POLITICAL IDENTITY AND RELIGIOUS PREJUDICE IN A POST-CONFLICT SOCIETY: A CASE STUDY OF POSO, INDONESIA

衝突後社會的政治身份和宗教偏見：印度尼西亞 POSO 的案例研究

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Abstract

The article describes an alternative approach to postreligious social conflict analysis. The conflict which occurred in Poso district, Indonesia, is used as an example. The political perspective enables the examination of religious identity politicization in a society. Using the phenomenology method, the authors attempt to explore the meaning of concepts or phenomena based on the consciousness that occurs in some individuals who experiences conflict. The study indicates that the conflict in Poso was due to a change in political flow that was quickly accepted, as was the case with Islamic migrants entering the Poso region. They were initially only a minority, then became more extensive and occupied most of the strategic positions in the bureaucrat. This situation generated the indigenous Christian communities being marginalized that provoke social conflicts arose. Apart from intolerance and negative stigma, religious conflicts are also often triggered by the politicization of religion. This study contributes to strengthening the local context of policymakers in considering minority groups and indigenous peoples in the policy-making process.

Keywords: Political Identity, Conflict Identity, Post Conflict, Religious Conflict

摘要 本文描述了一種替代方法來分析發生在印度尼西亞波索地區的後宗教衝突社會，該社會基於政治視角，能夠檢查宗教身份的政治化。作者使用現象學的方法，試圖探索基於一些經歷衝突的個體的意識的概念或現象的意義。研究表明，波索的衝突是由於政治流動的變化引起的，這種變化很快被接受，就像進入波索地區的伊斯蘭移民一樣。他們最初只是少數，後來變得更大，佔據了官僚中的大部分戰略位置。這種情況導致原住民基督教社區被邊緣化，引發社會衝突。除了不容忍和負面污名的存在外，宗教衝突也經常由宗教政治化引發。本研究有助於加強決策者在考慮

決策過程中的少數群體和土著人民.

关键词: 政治身份，衝突身份，衝突後，宗教衝突

I. INTRODUCTION

Political identity refers to utilizing social identities, either to gain a political support base or simply to gain recognition [1], [2]. In political power competitions, the application of identity politics, particularly ethnicity and religious identities, is common in emerging democracies and is prone to social identity-based conflicts [3]. This study focuses on exploring ethnic and religious identities in one of the post-conflict areas in Indonesia

Indonesia is a multicultural country of many identities, religions, and groups with 1,128 indigenous ethnic groups. Such cultural diversity is a certainty in a nation of 230 million people spread wide across more than 17,000 islands [4]. In a conscious effort to unite a country of different beliefs and cultures, the Republic of Indonesia, in the Old Order era of its first president, Soekarno, adopted the slogan "*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*" budding nation's official motto [5]. The saying means unity in diversity which refers to the last line of a well-known kakawin from the ancient Kingdom Majapahit [5]

The Indonesian government, throughout its history, has openly extolled the diversity of its people while remaining quietly cautious of the potential for conflict implicit in this diversity. This ethnic, religious, and racial diversity has been responsible for developing political identity and has repeatedly become a threat to the nation's unity. On many occasions, this diversity has led to mass civil conflicts motivated by ethnic, racial, or religious hatred. Such hate conflicts, which often lead to mass violence if left unchecked, could very well lead to the nation's disintegration.

Indonesian political transition period from the military regime (known as the New Order) toward the democracy era (acknowledged as the Reform Era) was followed by massive fatal communal conflicts in several areas in Indonesia, particularly in Sumatra, Sulawesi, Maluku, Papua, Kalimantan dan Java islands. The violent communal conflicts that occurred during this period consisted of etnho-conflict, political-conflict, and religious conflict [6]. One of the worst religious conflicts happened in the Regency of Poso, Central Sulawesi Province [7]. The warfare between the Muslim and Christian communities was provoked by personal squabbles between two youth of different religions in December 1998 [8], [9], [10].

The Regency of Poso has 256 393 inhabitants [11] Population data for the different religious communities of Poso is relatively balanced: 45% are Muslim, 35% are Christian, with the remainder comprised of a combination of Hindus, Buddhists, and other minority religious groups. Generally, the Muslim population of Poso are transmigrants from Jawa, Lombok, Gorontalo, and South Sulawesi (ethnic Bugis and Makassar), as well as Tojo, Bungku, and Togian people [12]. Poso's Christan population is primarily ethnic Pamona and Mori, with a smaller migrant Christian population from Manado, Toraja, and East Nusa Tenggara [12]. Based on this data, we can say that the demographic makeup of Poso is a miniature Indonesia of sorts, a reflection of the nation's multiculturality.

