and Christians look back at the Maluku civil war of 1999-2002 after 12 years. We were especially interested in how people understand what or who triggered the war and how they understand the 'religious other'. It was not our primary aim to retrieve facts, but we were rather interested in how people relate themselves to what happened through narratives and how they give meaning to the war after more than a decade.

4 Design

The interviews were conducted by Elizabeth between February and March 2014 and included 79 semi-structured qualitative interviews on Ambon and surrounding islands as part of a Master-program at Utrecht University: 36 stories were shared by Muslims and 43 stories by Christians. The ages of the interviewees ranged between 20 and 79 at the time of the fieldwork (which means that at the time the main clashes of the war had ended, the interviewees were between 10 and 68). Most interviews were conducted on Ambon, Banda, Saparua and Seram. The face of the war varied on all these islands, which is also noticeable in the interviews.

S. Putuhena, T. Yakob, et. al. Breaking the Violence with Compassion: Baku Bae (Jakarta: Yappika and Baku Bae Movement, 2003).

48 Jeroen Adam, "Forced Migration, Adat, and a Purified Present in Ambon," *Etnologie* 47/4 (2008): 227-38, p.228; see also: Hehanussa, *Der Molukkenkonflikt von 1999*.

49 Al Qurtuby, "Ambonese Muslim Jihadists", 26.

50 I.J.W. Hendriks, "Ketika Gereja Bicara." In *Carita Orang Basudara. Kisah-Kisah Perdamaian Dari Maluku*, ed. Irsyad Rafsadi Jacky Manuputty, Zairin Salampessy, and Ihsan Ali-Fauzi (Ambon: Lembaga Antar Imam Maluku & PUSAD Paramadina, 2014), 139.

51 (ICG) International Crisis Group, "Indonesia: Violence Erupts Again on Ambon" (Jakarta, Brussels: Asia Briefing, 2004), https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/indonesia/indonesia-violence-erupts-again-ambon. Accessed 16 April 2017.

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Most people talked quite openly about the war. The questions posed in the interviews were focused on how people remembered the war, on who started the conflict, and on what role — in their view — 'religion' (agama) played during the war. The results of the interviews were examined by a narrative analytical approach including primary focus on the verbal expressions of respondents. We summarized the raw data and transcribed the parts where the interviewees talked about their role in the conflict, their view of the causes of the war and their understanding of the religious other. We structured and analyzed the transcribed material and explored for this article three central themes that emerged in the interviews, specifically: 1) beliefs about causes of the conflict, 2) the religious justification of violent defense and 3) the role of miracles.

The interviews were conducted in collaboration with translators to bridge the language barriers between English and Indonesian. Since we realize the translators, one Muslim and one Christian, operated as interpreters as well, all the interviews were recorded on tape and we could check the material in Indonesian afterwards. The fact that the interviews were recorded might of course have influenced what people shared. Another element that (may have) influenced the responses, were the often chaotic settings in which the interviews took place with other people — family, friends, others — listening to the stories. This might have influenced narratives into directions accepted by the community of listeners. Besides, of course, the fact that the presence of a Dutch outsider asking questions about the war and implicitly representing a colonial past and a missionary Christendom (not to say: a position in the war), may of course have influenced what the interviewees shared. For the privacy of our interviewees we have changed their names.

Since the interviews took place 12 years after the Malino Treaty, we assumed that the memories narrated in the interviews developed into a new direction after the war. War memories themselves are already complex assemblages of subjective experience and (post-war) discourses.[52] Grass-roots processes of reconciliation, acknowledgment of victimhood and processes of transitional justice just after the war influenced the narratives and ideas about the conflict. How these narratives were shaped and reshaped at the surface of memory and how other narratives were suppressed would be part of a different research.

52 Stéphanie A.H. Bélanger and Renée Dickason, "Introduction," In *War Memories, Commemoration, Recollections and Writings on War*, ed. Stéphanie A.H. Bélanger and Renée Dickason (Québec: McGill-Queens University Press, 2017), 2-4.

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5 The Interviews

During the interviews, the personal experience of the war and the role of religion came strongly to the fore. In this section, we structure the responses into three themes that in our view were leading. First, interviewees distanced themselves from the causes of the conflict. From a helicopter view many pointed out that the Maluku war had nothing to do with religion but that religion was misused by political powers. Secondly, many stressed the right to protect and shared memories about the war using religious language. Thirdly, some interviewees told miraculous stories or shared events that they considered to be specific examples of divine guidance and protection. While most of the people that were interviewed affirmed the 'politically correct' idea that religion was not part of the genesis of the civil war, many also related to the warring parties using explicit religious terminology.

6 Conflict-causes

On July 23-28, 2001, *Baku Bae*, a peace movement that was active during and after the war organized a conflict-transformation workshop for Muslim and Christian religious leaders and scholars.[53] After a few long days of debate, the participants concluded "that the conflict in Maluku was not between religions, but involved religious people. Religious symbols had been exploited and politicized in certain ways by these elites."[54] The idea of being provoked by elite forces behind the screen as well as the idea that Islam and Christianity were 'used' or 'exploited' by outside forces marks a popular trajectory of dealing with the conflict.[55] The emphasis on external provocateurs used by "greedy elites" to enflame socio-economic and territorial tensions has been made by observers, researchers, NGO workers etc., neglecting the strong religious narratives and motivations of the conflict actors,[56] and, as a consequence, victimizing the perpetrators.

