Religion and anti-Chinese violence in Indonesian democratic transition, 1997-2004

Agama dan kekerasan anti-Cina pada masa transisi demokrasi Indonesia, 1997-2004

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Abstract

In the discussions of anti-Chinese phenomena in Indonesian regime transition in 1997-2004, religion appears to be less dominating in the study of ethnicity, economical and political factors. In scientific works, the perception of anti-Chinese violence also dominated by the views of politics and economy. In fact, religion also plays crucial role in many cases, ranging from the issue of Chinese infidelity, anti-Islamism and atheism. This paper was not aimed to stress that politics, economy and social are not important. Otherwise, this paper argues that religion are equally important as politic, economic and social analysis, especially to explain anti-Chinese violence in Indonesia.

Keywords: religious conflict, identity, Chinese ethnic, *pribumi*

Abstrak

Dalam sebuah diskusi paham anti Cina dalam transisi Indonesia antara 1997-2004, agama seakan tidak lagi terlalu mendominasi dalam penekanan pada isu etnis dan ekonomi politik. Persepsi kekerasan anti Cina juga didominasi oleh pandangan poltik dan ekonomi. Faktanya, agama juga memainkan peran dibeberapa kasus, belajar dari isu ketidaksetiaan orang cina, anti Islam dan atheis. Ini tidak untuk menyatakan bahwa politik, ekonomi dan sosial tidak penting. Artikel ini berargumen dengan menambahkan ke dalam analisis politik, ekonomi, dan sosial, serta menguatkan peran dari agama dalam kekerasan anti Cina merupakan hal yang cukup penting.

Kata kunci: konflik agama, identitas, etnis Cina, Tionghoa, pribumi

Background

Analysis of anti-Chinese violence during the Indonesian transition 1997-2004 seems to be dominated by political, economic, and social perspective. Politic relates anti-Chineseness to power contestation; economics is about resource competition while social analysis emphasizes the weak social capital and assimilation between the Chinese and *pribumi*. Religion seems to be not strongly emphasized, although in fact in many occasions are deeply involved in the anti-Chinese outbreaks (i.e. Pekalongan 1995, Rembang 1998). This paper argues that in addition to politics, economy and social, taking religion into account in analysing the phenomenon of anti-Chinese violence is important. Although it is often the case that the boundaries between religion and other non-religious factors is difficult to identify, emphasizing how religion plays its role besides politics and social economy is worth-considering, to gain better understanding of violence and conflict anatomy.

Considering religion effects also provides us a sharper lens to look at the problem, not only through the frame of elite-driven analysis, as most academics have done so (Purdey 2002, Turner 2003, Panggabean & Smith 2009), but also in the scope of intercommunity relations. Analysis on religion could also clarify the sense if religion is merely used as an instrument for elite to fracture community, given the divisive nature intrinsically attached to religion, for the sake of elite political interest. Therefore, this acknowledges that religion could play as a means of elite commoditisation of interest.

Or, could also be that religion used to legitimate violent actions, in the name of divine missions, due to the fanatic view of the community.

Considering the fact that anti-Chinese violence involves a complex idea of explanations, this paper argues that scrutinizing anti-Chinese violence needs a multiple approach covering both religious and non-religious perspectives. This is to challenge the existing studies on anti-Chinese violence, especially during the Indonesian transition 1997-2004, which are dominated by political economy analysis. Although important, such kind of analysis basically fails to capture the whole picture of anti-Chinese violence. The political analysis arguing that violence was provoked by the third party (army) for its inability to manage the protest escalation (Panggabean & Smith 2011), for instance, leaves many questions of community's autonomy and religious attachment.

Ignoring the other factors, such a third-party-led violence approach could lead the readers into assumptions of simplification of the problem. Putting emphasis too strongly on the third party (army), could lead the readers to question, such as, "should the army were able to manage the protest escalation, would the conflict not be firing, given the long prejudice and social disparity between them the Chinese and *pribumi*?"; "if the army were not present and the provocations were not blown up, would violence not escalate?"; "why were societies in some areas easily provoked than the others, and what social circumstances did distinguish them one another?"; "what is the historical experience of *pribumi* and Chinese relationship in the past?"; "in which circumstances are provocateurs effective, and in which are not?". Coining violence as merely a "game" of the third party sounds so simplifying. Not to undermine the role of provoking army, however, taking into account the social typology of society such *santri* or *abangan,* radical or moderate, their history toward interrelating with ethnic Chinese, and the like, is equally important. Using the political idea of scape-goating, as Purdey (2002) argues, is not enough, as it only gives us partial answers for the question of anti-Chinese in the meantime of Indonesian transition. There is a need to consider some other factors.

Finding the fact that the role of religion in anti-Chinese violence during 1997-2004 is usually understated compared to that of politics, economy and social, this paper tries to argue the reversed. This paper tries to put a stronger emphasis on how religion plays its role in the so called politics or economics of anti-Chinese violence, considering the apparent involvement of some religious leaders and organization in the events, such as KISDI and MUI. In addition, given a context of society we study in particular areas does not always tells us about clashing economic and social competition, but yet anti-Chineseness remains strong, scrutinizing through religious factor sometime becomes important. Learning from the Padang case, for instance, where *pribumi* and the Chinese collaborate in economy, compete in relatively healthy environment, and live in moderately peaceful social relations, potential for violence in fact is still present. The mass media and social network statement quarrelling, as well as ethnic Chinese exclusion in post-disaster recovery, uncovers the hidden problem between them, which is finally identified as likely to relate to religious sentiment and religious difference (Alfirdaus 2011).