Conflicts of religious identity are ingrained in the collective memory of the people of Poso. They are left with unanswered questions about its history of conflict, how to go on with life in the now, and what hopes there may be of peace in the future. In recent years, the media has reported multiple stories of mysterious shootings in Poso, such as an unsolved 2014 case that ended with numerous deaths. Other notable cases of violence include the case of two missing police officers who were later found dead, the bombings of Kawua and a traffic officer post, and the burning of a manse. Several mysterious items, suspected to be explosives, were found in some locations in the region. There was also the case of distributing a mysterious, threatening letter containing a list of target locations for acts of violence in Poso. Of course, we can't forget the high-profile search for the terrorist Santoso, a complex, collaborative effort between the National Army and local police officials involving the thorough combing of the entire region for terrorist operatives, an operation that is still ongoing. All these cases and more have entered the collective memory of the people of Poso, serving as stark reminders of the eternal political and religious tensions between the community's many groups.

This residual communal fear is a significant issue in Poso today. And a recent string of cases has reactivated this collective fear in Poso, a region that has been a hotbed for violent conflict

for decades. The activation of these memories is systematic and endlessly repeated through statements by the local government and security officials -- even community figures and peace leaders -- disseminated throughout the region by mass media.

The people of Poso, regardless of their religious beliefs, are constantly reminded of the wounds of conflict. These constant reminders of the region's violent past don't simply refer to these acts of violence within the context of their time's political and cultural situation. Still, they are twisted and exploited and integrated into a language of conflict and terror. In this language, religion is unequivocally connected to violence. Poso is a favored spot for terrorist training camps because it has a long history of inter-faith violence.

The many different and often conflicting interests of the various religious groups in Poso have given birth to prejudices, default descriptors for each religious group and the members that comprise them. These prejudices have increased the inclination for aggressive behavior toward others -- the other groups, other religions. The atmosphere is an extreme vulnerability, facilitating the repeated occurrence of religious conflict due to strengthening each group's prejudices about the other.

The regency of Poso, demographically, can be described as a miniature Indonesia, a localized representation of the multiculturality of the nation. Still, it has also been the place of violent, bloody conflict. Suppose Poso were to be thrown into another religious strife. In that case, the possibility is natural that it may trigger similar events in other historically conflict-ridden regions throughout Indonesia, such as Aceh, Papua, Kalimantan, Madura, and Ambon. This paper will explore the following research problem: What is the pattern of religious prejudice formed in the collective memory of post-conflict Poso?

II. METHODS/MATERIALS

This study was conducted in the Poso Regency, Central Sulawesi Province, Indonesia, in 2018. Poso is a post-conflict area where religious communal conflict was erupted in 1998 and caused about 1,000 dead, and thousand became internally displaced persons [13]. This study focused on observing religious prejudice in the collective memory of the community of post-conflict Poso. More specifically, the patterns of religious discrimination that develop in the collective memory of the community of post-conflict Poso and how the potential for communal religious conflict can occur in Poso.

This study is phenomenological. Phenomenological research intends to describe or explore the concept or phenomenon of experience based on an individual's consciousness. This study was conducted under natural circumstances. Thus there were no limits to the understanding of or assigning meaning to the studied phenomena. According to Creswell [14], "Phenomenology's approach is to suspend all judgments about what is real until they are founded on a more certain basis." Husserl called this suspension "epoche" and served to differentiate the data region (subject) from the researcher's interpretation [14]. The concept of epoche is the basis upon which the writer compiled and categorized initial presumptions of phenomena to understand what is being said by respondents.

This study used a qualitative approach, contextual research that emphasizes a human behavior interaction phenomenon in post-conflict situations. Therefore, an emphasis on the human element as a research tool is critical. Moreover, combining a qualitative with phenomenological method allows for analysis to focus on a multitude of phenomena in the form of context or text and the opinions of the public and institutions relevant to the purposes of this study. Through this qualitative method, one can observe the dynamics of management and empowerment of the outermost islands of Indonesia's borderlands. Data was collected through interviews and observation. The researcher interviewed ten key informants consisting of local government, community leaders, Indonesian National Armed Forces Security and Indonesian Police, local scholars, and community leaders.