Questions about 'who was responsible' and 'who was behind this all' that were asked in the interviews were often answered by pointing to 'the military', 'politics' or other predominantly non-religious actors. Most Muslims and

53 Sen Vicheth, *Trust and Conflict Transformation — An Analysis of the Baku Bae Peace Movement in Indonesia* (München, Ravensburg: GRIN Verlag, 2015).
54 Malik, "Peace Psychology of Grassroots Reconciliation," 98.
55 See van Klinken, "The Maluku Wars," 7-8.
56 Al Qurtuby, "Christianity and Militancy," 320; Duncan, *Violence and Vengeance*.

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Christians that were interviewed were not blaming each other for causing the war — contrary to popular discourse during the war[57] — but resorted to blame external, almost invisible players. This might have been an effect of the dominant narrative to situate the causes of the war not only outside religion but also outside the communities, a narrative shared by analysts, politicians and NGO's alike. Post-war discourses determine up till a certain extent how the war is remembered and often downplays the role of 'religion'.

Eddy for example, an engineer living in Wayame says that he did not engage in the fights. During the war, Wayame was strongly controlled by peace-workers from both sides. He argues that the Indonesian government had the military power to stop the violence, but did not do so. He shares that he had to pay toll to soldiers if he wanted to pass military posts between the villages. According to Eddy, this created a quite lucrative business. What purpose the conflict served for the central government remains vague, he says, but he is clear about the effects on Ambonese society: "The situation made us to hate each other."[58] Sammy, a Christian from the Banda Islands, who studied in Ambon City at the time of the conflict, argues along similar lines: "The agitators made it spread along religious issues", he claims. When asked whether he knew these agitators, he answers: "No, not at all." After his campus was set on fire by Muslims he had fled with the help of Christian and Muslim friends.[59] The agitators remain vague and unknown.[60] But for most interviewees it is clear that they were there, pumping up the tensions behind the screen with the purpose to set up Christian and Muslim communities against each other. This line of reasoning is also present in Julius' answer to the question of responsibility. During the war, Julius had been a village head, leading his village into an attack on a nearby Muslim village. But now Julius argues:

> It is too rude to call the conflict a religious conflict. (…) It is too rude because people do not know who was behind it. People just knew that Muslims attacked Christians and Christians Muslims. After all these years we now know that there were people who wanted a conflict, like the agitators who came to this village and provoked the people. Then the conflict broke out.[61]

57 See Al Qurtuby, "Ambonese Muslim Jihadists," 13.
58 Eddy. Interview by author. Tape recording. Ambon, Wayame, 05-02-2014.
59 Sammy. Interview by author. Tape recording. Banda, Neira, 03-03-2014.
60 See also: Meinema, "Provoking Peace," 52-3.
61 Julius. Interview by author. Tape recording. Saparua, Iha Mabhu, 06-02-2014.

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Some people answered the question 'who was responsible' in a more victimized setting and said that they felt as if they were part of a political game at that time. Amine, a Muslim resident from Ambon City, tells that members of his family were beheaded by Christians. First, he felt he had to defend the Muslim community. But after a while he realized that Christians were suffering in similar ways and he joined interreligious dialogue groups. "We have been set up to such killings" he contends, and explains his efforts for peace during the war as a "jihad".[62] Many Muslims and Christians see themselves as victims of anonymous 'greater forces' behind the screen. Amine did not put his perspective into the frame of a religious war, but in a political frame, accusing vague political instead of concrete religious 'others' for being 'real' antagonists. For many people it is clear that these antagonists had and still have political power. Others point to the economic situation that created distrust and despair. Speaking about the Indonesian government, Eddy for instance argues that political powers could easily encourage violence because of poverty among parts of the population:

> They took advantage of the conflict for political issues. The main problem is not that there are different religions, but the gap between rich and poor and the position of the economic clan, I think. The proof of this is that when the conflict was ended, it was very easy to make things good again. So that's the proof it did not come from us, it's not in our hearts.[63]

Similar to Eddy's answer is that of Haji. Haji is a Muslim resident of Latta who saw his Christian neighbors flee during the war. He also responds along both political and economic lines and answers the question of responsibility by pointing to economic slump:

> There were political powers in Indonesia who tried to affect the people here. Another aspect is the economical gap in Maluku. There were many people jobless, so it was easy for politicians to influence them.[64]

In agreement with a line of reasoning that we heard in many responses, Haji claims: "the conflict had no relationship with religion."[65] Muhammad, a citizen from Hila, tells that during the conflict "we as common citizens" did not realize that there was a 'big boss' behind the scene, setting up people against each

62 Amine. Interview by author. Tape recording. Ambon, Ambon City, 25-03-2014.
63 Eddy. Interview by author. Tape recording. Ambon, Wayame, 05-02-2014.
64 Haji. Interview by author. Tape recording. Ambon, Lata, 05-02-2014.
65 Haji. Interview by author. Tape recording. Ambon, Lata, 05-02-2014.