In addition, tracing back early modern Indonesian history, although is hardly identified as religious violence; many works tell us that anti-Chinese outbreaks in Solo in 1912 between the Chinese and *pribumi batik* traders, for instance, also involved the religious issue. The role of Sarekat Dagang Islam (SDI), led by Haji Samanhud, was seen to be contributive to the mobilization of anti-Chinese movement, apart from the issue of wage inequality and income disparity (Chandra 1999). Similar involvement could also be found in the case of communist massacre, where the Chinese was accused as atheist, and so is with the case of Malari 1974 (*Malapetaka 15 January*), where "non-Moslem foreigner" Chinese was seen to dominate economy. Prior and post the fall of Suharto, religious issue is also strong, leading to anti-Chinese, such as in the case of Pekalongan 2005, Kragan and Sarang (Rembang) 1998, Jakarta 1998, and Kebumen 1999. For the purpose of filling this gap, this paper tries to look at the role of religion in anti-Chinese violence during the Indonesian democratic transition, 1997-2004, using literature review as a method of collecting and analysing data. The central question

this paper tries to discuss is therefore: What role did religion play in the anti-Chinese violence in Indonesian democratic transition, 1997-2004? Why?

The existing studies on anti-Chinese violence in Indonesia

The racial clashes between *pribumi* and the Chinese in Indonesia are widely known as an old yet seemingly unresolvable issue. Most scholars argue that the Dutch's rule of social stratification, which divided society into three classes, namely (1) European; (2) Chinese, Arab and India; and (3) *pribumi* is a corner stone of *pribumi* and the Chinese tension in a later future (Purdey 2002, Hoon 2006, Chua 2004). Privileges, wealth, and access despite the very fact that the Chinese had been made as cash cow (*sapi perahan*) by the colonial government through the high taxing (higher than *pribumi*) and progressive taxing (Siet 2011:11-17), had caused the social distance between the Chinese and *pribumi* stronger, leading to the seemingly difficult integration between them.

Although colonial rule of social division has lasted over decades ago, clashes between *pribumi* and the Chinese remain rampant, with the seemingly unchanged perceived caused economic disparity. The cases that occurring in 1912 involving the Solo *pribumi batik* traders and that of Chinese, the outbreaks in 1958-1969, Malari 1974, and Medan, Jakarta, and Solo riots in 1998, and Kebumen 1999, are considered to involve strong issues of economic and social inequality, which is actually a continuation of the past long-lived social clashes. Relating to this, many scholars try to give an explanation, but yet come up with an agreed conclusion that political economy is the most considerable factor; can be either elite-driven, as well as community-initiated. Such conclusion in fact is not exclusive for current anti-Chinese violence, especially in post the Suharto regime.

In relation to political analysis, it was found that the idea of scape-goating seems to dominate the discussion of anti-Chinese violence prior and post the fall of Suharto. Amongst these are of Purdey's (2002, 2005), Turner and Allen's (2007), and Panggabean & Smith's works (2011), which argue of the third party (security forces) as standing behind the events. Purdey, referring to Allport (in Purdey 2005:25), describes scape-goating as a process whereby, "The people felt purged, and for the time being guiltless." Meanwhile, Panggabean and Smith refer to the finding of TGPF (Joint Team of Fact Finding), that indicate the involvement of state security force in the violence for some secret meetings they conduct before the riots occurred.

In the context of Indonesian Chinese, as middleman minority, an idea of scapegoating, for Purdey, is sensible. Referring to the theory of the middleman minority, Purdey asserts that the theory resonates with the situation of Chinese Indonesians, who are seen as both ethnically and economically distinct, and usually (forced to) 'acts as a buffer' between elite and public in commerce, and also plays a similar role in times of social hostility. Through her seminal study of anti-Chinese violence 1996-1999, Purdey argues that there seems to be patterned design of violence, in which the issue of inequality and dominant ethnic minority were blown up prior to the riots, triggering wider and stronger reaction of the public, to become more strongly anti-Chinese. In Purdey's findings, anti-Chinese violence in some areas during 1996-1999 seemed to be very close with the national context of social, economic, and political upheavals, with a very typical model of "designed" rioting.

Confirming Purdey, Panggabean and Smith argue that anti-Chinese riots in May 1998 were, "a frame-shifting strategy employed by the army to distract public attention from its failure in certain locales to control student demonstrations against the government" (2011:231-232). For them, anti-Chinese rioting took place only where the local government and the security forces failed to limit the repertoires and spatial reach of protests used by demonstrators. Provoking anti-Chinese violence was aimed to distract the public's concerns from (a) the army inabilities to control protests and (b) the army's own targeting in protesters' rhetoric. For them, this is strongly a form of contentious politics aimed at changing the frame of mass political mobilization from one aimed at the state to one aimed at economically dominant ethnic minorities (p. 232). Within such communal violence, there is no one to gain benefit, but the third party, therefore always questioning who stands to benefit in every rioting

is always critical (p. 241). This argument is interesting, as well as important, in this regard, for highlighting the need of awareness of provocateur, or *dalang* in Bahasa Indonesia/Javanese, that acts a violence campaigner.