The second method referred to above is observation, which uses the sense, such as sight or hearing, to obtain the information necessary to answer a research problem. Observation produces data in events, objects, conditions, or certain tones or attitudes, and emotions. Observation aims to obtain an accurate illustration of an incident or event to answer a research question. In this study, the writer conducted a direct observation of activities or incidents in the field. Data are analyzed by an interpretative approach where researchers use theory in analyzing exciting phenomena from the observed data.

II. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Religious Prejudice Patterns in Poso Society

The conflict in Poso is one example of a conflict in Indonesia that remains unresolved to this day due to a terrorist group which its member mainly ex-Moslem combatants [12]. Many solutions have been proposed, though none have guaranteed any palpable sense of safety in Poso. Conflict and unrest continue to be commonplace in Poso. Although conflicts in Poso have historically been attributed to religious factors, a closer look uncovers several group interests behind the discord.

Poso is a regency in the province of Central Sulawesi. Poso is a demographically diverse region. Aside from the native tribes that inhabit Poso, many immigrant tribes are also domiciled in Poso. These immigrant tribes include the Jawa, Batak, and Bugis ethnic tribes, among others. The indigenous tribe of Poso is the ethnic Toraja, who also inhabit the regions surrounding Poso, such as Morowali and Tojo Una Una. According to Noott [15], Poso society consists of three primary Toraja groups in Poso. The first is the West Toraja, otherwise known as Toraja Pargi-Kaili. The second group is the East Toraja, or Toraja Poso-Tojo, and the third is the South Toraja, known as Toraja Sa'dan. The first group is native to Central Sulawesi, and the third group originally came from South Sulawesi. The Toraja Poso-Tojo itself is comprised of two sub-groups: The first group is Poso Tojo, comprised of Toraja Parigi-Kaili, who speak the Bare's language. Unlike the Toraja Parigi-Kaili, the second sub-group does not have a shared language specific to the sub-group.

From a religious context, Poso is divided into two major religious groups, Muslims and Christians. In 1999, the national government prescribed the division of the regency of Poso into three regencies: Morowali, Tojo Una-Una, and Poso. Poso became majority Christian after the division; its community was majority Muslim before 1999. Other, smaller religious groups, typically based on historic customary beliefs, can still be found in remote areas of the region. Islam was the first major religion to follow in the Sulawesi provinces, later followed by Christianity. This socio-cultural and religious diversity of the Poso community is often the cause of communal violence in Poso. Religion is frequently the vehicle and tendentious cause for promoting group interests at the cost of peace. It is confirmed by Informant AB who is a community leader, addresses that

"…*I still remember the atmosphere from 1998 to 2001, the Poso area was terrifying, if I am not mistaken there were 600 houses that were burned, many people were displaced until someone died. I forgot the number. Like a religious war, members of the Muslim community feel that Christian groups will kill, so some citizens believe that Islamic groups will attack the Christian system. Given all the chest feels tight, can not be lost*" (interview on March 25, 2018)

The first significant incident of religious violence in Poso took place after the 1999 Regent Election campaign. Religious favoritism was implicitly responsible for the results of the election. Abdul Muin Pusadan's victory was supported by a message emphasizing Poso's community's religious and ethnic differences. Since then, religion has become a permanent factor underlying conflict in Poso. Even minor disagreements or fighting between two individuals can trigger mass unrest in Poso. For example, let's say there are two young men involved in a bit of alteration. One young man is Muslim, and the other is Christian. The loser of this scuffle refuses to accept defeat. Then one of the two -- or even both -- reports the fight to members of their religious community, leading to large-scale unrest involving many people, or even their entire community. It is confirmed by the informant AA, who is a researcher at a local university, stated that:

"*Since the Governor issued the letter of dismissal of Arief Patangan as Regent, conflicts overpower struggles from religious backgrounds have escalated, there are three candidates who passed the selection of Regent elections to replace Arief, namely Abdul Muin Pusadan (Islam), Ma'sud Kasim (Islam) and Eddy Bungkudapu (Christian) and when Abdul Muin Pusadan won the election, and he did not place a position for sekwilda for the Christian group, so the Christian group felt they did not get a position in the government. there is discrimination of power formed by the regent in office, eventually leading to excessive religious regiments in Poso*" (Interview, April 4, 2018)

Poso experienced such religious tensions in 1992 and 1995, several years before the 1998 election, between its Muslim and Christian communities [12]. In 1992, Rusli Lobolo (an ex-Muslim and son of the regent of Poso, Soewandi, who himself was an ex-Muslim) was accused of blasphemy toward Islam when he made a statement saying that Muhammad was neither a prophet nor apostle.

