Violent Youth Groups in Indonesia: The Cases of Yogyakarta and Nusa Tenggara Barat

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Problems of violent youth groups have escalated in Indonesia, following economic recession, unemployment, and weakened state institutions. Young people have been hit by the lack of income and broken expectations. In consequence, youth groups emerge and arrange for members' economic revenue as well as identity creation and confidence. Religion in some cases is used to legitimize violence and to strengthen the boldness of group members. The paper offers a brief overview of gangster (preman) traditions in Indonesia. Empirical findings on violent youth groups in the two selected provinces are presented within a multi-factor analytical framework, where the need for income and identity strengthening, political elite interests, and the lack of law enforcement contribute to explaining criminal and vigilante violence. Interviews with leaders and members of movements engaged in violent actions offer insights into a problem that threatens national security and control.

1. Introduction

Since the economic crisis started in 1997, an increasing number of people in Indonesia are thrown into the harsh reality of joblessness. The younger generation is most severely affected by the lack of employment or pertinent possibilities of income generation, and identity creation. More than 40 million people are without a reliable income from employment in Indonesia today, most of them young and male, having nothing to sell but their own muscles. Rates of criminality have increased, not least as a consequence of weakened state and police power since the fall of Soeharto’s authoritarian regime in 1998.
Vertical violence and human rights violations in Indonesia continue, especially in the troubled provinces of Aceh and Papua. More alarming, however, is the increase in horizontal violence, theft, and destruction of common property, and ordinary people are being threatened, tortured, and even executed by their peers. It is probable that several hundred people nationwide are killed every year in incidents of street vigilantism, where angry mobs take the law into their own hands.¹ Much of the horizontal violence observed over the last few years is related to problems of economic crisis and unemployment, combined with the weakening of central state institutions, including the police.

Concurrent with these economic trends in Indonesia are long traditions of youth gangs and organized criminality in Indonesia. Racketeering and forced protection seem to be a growing business. Groups and gangs of unemployed youth have become bolder, making security a highly valued commodity. The demand for security services has increased dramatically and entrepreneurs are seen flocking into the violence business. Entry barriers into this line of business are low, and personal satisfaction seems to be high for the idle young who are undaunted, as it not only provides them with a source of income, but also strengthens their self-identity and confidence. Members of the national and local political elites may also gain from youth mobilization and unrest, and this might have contributed to the escalation of the violence seen.

Given such a background and trend, this paper takes a closer look at violent youth groups in two of Indonesia’s provinces, Yogyakarta and Nusa Tenggara Barat (NTB). Within these areas, the phenomenon of youth gangs and the violence business is especially evident in the city of Yogyakarta and on the island of Lombok. Both provinces have been hard hit by the reduced inflow of foreign tourists since 1998. In Yogyakarta, a number of groups affiliated to political parties fight each other and against the police. In Lombok, security groups called Pam Swakarsa also fight each other and against criminality. Dominating groups in both provinces are related to Muslim leaders and organizations, and they use religious teachings to legitimize their actions.
The research underlying this paper is based on my observation of developments in the two provinces through regular visits over the last ten years and through a network of friends and colleagues in the regions. However, the main data collection was made in August 2001, followed by visits to the two provinces again in October 2001 and January 2002. While researching on small-scale entrepreneurship and the conditions for business innovations, my attention was drawn to the role of criminality as a hindrance for small-scale business development. Studying the “violence business” is scary, disappointing, and methodologically difficult to approach. The aim of this paper is thus modest: it throws light on the operations of violent youth groups and the reasons behind their increase in numbers and significance.

The research process was organized into four stages: First, as mentioned, a close following of development trends in the two provinces, rendered possible through an institutional collaboration with Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, and Universitas Mataram, NTB. Second, getting an overview of social conflicts and violence in the selected areas with information mostly from local newspapers and human rights organizations (REDHAM in the NTB, Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Yogyakarta (LBH) and AYOHAM in Yogyakarta). Information from the media and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) has been cross-checked with key informants at the two collaborating universities. Third, identifying organizations involved in the social tensions and violent conflicts. Again, the prime source of information has been local human rights organizations. The fourth stage involves an intensive process of interviewing leaders and members of the selected violent youth organizations, with assistance from the mentioned university institutions.