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other. In that time, Muhammad continues, the 'common citizens' fought based on their religion because they had to protect their religion and their community. But, he says, based on "his feelings", there were people behind the scene dominating the game, with links to the president's family in Jakarta.[66]

Thalib from Hukurila tells how he had to flee under military protection from Bentas to Liang together with his family. When their truck passed Christians who had made a zigzag on the road, the Christians started screaming 'Acang! Acang!' (a popular nick-name for Muslims based on a short Ambonese Public Service Announcement intending to stabilize relationships). That, Thalib says, was "a very scary experience because the Christians had swords in their hands while they were screaming". Despite this and other frightening experiences, Thalib is convinced that "the conflict was designed by some provocateurs." He doesn't know who these provocateurs were, but he heard that the RMS (Republik Maluku Selatan[67]) was behind it all.[68]

In some interviews, the vague powers behind the screen were more clearly identified as references were made more specifically to the role of 'the military'. The military is an important social actor in Indonesian society (TNI, *Tentara Nasional Indonesia*, National Indonesian Army). Before the conflict in Maluku, the organizational structure of the Indonesian military was seen as a problem for a swift transition into democracy. TNI models its own role strongly along lines of protection of the Indonesian unity. After the 'fall' of Suharto in May 1998, the military had to reconsider its role. Liem Soei Liong writes just after Suharto's fall but before the Maluku conflict became visible as a civil war, that "much of the violence in present-day Indonesia has, directly or indirectly, to do with the military."[69] Many analysts share Liong's claim. Be this as it may, 'the military' played a complex role during the Maluku conflict. TNI was sometimes involved in conflict-avoiding strategies but sometimes also in power-games within its own organization or with the Ambonese police force.[70]

More than a decade after the violence, interviewees pointed to the influence of the military and police on the escalation of violence. Amine for example refers to the many weapons that were suddenly present in local communities. "Both communities had professional weapons", he argues:

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66 Muhammad. Interview by author. Tape recording. Ambon, Hila. 04-02-2014.

67 The RMS is often identified as opposing Islam, See Noorhaidi, "Radical Muslim Discourse," 333.

68 Thalib. Interview by author. Tape recording. Ambon, Hukurila, 12-03-2014.

69 Liem Soei Liong, "It's the Military, Stupid," In *Roots of Violence in Indonesia, Contemporary Violence in Historical Perspective*, ed. Freek Colombijn and J. Thomas Lindblad (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2002), 222.

70 Schulte Nordholt, *Indonesië Na Soeharto*, 141.

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> This conflict had been set up by someone who must have had access to security supplies. Civilians were not supposed to have those professional weapons. So they were given to them.[71]

Suddenly Amine asks a question: "So I ask you your opinion, who was able to supply the weapons? Who were really in charge to do that during the conflicts?" When Elizabeth answers: 'The military?', he responds quickly "That's the truth!"

Despite a majority of the interviewees relating the conflict to rather vague powers behind the screen, economic circumstances and power games by the military, some respondents linked the sources of the conflict to 'religion' (*agama*), but even then many also argued that invisible actors 'used' religion for their own interests. Juno, a Catholic living in Ambon City, explains why he joined the clashes at the young age of 14. He shared that he killed people but also that he wants to 'forget it all'. On the one hand he refers to his religion that needed protection, but swiftly he indicates another layer and explains how he was trapped by 'provocateurs' encouraging him to protect his religion. Juno explains that the obligation to protect his religion felt as an inner vocation: "We were just always ready", he said:

> People had to protect our religion and defend our area. I was not afraid. I was passionate to do so. The point is, just by defending our religion I believed nothing could happen to me, because I believed in God.[72]

In retrospect however, Juno shares that he thinks the conflict was created by the military and the government: "they designed the conflict" Juno bluntly claims.[73] Ronny is another former child soldier who joined a Christian combat group at the age of 10. Many children, mostly boys, got involved into the conflict,[74] often after having lost their houses or their parents.[75] When Juno was a child he felt

71 Amine. Interview by author. Tape recording. Ambon, Ambon City, 25-03-2014.

72 Juno. Interview by author. Tape recording. Ambon, Ambon City, 14-03-2014.

73 Juno. Interview by author. Tape recording. Ambon, Ambon City, 14-03-2014.

74 See Sukidi Mulyadi, "Violence under the Banner of Religion. The case of Laskar Jihad and Laskar Kristus", *Studia Islamika, Indonesian Journal of Islamic Studies*, 10/2 (2003): 83, 93-99.

75 Richard C. Paddock, "'My Job Is to Throw Bombs and Burn Houses,' Moluccan Boy Says," *Los Angeles Times*, 14 March 2001, at: http://articles.latimes.com/2001/mar/14/news/mn-37618, accessed 11.07.2018; Tjitske Lingsma, *Het Verdriet van Ambon*, 273-282; Hehanussa, *Der Molukkenkonflikt von 1999*, 140-1.