On February 15, 1995, a group of Christian youths from the village of Mandale threw objects at a mosque and madrasa, causing minor damage. This incident triggered a response from a group

of young Muslims from Tegalrejo and Lawanga, leading to significant damage to a home in Mandale. This minor incident was successfully suppressed by the Military Regime's security personnel, preventing the spread of negative sentiments toward either religious community. After both incidents, Poso as a whole returned to normal.

These two incidents were as conveyed by the information D, who is a military officer, that,

"Actually, their conflict has had seeds since 1992 and 1995, in addition to the Rusli Labolo case, there were other cases, there was the persecution of Muslim youths from Christian youths, and in protests from the security forces, not long ago there were attacks by Christian groups in several mosques. Islamic groups do not accept because their religion is considered not good. About three years later, there will be revenge, three houses of Christians damaged by young Muslims because they did not receive treatment from the Christian group first. This conflict has even divided, no party has given in, until now security surveillance has been carried out to avoid further conflict" (Interview, April 8, 2018)

In the Reformation Period, following the fall of the New Order, unrest in Poso rocketed, with such incidents becoming more frequent and involving larger groups of people. Several significant cases of mass turmoil followed the mass riots of December 1998, once in April of 2000, quickly followed by another in May of the same year. Rioting took place in July of 2001 and once more in November of 2001 [16].

Based on the above explanation, it can be concluded that the many incidents of communal violence in Poso were fueled by messages emphasizing religious differences. What began as simple perceptual disagreements between the two major religious groups grew into a complex and dynamic issue, with rifts between the two communities growing ever more significant with each incident.

B. Patterns of Conflict-Triggering

There are four stages of unrest that lead to long-term conflict in Poso: the first is a pattern of sharply offensive behaviors and statements, starting in Poso's capital city, which leads to religious tension. This tension spreads to nearby regions. The relative balance in the sizes of the region's two major religious groups means each group feels they are equal in standing to the other, inspiring a sense of obligation to fight in the name of their religion. It is related to the statement of informant D, an official of the Pos government, who said that:

"The problem initially occurred in the city, between youth groups who were quickly offended by mutual humiliation because they seized the territory. Christian youth groups already consider the area of the city to be their authority, and should not be disturbed so they feel they can do away to defend the area of the city, but it is done using persecution of young Muslims" (Interview, April 7, 2018).

The same thing was confirmed by S informants, religious leaders, who said that:

"... The damage and fights are because, initially, they did not want to meet. It only always happened repeatedly, each defending his prestige, assuming the most authentic and most sacred in their respective religions, even though they were never taught to do. So, they were not controlled [theirself].... [they] drinking alcohol, carrying out persecution, pelting houses of worship, destroying homes... " (Interview, April 15, 2018).

Second, conflict in the capital city spreads to other regions and is amplified by mass mobilization on both religious groups. The conflict that was initially isolated in the capital is intensified by the arrival of support groups from other territories throughout the regency of Poso and groups from other regencies such as Donggala. Once tensions have reached a tipping point, mass mobilization accelerates, and an even more significant number of people become involved. This situation was supported by informant D, a military officer, who stated that:

"The situation is high-speed, the conflict has dramatically affected the community, we have tried to prevent it, but it turns out they have small groups that infiltrate and attack, promote the community to join the conflict until they quickly go to other subdistricts in Poso, there are some masses from other districts outside Poso came, from the districts of Parigi, Ampana, Pamona, Lage and also from Donggala ... they carried swords and spears" (Interview, April 22, 2018).

Third, civil disorder and mass riots in Poso involving extreme violence have been known to affect the use of weapons, including blunt objects, swords, machetes, and even firearms. Once conflict has reached this third stage, the death toll quickly rises. In the past, most deaths were due to injuries inflicted by swords/machetes, impact with a hard object and other forms of physical violence. Additionally, six more victims were killed by gunfire.

Fourth, the disorder is founded upon misunderstanding between both parties; disagreements between individuals are twisted

and reformulated into a religious conflict between Muslims and Christians. At this first stage, fighting between a young Christian and a young Muslim is inflated into a communal clash between two major religious groups, resulting in mass disorder based on religion.