In relation to economy, most scholars argue that economic competition, as well as the myth of economic disparity between *pribumi* and the Chinese is pertinent in triggering violence. The state economic favouritism, especially for the few groups of Chinese typhoon, which were viewed as the cause of inequality between the Chinese and *pribumi*, is also crucial to bear in mind (Panggabean & Smith 2011). Dealing with this, using Marxism as an analytical lens, violence was understood as an expression of dissatisfaction of the native deprived non-Chinese majority towards the unjust economy dominated by the Chinese minority. Chinese is seen to dominate the mode of production, exploiting the native labourers in their production processes, and enjoys the privileges of being an upper class (Purdey 2002:2), although for Adam (2003:1-7) and Chua (2004), these all are clearly a myth. As Chua, an idiom of "the Chinese constitute only 3% of the population but control more than 70% of the Indonesian economy" is deliberately disseminated, to create hatred among *pribumi,* so they are easily mobilized for participating in rioting (p. 465).

Meanwhile, social analysis relates the ideas of weak social capital between the Chinese and *pribumi* to be a causing factor of disintegration. In this regards, weak social capital refers to the Chinese grouping and exclusivism, manifested in the segregated housing and minority-based schooling. In general, segregated housing and minority-based schooling were seen to be an indication of the Chinese to limit themselves to be in touch with *pribumi*. In fact, historically segregated housing is a manifestation of social division policy of the Dutch, for the economic function of the Chinese during colonial governance (Adam 2003), minority-based schooling, such as the Catholic one, was chosen for the consideration of future needs of employment, compared to even Chinese-owned schooling that mainly taught Chinese culture and language (Siet 2011:11-17). However, social fragmentation is an impact that finally those two communities had to bear, causing a larger social distance and even violence.

Political, economic and social analysis in violence against ethnic Chinese is necessarily important and helpful. However, this does not sufficiently explain why myth, prejudice, and hatred could persist in *pribumi's* state of mind, and seem to be long-lived. This part tries to analyse religious aspect, especially during the Indonesian democratic transition, 1997-2004. This paper argues that in spite of economic disparity problem, religion contributes to the sustaining perception of *pribumi* anti-Chineseness. Religious analysis is useful to be a point of comparison of current violent with such kind of events in the past.

Religion and anti-Chinese violence in Indonesian pre independence until Suharto era 1912-1996

Discussing religion and the issue of ethnic Chinese violence requires a careful scrutiny on how ethnic Chinese politically positioning themselves (and being politically positioned) in Indonesian pre and post independence. Ethnic Chinese issue involves highly contentious politics, in terms of their identity making as well as in social structure, and in relation to the ruling power. This is not to ignore the similar contention in other ethnics in Indonesia. However, as the history has it, the status of ethnic Chinese has been heavily objectified as a commodity for the state's politics of identity. Vickers (2005:28) argues, the colonial policy of racial consciousness ranging from "train ticket to toilet", placing the Chinese into the second class along with their fellow immigrants, the Indian and Arabic. They were higher than *pribumi*, but yet lower than the Europeans. Confirming Vickers, this policy is clearly nothing but to keep the Europeans' status quo.

Vickers's point is sensible, as social division was in fact nothing but about the heightening taxes of the Chinese (Siet 2011). There was indeed easier access to education, but set hierarchy in society would always mean nothing but distancing the Chinese from *pribumi*, which clearly endangering their

life in the near future. Therefore, social division can be said as a deliberate design of the colonial government to fracture the society, to hinder them from consolidation, as this could endanger the colonial power, yet brought the Chinese into difficult position. "*Londo wurung Jowo nanggung*", as Carey recited, or if I may term it, "*munggah susah mudhun kepenthung*" (it is difficult to go up to be the first class, yet dangerous to go down with the natives), gives us a clear picture of how difficult it was (until present) to be a Chinese. While the Dutch highly taxed the Chinese without considerable privilege as the white had, the *pribumi* did not trust them for always seeing them as *antek penjajah* (colonial agent). The relationships between Chinese and *pribumi* thus become always problematic, resulting in a seemingly never ending anti-Chineseness. Nagata (2005: 114) figures out this complexity, that they considered themselves, "Chinese by race, but Dutch by law", converted to Christianity for acculturation, and coined by *pribumi* and their poor Chinese fellows as *masuk Belanda* (to become Dutch).

In later era, the relations between Chinese and *pribumi* get more complex with the additional divisive factors, such as ethnic, business competition, and undoubtedly, religion. A clear result which could be seen is a massive violence following the Dutch's rule of social division, such as the SI anti-Chinese movement in 1912, riots in 1958-1969, and Malari 1974. This part discusses the role of religion in anti-Chinese violence during early modern Indonesia until post independence (1912-1974), reflected from the works of some scholars focusing on it. Discussion of religion in anti-Chineseness exists but not much. Amongst those are Andreas Susanto (2011), Vickers (2005), and Aritonang & Steenbrink (2008), as political economic analysis is more striking. This is to identify how religion influences and mixes with other factors in anti-Chinese violence, instead of segregating it. From literature reviews, some points that are crucial to be borne in mind is the issue of religion and business competition, the idea of infidelity and the identification of Chinese with atheism and Communism.