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confident about the religious nature of the conflict, but when he became older he changed his mind and pointed out that they were "used" to fight each other:

> In that time when I was a kid I agreed that the conflict was a religious conflict, therefore I fought for God with the name 'Brutal' (i.e. Berjuang untuk Allah, Fighting for God). In 2004 I realized that there was really something beyond this conflict. I believed that there were certain people who tried to use us to fight each other.[76]

When asked how they looked back at the war itself, many interviewees argued that they were 'defending' their religion, 'defending Jesus', 'defending' their communities or fighting a *'jihad'*. Although many referred to the causes of the war as economic, political etc., the war itself was often understood as a war '*antar agama*' — between religions, especially by ex-child-soldiers. Tarek for example, who fought as a child within a Muslim militia in Rumahtiga, says:

> When I was a kid and experienced the conflict and heard about religious symbols and yells used by Christians and Muslims, I thought it was a religious conflict. But after the conflict I realized that it was not a religious conflict but a political conflict. Or more like a conflict of interests.[77]

It is noteworthy to see that more than a decade after this conflict with such a strong religious color, most people interviewed were not blaming Islam or Christianity, nor Muslims or Christians for the war, but many fingers were pointed to politicians, the government, 'the situation', or the military. Former child soldiers were indicating a point, often after the war, when they realized that they had been used or set up against others. This discourse is similar among members of Muslim and Christian communities. The importance of pointing to a vague, anonymous 'other' that started the war out of unclear reasons cannot be underestimated as facilitating power behind processes of reconciliation. This discourse however also leads to perspectives on agency where people who got involved can continue to see themselves as victims. But not everyone agrees on the idea that this vague outside other played grisly political games behind the screen. Such an exception is Timo, former militia leader in Bathu Gantung. Timo points out that the conflict was organized by Islamic countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan and Kuwait with the purpose to transform Indonesia into an Islamic republic.

76 Ronny. Interview by author. Tape recording. Ambon, Ambon City, 13-03-2014.
77 Tarek. Interview by author. Tape recording. Ambon, Ambon City, 21-03-2014.

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> All Muslims planned the conflict. It was planned in Ambon because they wanted to create a Muslim country. In Maluku, Christianity is strong, so maybe when Christianity in Maluku would fall, it would be easy to make a Muslim republic of Indonesia. (..) For many years the Muslims were planning this conflict.[78]

This narrative was popular among Christian militias during the war.[79] Despite Timo's claim however, out of 79 interviews, 51 interviewees considered the conflict-causes more than a decade later as non-religious while 19 interviewees said not to know the causes of this conflict and only 9 people understood the causes of war as purely religious.

7 Justifications

While the majority of the interviewees argued in retrospect that the instigating force behind the conflict had little to do with 'religion' and that provocateurs triggered people to fight a battle, the reality of the violence was strongly framed within religious discourses.[80] Both Muslim and Christian discourses and theologies were utilized to understand and deal with the tense situation. Christians were fighting 'to defend Jesus', identifying themselves with 'Israel'.[81] Robert Setio writes about the desire among some Christians to make Ambon City a solemnly Christian city, modeling Ambonese Christians after the Biblical 'Israelites' while at the same time referring to an imagined 'golden age' of Christian hegemony.[82] Two of the Christian interviewees who were engaged as peace-workers during the conflict, Benjamin and Johny, note that they were

78 Timo. Interview by author. Tape recording. Ambon, Ambon City, 01-03-2014.

79 See Twee Vandaag, "Molukkers Zweren Te Vechten."

80 See also: Mulyadi, "Violence under the Banner of Religion", 94-95; Wilson, *Ethno-Religious Violence in Indonesia: From Soil to God;* Lucien van Liere, "Representing 'Religious Violence': Understanding the Role of Religion as Simplifier and Magnifier of Violent Conflict.," in *Representations of Peace and Conflict*, ed. Stephen Gibson and Simon Mollan, Palgrave M (Basingstoke, 2012), 207-26; Al Qurtuby, "Christianity and Militancy"; Al Qurtuby, "Ambonese Muslim Jihadists"; Duncan, *Violence and Vengeance*.

81 Tjitske Lingsma, *Het Verdriet van Ambon, Een Geschiedenis van de Molukken*, p.23; Sumanto Al Qurtuby, "Christianity and Militancy in Eastern Indonesia: Revisiting the Maluku Violence," 328, 333-4.

82 Robert Setio, "The Text of War in the Context of War. A Functional Reading," in *Sense and Sensitivity. Essays on Reading the Bible. Essays in Memory of Robert Carroll*, ed. Alaistar G. Hunter and Philip R. Davies (Bloomsbury: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 194-5.

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labelled as "Judas" by co-religionists.[83] On the other side, many Muslims considered the war a '*jihad*'.[84] Both sides understood their violence to be defensive and legitimate, and saw themselves as the victims of the other. Albeit the war had no origin in a religious dispute, violence against Muslims simply because they were Muslims and against Christians simply because they were Christians created situations in which the suffering of one's community encouraged people to look for religious-based rights to defend. Benjamin makes this very clear. He had been a pastor during the conflict and reflects on what the tensions and violence did to him and how this dragged him into the war.