This study identified four riot patterns. The riots of the first and second patterns were preceded by interfaith prejudice culminating in conflicts in December 1998 and April 2000. Both incidents emphasized the regional and power differences between the two groups, with each group feeling more potent than the other. The development of religious prejudice in this research was accelerated by May 2000, July 2001, and November 2001. Conflict is open and indicative of a civil war based on religion. At this level, the strength of the religious prejudices held by each religious group is evident; each group is actively striving to eliminate the other. Religious identity politics are intensified through unreserved murder, including that of women and children. It was confirmed by informant DA, a local researcher, that:

"*In this aftershock, it has led to conflicts with nuances of ethnic and religious groups. Each group questions religion and ethnicity. Clashes between groups escalated and were very vulnerable to be triggered into a bloody conflict. Each group considered that the conflict that occurred was a religious holy war. Christian groups regard it as a crusade, and Islamic groups view the Jihad war. So, they are willing to wage war and are willing to die for the defense of their religion, very concerned about the situation*" (Interview, April 4, 2018).

Spiritual power is built through group solidarity and messaging that emphasizes the separation of the Muslim and Christian ideologies. It shows that religious conflict has become intense and extensive. Regarding intensity, the conflicts that occurred have shown to be extremely violent, leading to numerous deaths. On extensiveness, these conflicts accentuate the regional and identity differences of the two religious groups. As told by a BC informant, a Poso community member told,

"*The Poso conflict cannot be forgotten ... a lot of [terrible] events, like the chanting of the Al-Ikhwan mosque, were met with the burning of the church in Moengko Baru, the attack of migrants from residents, murder, etc. ... I am rather difficult to tell it ... When our fellow brothers turn into killing each other. Even though [initially] we all built Poso together, some succeeded, some succeeded, some didn't, some were officials, some couldn't. But [now, we]*

can't be brothers anymore" (Interview, May 1, 2018).

Conflicts in Poso have left a collective memory in its community and deep psychological trauma. Bear in mind, these conflicts have led to the deaths of thousands of people and furthered the socio-cultural and ideological rifts between the two groups. Simultaneously, group solidarity has been further reinforced through the exploitation of the migrants-versus-natives issue. This situation is further aggravated by the socio-cultural and economic differences between the two groups and political representation and power. Conflicts are packaged in religious ideology; minor disagreements between individuals transform into a civil war between religious groups.

From the explanation above, it is clear that the root of conflict in Poso is quite complex. There are two interpretations of the issue. The first is modern; these tensions arise due to current issues, such as fighting between youths and threaten religious harmony in Poso. The second is historical, relating to the issue of religious politics. It is not a new phenomenon; exploitation of religion for political reasons has been a part of Poso history since Indonesia was a Dutch colony. Under Dutch rule, the Dutch government supported the spread of Christianity by offering financial incentives to those willing to convert to Christianity. The open partisanship of the Dutch government was, in truth, not based upon religious passion but intended to support its political interests in the region, especially with the growing unrest of the native Muslim population.

Looking at the issue with an understanding of the history of the region, religion politics is the legacy of the colonial Dutch that is the foundation of two powerful stigmas in the political constellation of Poso. Originally, Poso was a majority Christian society [16]. Poso was well-known for its Christian community. Thus, the control of bureaucracy in Poso was dominated by Christians. However, this did not remain true after Indonesia gained its independence. Mass transmigration throughout the nation led to an influx of foreign tribes from South Sulawesi, predominantly Bugis [17]. These Bugis migrants were known for their trade culture, and they quickly gained control of the trade networks in Poso. The ethnic Bugis were also known for their intense loyalty to their ethnic roots and as firm believers in Islam, and they constructed mosques in each of their ethnic communities. It led to a massive shift in the religious and ethnic makeup of the region.

This religious transformation influenced the dynamics of politics in Poso. Educational policy, specifically the founding of Islamic educational institutions, led to an increasingly educated Muslim population in Poso, who was sufficiently educated to contest for positions in the region's bureaucracy [16]. Religious identity politics developed in the management of human resources in Poso. Positions of power in the Poso government, historically held by Christians, were slowly taken by Muslims who utilized this newfound authority to divert human resources to improving the quality of education in Islamic institutions. In this situation, we can see how religious identity politics in the context of employee bureaucracy begins to permeate the lives of the people of Poso. An essential element in this shifting of political powers is the open favoritism and even nepotism prevalent in the region's politics [17]. With Muslims gaining greater control of the government, many public projects were granted to other Muslims. From the explanation above, it is clear that political actors have also played their part in the birth of religious tensions and regional conflict. Bureaucrats, economic agents, religious culture groups, and other group powers exploit these issues to serve the interests of their group.