Religion and business competition

Amongst the most notable violence involving religion in anti-Chineseness in early modern Indonesia are of 1911-1912 in Surakarta and of 1918 in Kudus. Initially, tension between *pribumi* and the Chinese were considered to arise because of business competition in *batik* and *kretek* (cigarette). Therefore, some scholars question the label of anti-Chinese tagged into SI movement given the strong nuance of politics and economy (Chandra 1999:3). Dealing with this, the doubt of anti-Chinese nuance in SI movement to some extent might be sensible. However, there should be awareness that when the issue of ethnic and religion was introduced, conflict heightened, leading to a perception that ethnic and religion played crucial role in escalating the violence. Similarly, in Kudus case, referring to Suryadinata, Hoon (2006:89) asserts that besides triggered by the competition in *kretek* business, the incident strongly involved racial issue, which clearly relates to religion, and an expression of long-term prejudice, especially between Moslems and Chinese traders. During the Japanese era, the Chinese was still seen as a competitor for the local small business of *pribumi,* leading to the continuation of anti-Chineseness amongst *pribumi* (Hoon 2006:92).

Tension between Moslem and Chinese businessmen gained stronger around 1965-1966, when Communism promoted land reform, which clearly threatened the status quo of *kyai* landlords, leading to *kyai* opposition to Communism. Intimate relation of communism with the Chinese had brought the Chinese to be an object of attack when the state issued legitimacy for communist killings, including the non-communist Chinese. Another attack of anti-Chinese occurred in 15 January 1974, following up the Japanese Prime Minister Tanaka visit to Indonesia for building cooperative business. The attack was seen as an expression of anti-foreigner, and Chinese, although not necessarily related to Tanaka and Japan, became an object of attack for being coined as deeply foreigner (Dick, Houben, Lindblad, & Wie 2000:208).

Religious aspect gained strong in the Malari for long-planted feeling of anti-Chineseness for their economic state of beings, mixed with Moslem leaders' anger with the proposal of secular marriage

bill promoted by Ali Murtopo (Ricklefs 2001:361), as well as Pancasilaization which was regarded as the promotion of unbelief (Cady & Simon 2007:88-89). Masyumi and Indonesian Sosialist Party were accused for riotings and their activists were imprisoned. Although not explicitly religious, *Malari* protests were seen as a response to the issue of moral outrage (p. 89).

In terms of business competition and its relation to religion, most scholarly works seem to agree that religion heightens the conflict, as Hoon (2006), Vickers (2003), Ricklefs (2001), and Wookwards (in Cady & Simon 2007) clarify. As Juergensmeyer (2000:146-147), religion intrinsically provides power for doing anything, including violence, and coin it as divine, in the name of truth defence. Juergensmeyer terms this "cosmic war" for dealing with something beyond life, though the case is initially often "worldly" business issue. Although Juergensmeyer is sensible, in violence it is difficult to distinguish if religion is truly a means of divine mission (including in violence), or merely an instrument for mass mobilisation, to be a short cut for defeating business competitor. A careful scrutiny between leader and mass is important, to see if both perceive religion in the same way. It is likely that mass was manipulated with religious issues, for the gain of the leader's business matters.

The idea of infidelity

Still related to business competition, anti-Chinese views were also encouraged by perception that Chinese practiced non-Islamic business ethics. The fact that most money lenders were Chinese disrupted the *pribumi's* perception about the Chinese, although it was clear that some *pribumi* also did the same. Such money lenders took advantage of the need for cash created by Dutch taxation and the increasingly marginal levels of income from agriculture (Vickers 2005). The term for those in this line of business was *lintah darat*, 'leeches of the land', which gives some sense of the feelings aroused (Vickers 2005:67). The idea of taking interest in money lending for *pribumi,* who was dominantly Moslem, was clearly intriguing. In Islam, taking interest from money lending is *haram* (prohibited) and those practicing it are coined as anti-religion. This led to infidelity stereotyping, which put the Chinese to be vulnerable to be an object of anti-Chinese attack.

Outside the business issue, religious fanaticism was also prominent to create anti-Chineseness among *pribumi*, as Hoon (2006:92) exemplifies of *pribumi* attack to the Chinese in Japanese era. Not merely looking at the Chinese as a rival for the local small business, or as the Dutch-spy, the attack also involved the Moslem extremists who forced the Chinese to convert to Islam (Somers 1965 in Hoon 2006:92). The fact that Chinese was seen as a Dutch-spy, clarified that Japan was afraid of the Dutch. Yet, it is in this sense Chinese was distinguised from Arab. As Arab looked more enthusiastically to be sided in Republic than the Chinese, Arab was looked more nationalistic. Some Chinese were active in nationalism activism, but because they were limited, this was often seen individual than institutional. Therey were more Chinese to be in the Dutch's side. Although Japan saw anti-Chinese attack for their own political goal, Moslems saw this as divine mission to against the Dutch and its Chinese partner, which were seen as promoting infidelity. Different actor saw an action differently through their respective goal.