> When the mobs came to me they asked: 'Father, do we have a right to kill our enemy?' It was hard for me to answer theologically (…) it pushed me down. I had no answer for that kind of questions, because I knew: 'No! we have not'. But it was that situation. You cannot talk about theological value or ethical value in that kind of situation. It was a crazy time. (…) Sometimes I said: 'yeah, we do have rights'. This was my excuse for them. (…) It was not a wise answer, but it was like a trick. (…) In that crazy condition you cannot use a normal perspective. (…) You have to imagine the whole condition of that time. The only way you can save your values is getting out of that area. (…) If you stay in that situation, what can you do, if suddenly angry mobs come over you (…) disembowel your pregnant wife, take out the fetus and cut it? What can you do? Defend yourself, defend your family, defend the embryo in your wife's belly? (…) You kill or you are being killed.[85]

During the first year of the war, Benjamin still justified and encouraged violence. After one year however he stopped defending violence theologically and became an activist for peaceful coexistence. While the violence developed swiftly along religious divides, group-identities became important as fundamental distinctive elements in the conflict. Benjamin's story compellingly shows how people wanted to draw justifications from theologies to retaliate cruelty done to them as a group. It is not 'Christianity' that is harmed but — in Benjamin's gendered phrase — "your pregnant wife", "the fetus" and "the embryo in your wife's belly", those 'who are dear' and whose lives are

83 Benjamin. Interview by author. Tape recording. Ambon, Ambon City, 24-03-2014; Johny. Interview by author. Tape recording. Ambon, Ambon City, 13-03-2014.

84 See Al Qurtuby, "Ambonese Muslim Jihadists".

85 Benjamin. Interview by author. Tape recording. Ambon, Ambon City, 24-03-2014.

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'non-negotiable'. 'Christianity' might become part of conflict-terminology as far as this term is charged with the image of the community.[86]

Dullah from Tulehu, who was fighting with the *Laskar Jihad* at that time, tells how he got wounded and how he was 'now' trying hard "to delete it all". He says that God instructed the Muslims to fight a *jihad*. He stresses that *jihad* does not mean 'war' and explains that "when during the conflict someone attacked somebody, or myself, we just wanted to safe our souls".[87] Fazhur narrates how he was trained by the *Laskar Jihad* as an eight-years old boy on the island of Saparua. He tells how he lost three friends and that he learned how to make and place bombs. He points to "some people of *Laskar Jihad*" who told him: "If you die, God will accept you and you will go to heaven".[88] Tarek argued that "It's not about an option, but it's about a calling, a religious calling. In my mind, defending religion is an obligation".[89]

This worked similar at 'the other side'. Three ex-members of the Christian Coker gang of Kudamati; Aram, Krisyanto and Max, share their memoires of the conflict and explain about the role of the Coker group. The Coker group was a paramilitary Christian gang during the conflict, led by Bertie Loupatty.[90] The three veterans proudly share their war-experiences: "The role of the Coker army of Kudamati had a great impact on the conflict", one argues. They claim that the Coker group of Kudamati had a certain reputation in the area. They contend that they were helping those Christians under attack. The group "only protected" Christians, "Christian symbols, Christian faith and Christian religion". They recount that they prayed before they went out to 'protect' and how they did not only took their weapons but also their Bibles to the battleground and that, through the conflict, their faith had made them stronger.[91]

The ex-Laskar Jihad-members as well as the ex-Coker-members emphasize that during the conflict they were forced into defense. The violence used during the conflict is seen as justified counter-violence. More than a decade after the conflict, most interviewees were convinced that they were forced 'from the outside' to defend themselves against the other religious group. Doing this

86 See for example Paul W. Kahns ideas on the relationship between imaginaries of a community and sacrifice: Paul W. Khan, *Sacred Violence, Torture, Terror, and Sovereignity*, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008), 116-117.

87 Dullah. Interview by author. Tape recording. Ambon, Tulehu, 08-02-2014.

88 Fazhur. Interview by author. Tape recording. Seram, Latu, 17-03-2014.

89 Tarek. Interview by author. Tape recording. Ambon, Ambon City, 21-03-2014.

90 Kristof Titeca & Koen Vlassenroot. Jeroen Adam, Bruno De Cordier, "In the Name of the Father? Christian Militantism in Tripura, Northern Uganda, and Ambon," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 30/11 (2007): 963-83.

91 Aram, Krisyanto and Max. Interview by author. Tape recording. Ambon Ambon, Ambon City, 20-03-2014.

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however, mosques, churches and lives were not spared, which strongly contributed to the idea that the violence was truly a "religious war for religious ends".[92] Protecting an injured community by waging a just war constructed a self-perspective that made it possible to injure or kill as victims, as Dianne Enns has argued.[93]

8 Miracles and Visions

Although we were not looking for miracle-stories or visions at the time of the interviews, ten interviewees narrated about specific events that they related to divine guidance, protection or meddling. We understand miracles and visions as events that are "described by people as such".[94]