The paper consists of six sections. After this introduction is an overview of the history of violent youth groups in Indonesia. Thereafter comes a presentation of unemployment statistics combined with a theoretical discussion of identity creation, elite interests, and weakened institutions. Sections 4 and 5 focus specifically on violence and youth groups in the two aforementioned provinces. The conclusions and policy recommendations bring the paper to a close.
2. Traditions of the Violence Business

Gangster groups and youth violence are not new phenomena in Indonesia. The following is its historical background. It was not until 1900 that reasonably standardized police forces appeared within the Dutch colony. Till then, most of the non-European quarters of the colony's cities and towns were "policed" by volunteer neighbourhood watches, known as *ronda*, who routinely treated suspected thieves, burglars, and other undesirables with vigilante violence (Anderson 2001, p. 10). Local security guard systems are still in operation, based on the very old social institutions for policing neighbourhoods by the communities themselves rather than by the state, and around 60 per cent of public places are still formally "unpoliced". According to Siegel (1986), the neighbourhood's sense of "community" is actually expressed through a shared concern with security more than through ties of kinship or shared economic interests. There are also long traditions of street justice (*main hakim sendiri*) or lynch law at the level of gangs or communities, as documented by Barker (2001). In the absence of a recognized legal system, the distinction between youth militias and roving gangs has been unclear, as shown by Stoler (1988) in her study of *lasjkar* militias in North Sumatra during the freedom struggle of 1945–49, and by Cribb (1991) in similar studies in the Jakarta area. Today, there are many examples of rivalry between the police and groups of criminals or territorial security groups.

In the early 1980s, many security groups were increasingly active in the "security business", acting as bodyguards in rental and debt collection. In the 1980s, there were also improved gang organizations and their "supra-local realm" (Barker 2001, p. 24). The toughs, or *preman*, were central to the comprehensive systems of violence and corruption under the Soeharto regime. *Preman* are young males in groups engaged in criminal activities. "Everyone knows who the *preman* are because they have their own *lokasi* from which they collect money. If they aren't paid, they will stab people, burn the store, etc." (Barker 2001, p. 42). According to Ryter (2001, p. 128), the *preman* originate from the least privileged sectors of society, "like the small-time entrepreneurs they are accused of intimidating". *Preman* literally means "free
man", but in Indonesia, these groups are also characterized by their tight group solidarity and obedience to a chain of command. As described by Ryter:

> With tight enough structure of command, it is possible to bring in bodies from other regions or locales to create necessary incidents and then allow the local representatives to step in and save the day. (2001, p. 146)

All members pledge their solidarity to their organization. The improved organization of *preman*, with violence and protection rackets as main elements, gave their members increased power, which is more easily exchangeable for economic gains.

A wave of violent crimes peaked in the early 1980s, following the economic recession and liberalization policies from 1982 to 1983, including cuts in subsidies on energy and food and high inflation rates. Ordinary people increasingly complained that criminality was out of control. The New Order regime was not oblivious to the growing social anxieties about crime at that time (Kusumah 1988). Thousands of *preman* were killed during the period of *Petrus* (*pembunuhan misterius*, “mysterious killings”), an organized system of killing criminals, which started in Yogyakarta in 1983. The objective was “cleansing the criminal cancer” (Bourchier 1990, p. 185). *Petrus* is characterized by paramilitary operations with close bonds to the military, the police, and even directly to the president (Van der Kroef 1985; Pemberton 1999). *Petrus* represented a watershed, according to Barker (2001, p. 51), as “it marked the point at which territorial power became de-territorialized from the figure of the *jawara* (criminal groups) and re-territorialized within the state and its fraternities”.