During this research, the writer discovered that individuals who are prejudiced toward one group are easily persuaded to develop prejudices toward all groups. Religious conflict in Poso was also accompanied by socio-cultural conflict. Religion became the primary reason for each group in claiming injustice in social and political processes. Conflicts and religious tensions arose in Poso due to political competition for the power to enact policies that disregard a healthy balance between the interests of the Christians as majority and the Muslims as a minority.

Furthermore, this study suggests the following four main issues of Poso as a post-conflict society. First, social conflict in Poso is a part of the conflict between individuals of a society. Opinions on the root causes of these conflicts are focused on cultural subsystems, including religion and ethnicity. Informant M., a community leader from religious organizations, said:

"Many factors are causing the riots in Poso. Initially, only a fight between two young people eventually led to [developing into] religious issues. There are areas mapped as the mass base of Islamic groups called white groups in the Madale, Parigi, Toyoda, and Bungku regions, and Christian groups' mass bases are called red groups in Pamona, Tolorando, Taripa, Tentena, and Lage areas which are called inland. They used to get along well there was no conflict [between them]" (Interview, 10 June 2018)

Second, a common cause of social conflict in Poso is fighting between two intoxicated youths. Unfair application of the law has led to certain groups developing a sense of injustice due to perceived partisanship on the government or its officials, human rights violations. Third, a cause of social conflict in Poso is political. Tensions between groups reached a tipping point in 1998 with the election of the regent and regional secretary for the regency relating to a sentiment of imbalance in the distribution of government positions. It is under MJ informants, local government officials, that:

"If political problems are the cause of conflict in Poso, it might also be understood because indeed the periods of the regents who ruled permanently changed. Initially, the first regent was a Muslim, the second regent was a Christian, the third regent was a Muslim, and the fourth regent was a Christian, the fifth regent in 1989 was a Muslim, the sixth regent was a Muslim again. But when arranging the bureaucracy like the secretary wanted by [the people should be] Christians, it turns out that the people chosen are Muslims ... This also triggers conflict" (Interview, June 8, 2018).

Fourth, a cause of social conflict in Poso is the social and economic discrepancies between the native population of Poso and migrant ethnicities like Bugis, Jawa, Gorontalo, and Kaili. This social jealousy emerged due to the majority native ethnic group falling behind migrant groups in both aspects. This situation was confirmed by informant S, a local researcher, who stated that

"The gap occurred because of migrants, especially the Bugis who have a commercial nature. They are powerful and able to control trade, so they are more prosperous than the indigenous population. In addition, the Bugis also have loyalty to Islam, always building mosques in every place where they live. It has led to a shift, not only a shift in ethnic communities but also a shift in religious communities. Over time this shift also leads to political aspects, and the emergence of competition in the government bureaucracy, all of this is causing a lot of riots in Poso" (Interview on May 13, 2018).

The conflicts in Poso have had significant social effects. In addition to the loss of life and material damages, these conflicts also cause psychological trauma that is not easily erased. The disputes in Poso aren't simple cases of civil unrest but human tragedies and civil wars.

IV. CONCLUSION

The development of identity politics in Indonesia is not just the doing of minority religious groups but also majority groups. An example of this is the rejection or banning of certain religious activities, including constructing places of worship. It ly shows a sentiment of religious identity and a subtle exercise of the power that the majority wields to violate the rights of a minority group to practice their religion freely. The most violent case of religious conflict in Poso is that between its Christian and Muslim communities.

The sudden influx of Muslim transmigrants into Poso led to an abrupt shift in the region's political landscape that ultimately fueled the conflict. These transmigrants quickly grew from an insignificant minority to a majority, with members in key positions of power in Poso's government. This sense of a dramatic and swift loss of control in their government led to a perceived marginalization of the indigenous Christian groups, giving rise to social conflict

In addition to intolerance, the politicization of religion was also a key factor behind these religious conflicts. Religion is increasingly becoming a tool for political gain. Ironically, no short number of religious institutions, religious leaders and figures, use politics as a vehicle for achieving temporary interests. After all, position, power, and money are more easily obtained with political exploitation than without it. Power, politics, and religion in Indonesia have become so firmly intertwined that instances of the religious civil disorder can commonly be traced back to power and political interests. Syariah law, which has been gaining traction in Indonesia in recent years, is just such an example of the politicization of religion that is unsympathetic to the needs and rights of a non-Muslim minority.

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