Although there is a large literature on the subject of miracles,[95] the language and function of miracles and visions in situations of violent conflicts have not yet received much scholarly attention.[96] Miracle-stories are meaningful within communities as they 'convert' experiences that are informed by the specific language of the group, into strengthened (self) perspectives of the group. Language, place, moment and matter all play important roles to unravel an experience as 'meaningful' for a group. The language of a miracle narrative links the group's self-understanding to a frame that might sustain the group's beliefs about what is going on. Especially in conflict-situations, these stories can produce the 'truth' about a conflict as God is clearly on 'our side', as he guides, protects and 'visits' us with visions. Subsequently, the conflict may become more intensely framed as religious. During the Maluku conflict, miracles

92 Al Qurtuby, "Ambonese Muslim Jihadists," 10.

93 Diane Enns, *The Violence of Victimhood,* 37.

94 Gerrie ter Haar, "A Wondrous God: Miracles in Contemporary Africa.," *African Affairs* 102/408 (2003): 412.

95 See Anne-Marie de Korte, *Women and Miracle Stories: A Multidisciplinary Exploration* (Leiden: Brill, 2001); Gerrie ter Haar, "A Wondrous God: Miracles in Contemporary Africa," ed. Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar, *Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa* (London: C. Hurst & Co, 2003).

96 Although the work of Nils Bubandt on North Maluku is a fascinating exception, for example: Nils Bubandt, "Ghosts with Trauma: Global Imaginaries and the Politics of Post-Conflict Memory" in *Conflict, Violence, and Displacement in Indonesia*, ed. Eva-Lotta Hedman, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2008), 275-301; Bubandt, "Violence and Millenarian Modernity." A perspective on apparitions of Mary in former Yugoslavia and how these were used as conflict-models is given by: Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan Idols, Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 109-123.

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and visions encouraged war-perspectives that made it difficult to understand the conflict at more levels than only the religious. Some Christian visions had a strong apocalyptic content. As miracles on Ambon were often about guidance, protection and revelation through visions, they implicitly enhanced the different conflict-roles of defenders and offenders, victims and perpetrators. Although both Muslims and Christians referred to miraculous guiding during the violence, during the interviews most miracle stories were told by Christian respondents.

In post-war Maluku, Christian miracles were retold, uploaded unto the internet[97] and often referred to. Miracles were seen as strong signs of God's presence, protection and guidance. Most of these stories contain dichotomic perspectives. This is especially true for visions that some Christians had preceding and during the war. Nils Bubandt discusses a vision that gained popularity among some Christian communities on Ambon: the story of Ria, a 16-year old Christian girl from Halmahera.[98] A day after the first violent clash appeared in January 1999, she was woken up by Jesus who told her that "the year 2000 would mark the beginning of a new era, but the time before this renewal would be marred by bloodshed and fighting. Much calamity is still to come" (During six days following her first vision, Jesus showed Ria heaven. Ria saw that while most roads were heading towards hell, only one road would lead to heaven. Once the violence spread and became more severe, Ria was shown the prophet Muhammad who was "doomed for eternity to turn a large wheel and was denied food and drink".[99] Another vision was revealed to Enona Laetemia, a 14-year old girl. Youngsters are often considered as 'pure' agents, channeling visions and messages. Jesus showed Enona Muhammad as an old man pushing forward "something like a wheel". Her visions are dated before the tensions turned into violence on January 19, 1999. Jesus told Enona that Muhammad was penalized. In a fearsome vision, Enona was shown Ambon's vicious near future. She saw burning churches and heard words from Jesus: "Behold, soon I will release My hands from the world".[100] The explanation of Enona's vi-

97 Tabitha, "Kesaksian Keajaiban Yang Mengherankan Di Ambon," 2011, https://wannabextraordinary.wordpress.com/2011/09/03/kesaksian-keajaiban-yang-mengherankan-di-ambon/. Accessed 16 April 2017.

98 Nils Bubandt, "Violence and Millenarian Modernity"; See also: Lucien van Liere, "Fighting for Jesus on Ambon. Interpreting Religious Representations of Violent Conflict," *Exchange, Journal of Missiological and Ecumenical Research* 40/4 (2011), 1-14.

99 Nils Bubandt, "Violence and Millenarian Modernity," 102.

100 Candrawijaya, "Peristiwa Ajaib Seputar Kerusuhan Ambon," 2008, http://candrawijaya.wordpress.com/2008/05/15/peristiwa-ajaib-seputar-kerusuhan-ambon. Accessed 16 April 2017.

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sion by church minister Candrawijaya also shows a sharp separation between Muslims and Christians. Muslims are portrayed as the well-organized perpetrators of the atrocities opposite vulnerable Christian victims. On his website, Candrawijaya adds other miracle-stories to Enona's witness. God's visions are not only visions of shielding but also of vengeance, like the attack by Muslims that was diffused by God. The Muslims suddenly started to kill each other instead of Christians. Or the church-bell that was stolen by Muslims but was still ringing. Every time the bell rang, a Muslim found his death.[101] Another narrative tells the story of Muslims who were met by a *Bapa Bule*, a white man who, while the Muslims were attacking and shooting their bullets at the Protestant church of Sulii, took these bullets and put these into his chest, an allusion to the suffering of Jesus, portrayed in this vision as a white (colonial) Christ.[102] These stories are understood as witnesses that "really strengthens our faith in Jesus Christ."[103]

Most of these Christian stories appeared on websites and in booklets during the riots. After 12 years however, miracles still do have a function in dealing with the memory of the war. Not only on still active websites,[104] but also in the narratives of the interviewees.