In this case, Japan seemingly legitimated the attack, but of course not for Islamicising purpose. Japan was indeed in need of political support to get rid of the Dutch. Japan's political motivation on the one hand, amalgamated with Moslem religious mission—which had long been dismissed by the Dutch— on the other hand, resulted in wider space of coercion, with the Chinese as one of the most victims of the actions. There were spontaneous attacks on Dutch officials, indigenous civil servants, and on Chinese, with murders and atrocities. Some Chinese people were forced to be circumcised by Muslims from the traditionalist Nahdlatul Ulama movement in East Java, just to make sure that they practiced the so called Moslem way of life—being circumcised (Vickers 2005:91). Not being circumcised is coined as infidel. Conversely, circumcision is a symbol when a man is coined to be Moslem, although it is not clear if circumcision was rooted from Islam or not.

The identification of Chinese ethnicity with atheism and communism

Although the 1965 massacre of communist activists for some scholars is seen as a culmination of ideological contestation, for Hefner (1993:67) it implied a long rooted *abangan* and *santri* conflict. Awkwardly, massacre also involved ethnic Chinese as victims, leading to the question of *abangan*, communism and Chineseness definition. The flawed generalization of religion, ideology, and ethnicity had caused brutal killing towards the Chinese along the Javanese regions, despite the very fact that communism threatened the property ownership of some Moslem scholars. This however implies Moslem over-generalization and political carelessness, that they were being used by the ruling power. East Java is coined to be most strongly dealing with Communism attack, including violence against the Chinese, and non-communist Chinese. Starting about 7 October 1965 there was a spate of anti-Communist (and anti-Chinese) rallies in East Java, which led to attacks on PKI buildings (Cribb 1990:79). As Cribb argues, the attack was triggered by rumours among the *santri* about the misdeeds of 'the atheists' that quite is popular (p. 77).

Indeed, Moslems could not ignore the threatening image of Communism. Recalling a story of my late father when he was about ten years old, being approached by a Communist Party activist while he was swimming in a river, and suddenly this communist man cried, "hey, a grandson of Abu Bakar (NU figure)! What if I make you drowned in this river?", it is clear that communism is also intimidating for Moslems. However, attacking Chinese in their confrontation with Communism implies how sporadic the Moslems action is. To some extent, Cribb's argument is sensible that it seems obvious that clashes were to stiffen the resolve of the *kyai* in their opposition to the PKI (1990:141). Ironically, some non-communist Javanese and Chinese merchants were coming under attack, simply because they were coined as atheist, communist and giving support to Communist Party.

Meanwhile, in Banyuwangi case, competition between the two major forces, the PKI and the NU, resulting in one-sided action strike of labourers (*mogok kerja)*, brought difficulties in the side of NU entrepreneurs, but not in the Chinese side. Some NU-affiliated employers regarded that the strike action in their fishing labourers, but not in the Chinese-owned one, was a result of PKI propaganda. This strengthened the sense among NU businessmen that Chinese was identical with communism, leading to the sharpening idea of anti-Chineseness. Although there was a fact where Chinese entrepreneurs gave big support for Communist Party, there were many of them who were not. In Bali, for instance, it is true that Lie Lie Thien was supporting the Balinese PKI. However, Lie Lie Thien himself was in confrontation with another Chinese in dealing with communism (p. 257). This is what NU followers mostly disregarded, but rather generalized. Chinese, in this case, again suffered from highly contentious politics of generalized yet careless prejudice.

Religion in anti-Chinese violence during the Indonesian democratic transition 1997-2004

A challenging point in analysing religion in anti-Chinese violence during the Indonesian democratic transition is in terms of distinguishing the "status" of religion if it is coined as a mean of a divine mission, or as elite's political instrument, given the highly contentious politics entailed post the *reformasi*. Conspiracy theory is unavoidable, yet useful, although is not easy to prove. Amongst the strongest issues leading up the debate on the case post *reformasi* is political competition between two generals, Prabowo and Wiranto, whereby anti-Chinese violence is "engineered" or "designed" to defame Wiranto who was in confrontation with Prabowo (Turner & Allen 2007:116-117).

It is surely not easy to prove the rumour. However, some big questions are unavoidable. Question about personal is the most striking for perceiving the idea of "designed" violence against the Chinese rather than institutional. If the goal is personal career—of Prabowo and Wiranto, why should bear too highly cost of murders, destruction and capital flow? Or, if only the rumour were true, why are people especially those who do not have any deal with the two men, easily provoked? What factors did cause people difficult to relieving themselves from prejudicing the Chinese despite the very long term

interrelations? What is the bigger thing to strive for through the highly cost anti-Chinese violence other than personal problem of the two generals? To what extent is it acceptable that the violence is a tactic to distract the protest focus from the state to the one "dominating" minority, or a tactic to manage the protest that is no longer manageable, as Panggabean & Smith argue (2011)?

This paper argues that despite considering the sentiment of economic inequality, the interest confrontation of the two generals, the inability of the military to manage the protest or the failure of social assimilation, thinking through religion in violence against the Chinese is important. Indeed, it is impossible to coin religion as the sole cause of violence, due to for instance blind primordialism, as *pribumi* and ethnic Chinese relations are deeply complex. There must be a mixture. The more important thing to consider in this sense is to think of to what extent is religion influential to push the explosion of violence? How do people, not only the elite, perceive religion in dealing with anti-Chinese violence? Moreover, as it is clear that violence is not always about elite for involving masses in the execution, relying solely on the idea of scape-goating or conspiracy theory in seeing anti-Chinese violence is not enough. Religion helps us see this politics not only in elite level, but more importantly in masses level.