Following *Petrus*, government policy limited the economic and territorial bases for the gangs and private security firms. State officials increasingly controlled and protected street-level *preman* through a system known as *bekking* (“backing”). Rival criminal gang structures linked political and business elites through the police and the military to the *preman*. Sometimes these gangs mutated into private armies or militias associated with political and business leaders. The *bekking* system gave the *preman* state protection while also forcing them to pay
their own dues. Having extracted their rents from business people and other citizens, they in turn paid rents to government representatives, usually members of the military or police, in return for the right to operate (Lindsey 2001). The national, militant youth organization Pemuda Pancasila (Pancasila Youth) clearly played a central role in the bekking system, in close co-operation with the military (Ryter 2001). Also in the 1980s, the government reformed the traditional ronda system to make it more efficient and to bring it under the supervision and control of the national police. The new police-controlled Siskamling reduced the influence of lower regional authorities that formerly profited from commercial security and protection rackets. Even though the local security guards continued to be based on the gotong royong (mutual assistance) principle and were not paid by the police, the new organization of local and regional security represented a weakening of local mafia-like institutions and a strengthening of state control and the monopolization of violence.

A system of organized crime is made possible by the presence of a formal judicial structure that is incapable of exercising the monopoly of legitimate force and violence normally associated with a modern state. Duplicity of the criminal justice system allows organizations to run protection rackets, extract payments from and control entry into, legitimate business enterprises. According to Anderson (1995, p. 34) a mafia is “a group that is characterized by profit-oriented criminal activity, that uses violence or the threat of violence, and that corrupts legitimate governmental authority”. Organized systems of preman in Indonesia, either controlled by the military or detached from the state, before or after Petrus and before or after the fall of the New Order, represent rules of the game with much in common with mafia systems. Three major conditions are associated with the origins and development of mafias: a weak legitimate government power, excessive bureaucratic power, and the financial potential of illegal markets (Anderson 1995). After the fall of Soeharto, the Indonesian state again increasingly revealed its inability to maintain public order and failed to exercise the legitimate monopoly of violence. A history of excessive bureaucratic power provides a basis for extensive use of bribery, threats, and extortion
in the society. In consequence, business opportunities in security, gambling, and debt collecting rise with economic crisis and social unrest. With the power of mafia-like institutions, whole lines of business activities may come under the control of organizations exerting violence in a specific geographical area, suppressing rivals and challenging the rule of the state (Schelling 1971).

In the new era of democracy, the ordinary folk’s lack of trust in the police and the judicial system inherited from the New Order regime is palpable. At various levels of the society, there are still alliances between the police and organized street gangs that generate financial returns to someone and “provide available strong arms for political action” (Lev 1999, p. 189). The New Order, according to Pemberton (1994, p. 8), represented “a relatively muted form of terror: the repression of fear that customarily secures, over time, an appearance of normal life”. Most of the Indonesian population, especially those on the inner islands, seemed to accept the official virtues of order, stability, and progress. The main challenge today is to find alternative ways to reduce the sense of terror and fear and to bring about stability and progress, as well as to avoid dismantling smaller established groups of similar ethnicity, religion, or neighbourhood that contribute to those purposes.

3. Unemployment, Identity, and Political Change:
Towards a Conceptual Model

The tragic killings in the Maluku, which claimed more than 5,000 lives since 1999, are supposedly caused by ethnic and religious conflicts. Trijono argues, however, that the economic crisis and unemployment problem are underpinning the conflict there:

It is no wonder, therefore, that when Indonesia encountered economic crisis in 1997, the city of Ambon was knocked down: youth unemployment severely increased; hoodlums emerged everywhere; social security and public order were disturbed. (2001, p. 5)