The story of Timo is a point in case. Timo, a Christian lecturer whose faculty was destroyed during the war, claims that already before the conflict, he was concerned about the position of Christians in Indonesia. In 1997 — two years before the riots broke out on Ambon — he had an extraordinary experience that he considered as a sign of God; he turned on his computer without using electricity. He believed this experience was a warning for the coming violence against Christians on Ambon. He thought God used the computer because he had to warn the church leaders by sending them an email. However, none of the church leaders believed this, which was disappointing for Timo. Later on, one day before the violence broke out, Timo had another vision. In his "mind's eye" he saw fire all over the place and many villages that were burned down, images similar to Enona's vision. Again, he interpreted this as a sign that warned him for violence against Christians that would start the day afterwards. When the riots broke out, Timo asked the church leaders to organize combat and provide weapons. However, the church leaders reasoned that only prayers were

101 Candrawijaya, "Peristiwa Ajaib," 18.

102 Candrawijaya, "Peristiwa Ajaib," 9-20.

103 Tabitha, "Kesaksian Keajaiban."

104 Compass direct, "Miracles in the Midst of Massacres," *The Network for Strategic Missions*. http://www.strategicnetwork.org/index.php?loc=kb&view=v&id=3782&fto=594&fby=108b70701edf23b3dc27e1a8688ec8a6&&. Accessed 14 May, 2014; Tabitha, "Kesaksian Keajaiban"; Candrawijaya, "Peristiwa Ajaib".

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necessary in this conflict. After this response Timo felt responsible for playing a more active role in defending his fellow believers and he became the leader of a Christian combat group. He emphasizes that he was angry and irrepressible to defend Christian beliefs. His house became a base where Christian combatants prepared for battle. Before each battle, Timo would lead the prayer. He tells that it was of great importance that each individual fighter had experienced a personal vocation from God to join the fight. He believed that if they were not sure about God's calling, they would be without God's protection and they would certainly be killed. Timo explained that the trumpet was a spiritual weapon with "Biblical power" and had a great impact on the conflict. In the Biblical story of the fall of Jericho, the Israelites conquered the city by blowing their trumps. In line with this story, Timo organized a brass band because he believed the trumpet could frustrate the activities of Muslims. He says that he has seen "lots of miracles" as the result of using trumpets at the battlefield. For instance, when the Muslims attacked his church during a service, the brass band started to play and all the bullets flew over their heads — no one was killed or even wounded, Timo claims. The trumpet however was also a weapon:

> When the conflict started everywhere, we were playing trumpets and thousand Muslims died. When they came here, to start the war, they died because of the strength of the trumpet. Because the sound and strength of the trumpet came from God.[105]

Timo's narratives indicate a clear distinction between Christians and Muslims. Narratives like these enhance the conflict to a different level where it becomes more difficult to understand and to solve.[106] Even after the conflict these stories were still popular. Although one person told us that Timo was 'crazy', others indicated that he was highly respected.

Other Christian miracle-stories were less about violence against Muslims but more about guidance and protection. Sabar, for example, had to flee into the jungle in January 1999 and tells a story of his escape at night during an attack on his village Hila:

> It was almost at night when we had to run (…). It was the mercy of God that came to us because God was like … well, do you know fireflies? It was the light of the fireflies that guided us.[107]

105 Timo. Interview by author. Tape recording. Ambon, Ambon City, 01-03-2014.
106 See van Liere, "Representing 'Religious Violence'."
107 Sabar. Interview by author. Tape recording. Ambon, Wayame, 08-03-2014.

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Simon also shared a story about God's protection. As an 11-year old, he was playing in his room and did not notice anything about clashes that broke out in the street. He did not notice nor smell the houses that started to burn. His parents assumed that Simon was already at a safe place and left their house in a hurry. When they arrived at the house of a family-member, they were shocked to notice that Simon was not there. While everybody feared for his safety and started to pray, Simon was still playing in his room, not noticing what went on. After a few hours he left his room and discovered what happened all around him. His house was the only house in the street that was not burning. He arrived safely at his family's house. Simon explains that this was a miracle of God and refers to God's protection.[108]

Lea tells us how an acquaintance was protected by the Bible. For her, this story was an important sign that God protected his people during the war:

> One of our fellow-Christians was almost shot. He took his holy Bible. (..) A Muslim wanted to shoot him but he shot the holy Bible instead. It's really amazing. The holy Bible protected him.[109]

Lea continues to tell how they discovered the bullets that were stuck in the Bible (a narrative linked to an interesting trope within Christianity about Bible-protection). In most of these stories, protection and guidance are mediated by objects like a Bible, fireflies or a trumpet. Miracles function as intercessions of the divine. Timo's story was and still is popular among many Ambonese Christians, although also contested by some. Miracles and visions were still retold by many.