Theoretically speaking, as religion is coined as divine, religious violence is not only a tactic of political strategy, but more importantly of evocations of a much larger spiritual confrontation (Juergensmenyer 2000:146). This could help us identify the masses motivation of committing violence. In addition, although sometime it is possible that religion is only used as an instrument, but again, we should question, whose instrument? This clearly refers to elite. Meanwhile, as violence, moreover anti-Chinese violence, often involves a big number of masses, it is very likely that the masses perceive the problem differently from that of elite, and of the provocateurs, that they dare to participate in violence. In this sense, religious lens can be used to see, such as why violence explodes, and maybe, how to deal with it. Reviewing some literatures, this paper argues that religion in anti-Chinese violence during the transition era 1997-2004, relates to the issue of anti-Islamism, social frustrations, and the identification of the Chinese with Christianity. This is a bit different from what has been underlined in previous part. However, there is still some connecting ideas, but with relatively different emphasis.

The idea of anti-Islamism

The idea of anti-Islamism is basically close to the idea of infidelity, as mentioned in the above-written part, in the sense of not being sided for Islamism. However, if the idea of infidelity relates to Moslem perception towards the Chinese that does not embrace and behave in Islamic way, anti-Islamism refers to the Chinese behaviours of "seemingly" undermining Islam. One of the most noted event is anti-Chinese riot in Pekalongan 1995. Leading up to the democratic transition era, an anti-Chinese outbreak exploded in Pekalongan in 1995, caused by religious sentiment between Moslem and non-Moslem Chinese. Chinese was accused for anti-Islamism for an action of a Chinese man who urinated on the Qur'an. Another version mentioned that the man was to tear up Qur'an and rather than urinating on it. Quickly, the news was spread over the city and the surrounding, coined as unacceptable, and led to wider escalation of anti-Chinese violence. Problem was then perceived as misunderstanding, since that Chinese man (Yoe Sing Yung) committing the action was later recognized as psychologically unhealthy (*orang gila*).

Another case occurred in Rengasdengklok, 30 January 1997, which also indicates Moslem's accusation of ethnic Chinese anti-Islamism. A man was mentioned to protest the voice of *adzan* (a calling for praying) in *subuh* (early morning time), said to regard *adzan* as bothering people. Soon, the local Moslems people felt disrupted, and this led to quarrelling between the local people and the Chinese. Moslems could not accept what the Chinese man doing and attacked the Chinese shops and houses, although in fact not all Moslems feel comfortable with a loud *adzan* voice, and also maybe not all the attackers are pious Moslems. Another case occurred in Ujungpandang, 15 September 1997,

when a Chinese man injured a local child, triggered the local people to riot, burn and destroy the Chinese shops. Likewise, later it was said that the Chinese man is psychologically unhealthy.

Apart from the issue, if the two Chinese men are psychologically unhealthy or not, it seems to be obvious that the heightening violence in Pekalongan and Rengasdengklok is a result of a mixture between religious primordialism and ethnic sentiment. People suddenly relates the case with the idea of anti-Moslem Chinese mixed up with anti-Moslem Christians (Moslems usually attribute to), coined it as undermining Islam, and heightening the conflict scale. *Quran* and *adzan* are the very symbols of Islam, which Moslems highly respect to, and expect to be respected, not only by their fellow Moslems, but also the others. Undermining it would be coined to undermine Islam, teasing their symbols of divinity, and thus, anything would be done by the people to defend it including through violence against the others, but, as Juergensmeyer's theory (2000), see this violence as "holy".

Religion, social frustrations, and the Chinese anti-nationalism

Anti-Chinese violence prior to the fall down of Suharto in May 1998 for some scholars is seen as an expression of highly social frustrations, combined with a strong accusation of ethnic Chinese anti-nationalism. Some people argue that attack to the Chinese is unjustifiable as what people basically are mad at is the regime failure to recover the national economy, which is totally not about the Chinese. However, people connect the economic failure with rampant corruption and nepotism which unfortunately involved the Chinese businessmen and typhoon. It is indeed confirmed that some Chinese businessmen chose to exit finding the economic collapse (Wibowo 2001), which is actually a natural instinct for any businessman. However, for some people, this is seen as anti-nationalism simply because a notion that the Chinese left the country once it destroyed, but was staying once it was good for their business. In Indonesian idiom, it is like, "*habis manis sepah dibuang*", or just take it when it is good, and throw it—rather than fix it—once it is no longer useful. For some people this is impolite, as the Chinese were expected to bear responsibility of fixing the national economy for the very corrupt state they contributed to. The fact that some Chinese exit, rather than—though some many others—being loyal triggered a constant strengthening of anti-Chinese view that was already deeply planted. Frustrations met with anger and jealousy finally yielded mass attack, resulting in the murders of about 1200 people, over 100 women, most of ethnic Chinese origin, were systematically raped, and hundreds of shops, houses, cars and motorcycles destroyed. There was a large movement of people out of the country, particularly foreigners and Indonesians of Chinese descent and of a large amount of capital as well (Brown 2003:280). Not only in Jakarta, had also the mass anti-Chinese violence exploded in Medan, Solo, Surabaya, Cilacap, and Kebumen.