The International Labour Organization (ILO) calculated that 150,000 people lost their employment each day in Indonesia during the worst phase of the crisis in 1998 (ILO 1998). In the same report, the ILO
stated that the number of unemployed in Indonesia reached 18 million in 1998, or around 20 per cent of the work-force. The employment statistics from Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS, or Central Board of Statistics) indicate 5 million unemployed in 1998 and 6 million (6.4 per cent) in 1999.\textsuperscript{5} The national planning agency estimates indicate an unemployment rate of 30 per cent in 1999 (BAPPENAS 1999). Official statistics also reveal that more than 18 million people worked without a salary in the year 2000, an increase of 3 million from 1997. Over the same period, employment in agriculture increased by 6 million, without a measurable increase in agricultural output. Summing up official figures on open unemployment, unpaid workers and excess labour in agriculture totalled 30 million in 2000.\textsuperscript{6} In addition, some 25 million people in their productive age period have their main occupation in the household — which means that they were underemployed or were unemployed in reality. Towards the end of 2001, the Minister of Manpower formally revealed that the unemployment figure was 40 million.\textsuperscript{7} Among the youth, the real unemployment rate is probably more than 50 per cent. The ILO calculated that the national economic growth should be above 5 per cent annually for the economy to be able to absorb the net population growth, which is close to 3 million people annually (ILO 1998). A growth in gross domestic product (GDP) of 3 per cent adds another million or so young people annually to the numbers of the unemployed.

Unemployment and uncertainty about the future and the absence of recognized social status for young people combine to push a growing proportion of Indonesian youngsters into the margins of society. If employment usually provides a reference and pride to identity, then its absence affects people's identity and pride severely. To overcome this identity crisis, means of defining identity other than employment have increased in importance. Building a support network of companions in similar plight might develop into a source of support, encouragement, and alternative pride and identity (Amundson 1994). Thus, creation of a subculture of the unemployed is generally a measure for identity strengthening (McFayden 1995).

More specific needs in the process of identity creation are situational
and depend on the cultural context. Religion is obviously an important identity marker for the young in Indonesia today, and probably more so for those marginalized from the national process of economic development and modernization. “Religious identities are perhaps more salient in contemporary Indonesia today than at any other time in its modern history” (Kipp 2001, p. 1). Among an increasing number of Islamic parties and movements, the majority support the new democratic political system, and are actually the forerunners in that process, while a few of them operate outside the law and subscribe to violence as a means to reach their religious goals. A typical approach for them is to draw mass support from the unemployed youth. In this way, their members strengthen their identity by pursuing lifestyles that distinguish them from non-Muslims and sharing the same dedication to a cause and dissatisfaction with society. Cohesive religious groups provide their members a sense of familiarity, trust, easy communication, and emotional comfort. Through participation in mystical orders, common believers are associated with past generations and the strength of spirits, enabling them to pass into the spheres of kekebalan (invulnerability) and magical potency.

In addition to individual material interests and identity strengthening, there might well be political elite motives behind efforts to build movements and organizations accepting violence as a means for religious ends. In Indonesia, as elsewhere, cultures of violence are “agents of social empowerment, personal pride, and political legitimisation” (Juergensmeyer 2001, p. 216). It is widely believed that criminal and violent gangs still operate under the direction and protection of government officials or political or business elites at the central or local levels, as discussed earlier in this paper. Similarly, from Thailand, Ockey (1998) has reported a widening difference between “democracy” at the centre where the media and transparency play important roles, and in the provinces where candidates rely on intimidation and vote buying. The centre and the periphery are bound together, however, by a reliance of the centre on influential persons as agents in the periphery as well as a local elite dependent on the centre for protection and legitimacy. The use of criminal groups in the election process, putting opposing
candidates and even voters under threats of violence, was one effect of that system. When political parties needed representation and support in the periphery, right down to the neighbourhood level, they turned to the local *nakleng* (gangster groups). Boundaries between peripheral crime, central high society, and politics were made increasingly porous. In the Philippines, Sidel (1998) has documented that organized “gangsterism” characterizes political competition and leadership in the province studied. Politicians are frequently involved in assassinations and in lucrative illegal rackets there.