9 Interpreting the Material

The interviews show a — what we called earlier — 'double mode' between the causes of the conflict as non-religious and religious interpretations of the conflict itself. What was at stake during the conflict was religion as it functioned as a matrix of historical and social identification, i.e. as the heart of the community. This perspective on religion explains in our view why there appeared a double mode; religion could only justify violence as protective violence and as such formed a bulwark against the alleged Islamization or Christianization

108 Simon. Interview by author. Tape recording. Ambon, Ambon City, 10-02-2014.
109 Lea. Interview by author. Tape recording. Ambon, Poka, 09-02-2014.

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efforts of the 'others'. It could not provide the community with reasons to 'attack', only with arguments to defend. Religion, in this sense, is put at the heart of "what is dear and non-negotiable", and reflects not so much a conviction but a bonding. The conflict was not a conflict *over* religious difference as such but over "dear and non-negotiable" relationships, about the right to be and protect, informed by narratives on the violence committed by Islamizing or Christianizing others.

In the post-war situation where Elizabeth conducted the interviews, nobody took the accountability for having thrown the first stone. The narrative of the unknown outsiders could be adopted by both Muslims and Christians alike without pointing fingers or accepting responsibility. This narrative provides a frame by which communities can avoid responsibility and (re)construct their communities as victimized. Sharing this narrative can be understood as an effort to create a context in which nobody is really to blame and reconciliation between the different religious communities is facilitated by the unknown provocateurs.

10 Concluding Remarks

In this article we have analyzed how Muslims and Christians in retrospect reflect on the Ambon civil war. Based on 79 interviews we explored what causes of the conflict were identified by the interviewees, and how the interviewees understood their own role, the role of politics and the role of the religious other. We identified three core themes related to the conflict: causes of the conflict according to the interviewees, religious justifications of violence and miracles.

Looking back at the causes of the conflict as described by the interviewees, an interesting observation can be made. Although after more than a decade most interviewees were convinced that the war was caused by 'outsiders' who gained profit by setting up Christians and Muslims against each other, many also argued that as their communities were attacked, they felt obliged to protect their communities and were convinced of its religious character. Albeit a huge majority of the interviewees argued that the origin of the civil war was not 'religious', talking about the war and the obligation to protect was drenched in religious language and interviewees did not only refer to their religious communities they defended but also mentioned religious practices and miracles that functioned as identity-splitting instruments during the fights.

Al Qurtuby argues that political and economic issues were a "smokescreen" to conceal religious goals; the demolition of particular religious groups and

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areas, the spread of faith, conversion etc.[110] Based on our research we can conclude that in retrospect, many used the smokescreen of the outside provocateurs to make their roles during the conflict understandable, creating a unified community of victims and leaving the utilization of "religion" during the conflict out of the scope.

On the other hand, peace projects use religious resources to build safe communities and to avoid new waves of radical religious solutions to communal threats or violence. Still, Al Qurtuby signals an unwillingness to coexist especially from the Muslim side and argues that if this is not solved, the situation will remain a time bomb.[111] Some interviewees, like Yushuf and Dullah, former members of the *Laskar Jihad*, were convinced that in the future the violence will come back. The ex-Coker members Aram, Krisyanto and Max were bragging about their time with the militia and argued that the conflict made their faith stronger. Many Christians and Muslims however shared that they hoped it would remain safe in Maluku. While religious conflict-frames were still very active and distrust still present, narratives and suspicions about the 'real' conflict-causes created an alternative imaginary to replace the narrative of religious antagonism and domination.

This however cannot downplay the role of religious *language*. When the violence broke out and communities got injured, religious affiliations provided clear frames to justify the battle as a religious clash. Religious ideas and symbols fused with the harsh reality of wounded communities. Religion functioned as the kernel of group-splitting discourses distinguishing clearly between victims and perpetrators. Most Christians and Muslims did not battle each other over religious difference as such, but because their communities were targeted as Christian and Muslim communities. When violence breaks out and people get injured and are killed, when 'what is most dear' is targeted and — in Benjamin's words — the situation becomes 'crazy', communities start to understand themselves as injured and victimized. On Ambon, narratives, gossip and suspicions triggered established frames by which Christian and Muslim communities could find religious language to understand what was going on, why they were targeted and how they were justified or obliged to fight back, embedding the conflict into collective memories and political fears of Christianization or Islamization efforts. Several Christian interviewees shared miracles they experienced at the time of the conflict. They had no doubt that God guided and protected them and no doubt that, while fighting to protect,

110 Al Qurtuby, "Ambonese Muslim Jihadists," 3; Schulze, "Laskar Jihad and the Conflict in Ambon," 66.
111 Al Qurtuby, "Ambonese Muslim Jihadists," 26.

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the conflict they were into was thoroughly religious. Religious frames of the right to defend communities under attack created a strong obligation to defend one's injured and victimized community. These frames were still present at the time of the interviews. After 12 years and many reconciliation processes, most agreed on the non-religious origin of the civil war. There was a commonly shared idea that the war was not inaugurated by Muslims or Christians but by elites, the military or other vague powers working behind the screen and using provocateurs to lite up the violence. Still, the war itself was for many directly or indirectly charged with religious meanings. This discrepancy however can fire conflict-agents from taking up responsibility and leaving the conflict-frames and the religious language that influenced the conflict-dynamics intact, even after more than ten years.

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