What is the role of religion? There are at least two considerable organizations that should be counted to get involved in that violence, namely MUI and KISDI. MUI is a state legitimate *Ulama* council with a main task of issuing *fatwa* to be a reference or code of conduct for a Moslem. Meanwhile, KISDI (Indonesian Committee for the Solidarity of the Muslim World) is a militant Islamic group; with its central figure is Ahmad Sumargono. Why them? A record argues that those two organizations are active in spreading anti-Chineseness. MUI, for instance, as Wibowo (citing Jakarta Post) argues, called for a "holy war" against speculators and hoarders (Wibowo 2001:129), which what "war' it means is a bit unclear. KISDI on the other hand is active in disseminating the books that denounced the unhealthy dominance of the Chinese in business (Turner 2003:345).

Reviewing some articles, it is obvious that the case is so contentious. In the case of rape, for instance, there is a bigger debate of whether it exists or not, rather than how it could happen. As Wibowo (2001:133-134) argues, resistance from KISDI, as well as from the Police Chief, and members of parliament, towards the findings from "Volunteer Team for Humanity" indicates the strong political contention behind this. Public would surely question that given this Islamic organization did not involved—in the rape case, there is off course no need to counter any accusation. To respond this accusation, otherwise they could argue that the rape was not the purpose of the protest, it was not their

responsibility, and should be investigated as personal crime, rather than challenging the team findings. Unfortunately, as what KISDI did relating to this is to bringing charges against the magazine, *Jakarta-Jakarta*, which published a story about a man who raped a Chinese woman, yelling, "You must die because you are Chinese and non-Muslim" (Turner & Allen 2007:116), public could not stop to question, "why should bother?".

Dealing with this, there are at least two hypotheses that are worth-considering. Firstly, this religious organization is blind—innocent—with the conspiracy. They are "only" trapped in over-generalization, do not conduct any deep study on what is actually happening, do not base their argument on strong evidence, but yet they try their best to save the people, though finally this only produces an unproductive, yet ridicule, *fatwa*. Although innocent, it is in this sense that religious institutions could easily be used by elite to mobilise the masses that also might not be aware of conspiracy. Secondly, there might be possibility that religious organization gets involved in conspiracy. They are well aware of the nature of society that is deeply frustrated, religiously primordialistic, and thus easily provoked. Religion is by conscience used to flame the chaos, merely for pursuing particular interest of the people behind the scene, and so, nothing to do actually with religious purpose. Citing Woodward (in Cady & Simon 2007:13), religion is used as a legitimating source of violence in 1998, but religion per se never is the causing factor of violence.

Mixed identification of Chinese ethnicity and Christianity

The idea of anti-Chineseness among Moslem gets stronger while it is combined with the fact that most Moslems are also anti-Christian. As Ricklefs (2001) argues, as Muslim–Christian relations were complicated, by the fact that many Chinese were Christians, it makes possible to amalgamate anti-Chinese and anti-Christian feelings (p. 401). Ricklefs exemplifies, in October 1996 five people died when Muslims in Situbondo, East Java, burned nine Christian churches. Similar events took place in Tasikmalaya, West Java, in December, leaving four dead and Chinese property destroyed (p. 401).

Meanwhile, people often disregard the context of the Chinese conversion to Christianity, and generalize it as merely an anti-Islamism of the Chinese people. Susanto argues that Chinese conversion to Christianity in Yogyakarta, especially since the New Order era, sometime is not occurred because of the attractiveness of the Christian teaching. It is rather because of the Chinese tactic in order not to be identified with "Chinese", as well as Islam imaging that is mostly coined as militant, promoting fear, rather than peace (p. 83). Some Chinese see Islam as historically too heavily opposing to Chinese, quoting some violence committed by Moslem activists in previous time. Therefore, the conversion itself somehow is about the issue of security. There are indeed some Chinese that embrace Islam. However, they are also not free from suspicion of their motives in becoming Moslem (p. 83). The fact that those Chinese Moslems also become the victims of anti-Chinese-Christian violence, illuminates the sense of how far the Chinese identify is overgeneralised and over-identified as Christianity.

Over generalization also occurs in West Java, as Aritonang & Steenbrink (2008:663-4) argue in their article of "The turbulent decade for West Java: 1995–2005". In Tasikmalaya tension was initially between a *pesantren* with the police, which led to an aggression to the police station, continued with the destruction of factories, hotels, banks, shops and a number of Christian schools and churches. Violence induced Cileunyi and Kalaksanan, at a distance of some 70 km, to explode. Apparently violence was turned into an anti-Chinese and anti-Christian action, triggering a confrontation between moderate Muslim leaders and a hard-line Muslim Adi Sasono, in which moderate Moslem accused Adi Sasono standing behind the action. Four people, mostly Chinese shopkeepers, were killed, and 15 church buildings, consisting of two GKP, Catholic, HK Pantekosta, BP, were destroyed. Another case occurred in Situbondo in 1997, where anti-Christian violence turned to be anti-Chinese violence. Indeed, it cannot be denied that historically Christians benefited from the so-called ethical policy, which was applied in the Indies from 1901 onwards (p. 761). Christian hospitals and schools, and in an indirect way the churches, were privileged. Between 1909 and 1913 the number of subsidized

Christian schools increased by 40%. However, Christianity today could no longer be understood as they were in colonial era. Some Christian scholars even refuse the identification of Christianity in Indonesia with Western, moreover with colonialism (Rissakota 2012). Oppositions to the Western Churches are even conveyed to challenge Western domination in Indonesian churches. And, so is the Chinese. Not all of them benefited from the Dutch social division, or gain privilege from the state economic policy. Many of them avoid nepotism, poor, but never be counted as social incentive receivers, such as direct cash payment (BLT), social safety net (JPS), or rice for the poor (*raskin*).