The New Order Indonesia was a highly centralized state, with most of the political power residing in Jakarta. Before the fall of Soeharto, the military, which included the police, constituted a structural authority. All these were underpinned by its role in politics, its control of the intelligence services, and its reach extended all the way down to the village level. It had a monopoly on state coercive power. The breaking up of Soeharto’s “cement politics” and the vanishing respect for the superior wisdom of a paternalistic elite necessarily led to a weakening of state institutions, culminating in what some would call a power vacuum. The military and the police lost their guard and “civilians moved into the vacuum created by the military’s lack of vision and leadership” (Liddle 1999, p. 29). Soeharto had subordinated the military to his own presidency so thoroughly and for so long that when they might have acted as one body, they lacked the ability to do so (Emmerson 1999). The weakened police and military institutions may leave no alternative but to comply with gangs running protection rackets. The national police was separated from the armed forces in 1999 and removed from the supervision of the Minister of Defence in 2000. The relatively small 175,000-member police force is generally considered to be substandard in its professionalism, integrity, and intelligence apparatus. A new law regulating Polri (the National Police) may not have taken into account the confusion arising from the laws on regional autonomy. The new responsibility for Polri at local levels falls under the provincial administration, whose power has been substantially reduced by the expanded political and administrative roles of the regencies. The judicial system remains subordinated to the
The executive and the military and suffers from pervasive corruption. The court system has recently been ranked one of the most corrupt institutions in the Indonesian public sector. People continuously lose confidence in the new and reformed government institutions, which may be a combined result of their low efficiency and their misuse of power. The weakening of state institutions occur at a time when trust, solidarity, and collective consciousness are being impaired and the problems of criminality and terrorism increase, and when the role of the state therefore becomes even more important.

Based on the above two sections of this paper, a conceptual model for analysing violent youth groups is presented in Figure 1. The model presents two main propositions: (a) business and identity creation comprise the main activities of violent youth groups; and (b) the growth of violent youth groups is nurtured by unemployment and élite interests, and thrives within a context of weakened state institutions. Against this background, recent violence in the two provinces of Yogyakarta and Nusa Tenggara Barat will be analysed.
4. The Case of Nusa Tenggara Barat (NTB)

The province of the NTB was generally regarded as a relatively safe and non-violent province until 17 January 2000, when violent riots broke out. The alert level of the police and the military was at its lowest, in spite of evidence of increasing criminality and upcoming conflicts. In 1998 a charismatic Muslim leader in East Lombok, Tuan Guru Haji Subawaihi, took the initiative to establish “self-security groups”. He organized an improved system of village-based siskamling, and called it Pam Swakarsa. The system has grown into a substantial force in security services, as well as in economic and social affairs in the province, especially in Lombok, with more than half a million members.

The population of the NTB is approximately 4 million. Inhabitants on the island of Lombok alone count for nearly 3 million people. The tourist industry saw a very fast increase in investments, tourist inflow, and employment in the ten years before 1997. At the peak, almost 250,000 foreign tourists visited the province annually, with a very strong concentration in West Lombok. Due to the economic crisis, political turmoil, and social unrest, there was a drop in the number of foreign tourist visitors to approximately 100,000 in the year 2000.9 West Lombok was also, prior to the tourist era, the more developed regency compared with the other districts in the province, and there are actually long traditions in antagonism between East and West. People of Balinese and Chinese origins play a major role in non-rural economic activities, including shops in the capital area and hotels, restaurants, bars, and discotheques in West Lombok. Measuring welfare unconventionally as the number of people per motor bike, one finds great regional differences within Lombok. In 2000, the ratio was 6.7 in West Lombok compared with 42.3 in East Lombok. The Muslim community is generally strong in the NTB, and it is often heard in conversations with local politicians and bureaucrats that nothing can be done here without the support of the association of Muslim leaders (Tuan Guru). The Muslim leaders are also generally regarded to be the informal leaders of the Pam Swakarsa groups, although both groups were not always on friendly terms.10
Unemployment and Criminality

Of a total male labour force comprising approximately 1.2 million, only 17 per cent are registered as being employed outside the agricultural sector. Formal employment absorbs a negligible share of the labour force increase, and many young people seek all kinds of solutions to avoid falling back into the hard work and low income of traditional crop growing or husbandry. However, agriculture steadily absorbs, at least in the statistics, the labour excess without measurable increase in output.

The number of criminal cases registered at civil courts in Lombok doubled from 1997 to 1998. A criminality index (registered cases in percentage of population) shows that crime density is much higher in West Lombok/Mataram (0.9) than in East Lombok (0.4). From 1998 to 1999, reported crimes were reduced again by 60 per cent. The general downward trend of registered cases continued in 2000, cutting back to only one-fourth of the 1998 peak. However, people’s impressions of criminality and violence are very different. Thefts and aggravated burglary are nightly events in hundreds of villages and urban areas of Lombok today.

An Overview of Recent Episodes of Violence

There have been a high number of violent episodes in the province of the NTB occurring over the last couple of years. In many of these, we can see the Pam Swakarsa organizations playing a leading role. In the following overview of aggression and hostility in Lombok, the episodes are categorized into three groups. One is the January 2000 incident; the next is inter-community fighting; the last touches on the escalating problem of self-justice.

17–23 January 2000: On 17 January 2000, a large jihad gathering was arranged at the stadium of Mataram, Lombok. After the meeting, people turned into the streets and burned or damaged churches, shops, private houses, and vehicles. Christians and the ethnic Chinese were obvious targets for the mass aggression. The rioting and physical damage continued, spreading to the tourist areas and to Central Lombok. Thousands of Chinese fled the province and all foreign tourists were
evacuated from the island. The police issued "direct shoot instructions" and seven people were reported dead and fifty-four severely injured during the week of rioting. The following month saw only 14 per cent of the number of foreign tourists who would normally visit. Several months passed before non-Muslim business people returned to the island and trading in the capital area regained its normal rhythm. The blame for the rioting was mostly put on external provocateurs. The Pam Swakarsa groups clearly did not mobilize to guard the happenings during and after the mass meeting, and are accused, together with the police, for having an interest in the riots. Obviously, the riots dramatically increased earnings on security services.

Inter-Community Conflicts: Since 1999, an increasing number of inter-community conflicts and fighting have been reported in the province, especially in West Lombok and the capital area of Mataram. Probably the best known is the Bongor-Parampuan conflict, which is a series of thefts, fights, and killings between two Muslim villages. The conflict reached a peak in early January 2001 when at least eight people were killed during two days of fighting. A Pam Swakarsa called Amphibi mobilized people in support of one village. It was only later that the Amphibi leader appealed to his followers to keep calm, and his brigadiers not to send in the masses. There are also several examples of recent inter-community conflicts in Lombok involving Muslim and Hindu followers, which reflect the inter-ethnic conflicts between Sasak and Balinese people. Groups of Pam Swakarsa are actively involved on both sides, and economic and identity interests are at the core of the conflicts.

Street Justice, Punishment, and Execution: On 19 July 2001, three men were brought to hospital for extensive treatment following the violence inflicted by a Pam Swakarsa group. The three men were undressed and forced to admit their "sins" before they were handed over to the police several days later. Everyone in Lombok seems to know about similar episodes of street justice, punishments, and even executions carried out by some of the Pam Swakarsa groups. But because of fear of reprisal from the Pam Swakarsa, only very few of these cases are openly reported.
Violent Youth Groups: Pam Swakarsa

The term “Pam Swakarsa” (Pasukan Keamanan Swakarsa, “self-help security force”) is generally used in the NTB for security groups outside the control of the police or the military, and organized above the dusun (sub-village) level. At the sub-village level, the individual ronda systems are still in operation in some places, without connection to Pam Swakarsa. The rule, however, is that security systems since 1999 have become supra territorial. The term “Pam Swakarsa” had formerly been used in 1998 when calls to support the “civilian defenders” of the November Special Session of the MPR (People’s Consultative Assembly) against the high numbers of student activists in the streets of Jakarta were made. In Lombok, the term was also adopted, and several new organizations rapidly developed to “protect the society against the escalating problems of criminality and compensate for the weak position of the Police”. According to a recent report from the NTB Police Department, there are thirteen larger-scale Pam Swakarsa organizations operating in the province. Among them, the biggest is the Amphibi, which has 480,000 members (according to the same police report, while the general secretary of Amphibi claimed 700,000 members). Of the total Pam Swakarsa membership registered by the police (609,000), 85 per cent are inhabitants of East Lombok.