Democratic transition, accommodative religion, and reconciliation, 1999-2004

Despite the very bleak face of religion in anti-Chinese violence during the Indonesian democratic transition era, religion also shows its very side of kindness. As Anthony Reid (2009: 294) argues, "The worst of times for Chinese Indonesians appears to have been followed by the best of times". The two Presidents, who followed Suharto, Habibie and Abdurrahman Wahid, dismantled official discriminatory measures against Chinese Indonesians, permitted and even encouraged Chinese New Year celebrations, and stimulated a boom of nostalgia about all things Chinese. Habibie is the one who is on the other hand strongly criticised for his proportional politics in his cabinet, which is seen disadvantaging minority. Yet, Habibie is also noted to be accommodative to the Chinese.

Ali (2007:14) argues that in 2000, former President Abdurrahman Wahid lifted the legal ban on Confucianism with Decree No. 6 on Chinese religion, belief, and cultures, while in 2001, President Megawati Soekarnoputri, represented by the Minister of Religious Affairs, issued Decree no. 13, stipulating that the Lunar Chinese New Year, or *Imlek*, was a national holiday. In addition, Turner & Allen (2007:117) argues that President Wahid declaration, that, "I would like to renew the Government's commitment to stay out of religious issues. Let every religious believer take care of their own beliefs. As we have all learned any government intervention would only create negative consequence", open up religious freedom for the Chinese, and reassure the Chinese that they could openly practise their culture and religious beliefs without fear of reprisal by the State. For Brown (2003:235), Wahid had made strenuous efforts to assure the country's Christian and ethnic Chinese minorities that he respected and valued their membership of Indonesian society.

Wahid's stance toward the Chinese in Indonesian society has resulted in a shift opinion of public toward NU. Wahid bravely confessed the 1965 massacre involving NU fault, something that triggered protest against Wahid within NU itself. However, Wahid's way of thinking has changed the face of NU from the traditionalist exclusivist (anti-minority) to open moderate. As a result, in East Java, Chinese seem to feel "safe" with NU, rather than with some other religious organizations. In Surabaya, PKB has attracted more Chinese than many other parties, and they did not feel excluded. In fact, six Chinese became active members of the board of the PKB East Java Provincial Chapter, and another five Chinese were on the board of each of the *Kabupaten* (district) Chapter although the Chinese also contributed a substantial amount of money to PKB (Subianto, in Wibowo 2001:141). Decision to join with mainstream party is however sensible rather than with "Chinese" party, for the purpose of policy change effectiveness (Turner & Allen 2007:121).

Conclusion

Although the role of religion in anti-Chinese violence in Indonesian democratic transition, 1997-2004, is mostly deemed to be an instrument for the elite to pursue their political interest amidst the social hostility in the country, coining the grassroots idea of religion is equally crucial. It might be true that elite uses religion to flame the anti-Chinese violence to gain more control in political stage. However, elite's social engineering would not be possible to work unless the social circumstances provide required ingredient for the anti-Chinese violence to take place. Therefore, it is important to trace the religious nature of society that we can identify if they are volatile enough or difficult enough to get fractured. Past experience is clearly influential to shape society's perception towards religion and others', but it does not explain comprehensively the cause of current anti-Chinese violence to occur.

Nor is it cultural analysis to satisfy the question of rampant anti-Chinese violence in society, though remains important, as there are many other cases where society is well consolidated in spite of the strong stimulation of violenc. So is the economic issue. This is not to undermine factors other than religion to influence the explosion of anti-Chinese violence in Indonesian transition of 1997-2004. This rather agrees that analysing anti-Chinese violence strongly needs to consider multiple causes, which unfortunately are often mixed and difficult to distinguish.

Therefore, taking into account religion more seriously is useful, not only to enable us identifying many more possibilities of the anti-Chinese violence triggers, but more importantly to understand why society in particular areas is easily driven to join in rioting than the others. Elite understands well that religion is naturally divisive. Being combined with ethnic and religious fascism, in the context of society that has long been frustrated, that divisive religion could be an effective tool of divide-and-rule politics. Given the perception that Chinese is identical with atheism, communism, infidelity, anti Islam, and Christianity, it becomes rather clear that anti-Chinese is not only a matter of ethnic but also religion. Besides revealing over generalization, such a state of being of course also dangerously becomes a point of social volatility, which could be misused by elite, to squeeze vertical conflict (anti-state, anti-elite) into horizontal one (anti-Chinese). Not a surprise if in many cases, anti-Chinese violence is a combination of ethnic sentiment and religious sentiment. Anti-Chinese violence in Indonesian, 1997-2004 also tells us the same: a perfect combination of mean elite, fragile society, ethnic sentiment, and religious primordialism.

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