Amphibi was the first Pam Swakarsa to be established in the NTB, informally in late 1998, formally on 8 April 1999. Its leader was Tuan Guru Haji Sibawaihi, a charismatic Muslim leader in East Lombok. The ideological basis is twofold: Pancasila (the official state ideology) and Islam. The members are mostly young men with low education and registered as farmers, but in reality most are without regular employment. 80 per cent are under the age of forty and with education not above junior high school. The members have to pay 120,000 rupiah as a registration fee. A part of the fee is in compensation for uniforms (an orange shirt) and some equipment. A 2,000-rupiah monthly contribution from each member covers security and insurance. Members of Amphibi groups often meet under the leadership of their local religious teachers for ideological strengthening and magic exercises. The legal economic activities of Amphibi are extensive, including insurance business, a saving
and credit co-operative, a petrol station, an employment agency, and a wide network of security businesses. The underworld activities are probably connected to the same activities. Debt collecting is one example often mentioned; illegal trading in labour power is another. Amphibi is definitely one of the biggest business units in the province. The security services offered to businesses and individual non-members of Amphibi probably have an annual turnover worth some tens of billions of rupiah. The operation of Amphibi's security services is based on an intricate system of secrecy and surveillance, routine patrolling and “task force missions”. Each operational team consists of fifteen members. Radio communication between battalions facilitates a smooth process of information sharing and mobilizing larger forces when necessary.  

This is a well-organized system of preman, linking the poor and unemployed to a political élite with business interests, and providing a duplicity of the criminal justice system that allows for protection rackets and control over large business segments.

From the perspective of this organization, we raised the question of motivation for members to join and pay the relatively high amount of fees, equal to a one-month family budget. The secretary general believes that “protection against all kinds of criminal cases” must be the main reason for being a member. A second reason, according to him, is the spiritual and financial support one gets as a member when dying. Asking two specialists on the Pam Swakarsa movement the same question on members’ motivation to join, their answer is threefold: (a) pride and belief in a charismatic Tuan Guru; (b) protection and insurance (for instance, in family conflicts such as settlement of a deceased’s estate or divorce, members can draw upon their organization for “law enforcement”); (c) earnings from security services (debt collection, bodyguard, and “non-regular” security services are examples).

According to one regular Amphibi member: “Why be a member? Because it makes me stronger. I feel safe joining the group, I have insurance for my motor bike, and I can earn some money on security.” Other members emphasize the importance of ilmu (supernatural knowledge), explaining how meetings under the guidance of their Muslim leader bring strength and magical potency of value for their
evening activities. Discussing the high registration fee with poor members of the Amphibi organization, clear indications are given that many became members prior to the general election in 1999, and that a vote is a value exchangeable for membership.

Among ordinary citizens, the self-justice of Amphibi groups is regarded as terror creating widespread fear. Says another member of Amphibi: “After we catch the criminals and if they admit to the crime and regret, we give to the police. If not, and if they steal our people [rape our wives] we have to kill.” Episodes of torture and execution are regularly mentioned as reasons for deep dissatisfaction with the Pam Swakarsa in a recent survey. Legitimized by “fighting against criminality”, the organizations have facilitated extensive criminal conduct under their own control.

5. The Case of Yogyakarta

The special province of Yogyakarta is regarded by many as a barometer of political tensions in Indonesia. When Sultan Hamenkubuwono X was able to calm down the huge masses of students demonstrating in the streets of the university city during May 1998, it was taken as an indication of a peaceful transfer of power from Soeharto to a democratically elected government. Also, when the Ambon conflict was reflected and religious tensions surfaced in Yogyakarta by the stoning of Christian churches in late January 2000, it was taken as a signal of the wider national spread of horizontal violence and the government’s lack of control. Since the January 2000 incident, an increasing number of horizontal violence episodes have occurred.

The province has a population of approximately 3 million people. 500,000 live in the city of Yogyakarta, where most of the seventy institutions of higher learning in the province are located. Education is the main business in the province, which lacks natural resources or any other major exportable items. The rich central Javanese cultural traditions have been a main source of pride as well as of income. Several hundred thousand tourists used to visit the province every year to see Borobudur and Prambanan, the Sultan’s Palace, and all handicraft and dance museums, shops, and performances. After the crisis, the tourism business
suffered, and hotels normally now run at an occupancy rate below 30 per cent. Regional income per capita (at constant market prices) decreased dramatically after 1997, by 13 per cent in 1998.\textsuperscript{22}

Unemployment and Criminality

The unemployment problem in Yogyakarta is not less than the national average; thousands of young people are being fired from tourist industries while experiencing the lack of alternative employment opportunities. The province probably has a higher number of unemployed university graduates than any other province in Indonesia. While the employment opportunities are scarce, the young and educated people still do not want to return to their places of origin and traditional livelihood. Tens of thousands of redundant young people continue living in the city or surrounding areas while sustaining their formal student status for years after graduation.

In Yogyakarta city, as in the NTB, the number of crimes escalated from 1997 to 1998. From 1998, however, also in parallel with the NTB province, the numbers of recorded criminal cases started to decline at a remarkable rate: from 815 cases noted by the Yogyakarta City Police Office in 1998, the number shrunk to 710 in 1999 and to 310 in 2000.\textsuperscript{23} The official statistics give a picture very different from the perception of ordinary people. Fears about the rising crime and violence can be heard everywhere in the city and its surroundings.

An Overview of Recent Episodes of Violence

The youth gangs riding motor bikes and stoning churches at different locations in the centre of Yogyakarta on Sunday, 30 January 2000, marked a dramatic change towards escalating mass violence in the province.\textsuperscript{24} In September 2000, a newspaper article concluded that “Inter-Village Wars Increase” in Yogyakarta because of a power vacuum, and because organized youth gangs fight against each other for influence and revenge.\textsuperscript{25} Other examples of newspaper headlines reporting on escalating violence problems in 2000 and early 2001 are: “Violence Around Us”, “Violence, Why Is It Out of Control”, “In Need of an Appropriate Concept to Solve Violence Problems”, “Senate Office of Law Faculty, YMU, Burnt by Fire Bomb”.\textsuperscript{26} During the summer of
2001, several incidents point towards a continued escalation of violence problems in the province. On 10 June the *Insiden Sultan Agung* scared many people and political observers as well. On that day, residents of a village in Bantul clashed with hundreds of PPP (United Development Party) supporters returning home in a motorcade from a party gathering. At least eighteen people were injured in the clash. The *Jawa Post* reported on 13 June 2001 that “Crazy Masses Make Jogja Dirty”. Several episodes of stoning and burning were described. On 19 June, *Target* reported under the headline “Police Get More Brutal” that the police violently broke into houses in a certain *kampung* in Yogya and kidnapped members of the PPP, whose members have repeatedly complained to the LBH about police violence.²⁷

The *Jakarta Post* reported on 25 July 2001, under the headline “Many ‘Revolutionary’ Bodies Have Their Home Base in Yogya”, that there are “some forty newly born Muslim hard-line groups in the sultanate town”. In December 2000 those groups, according to the same source, conducted raids almost every night on cafes, nightclubs, liquor sellers, gambling spots, and other places they branded as insulting to Islamic teachings. A Yogya-based human rights and democracy NGO recently reported that there has been an escalation of horizontal violence during the last couple of years. The violence mostly occurs between youth groups with affiliation to different political parties and religious movements.²⁸ Also, Lembaga Bantuan Hukum (LBH) Yogyakarta reports on increasing problems and cases in their organizations on horizontal violence, in contrast to the dominating vertical violence among their cases before 1997.²⁹ Militia groups with relations to political parties and religious and ideological organizations are identified by the same NGOs as standing behind the violence episodes. The most active groups are the GPK (Ka’bah Youth Movement) and the BSM (Straight Way), with open affiliations to the respective political parties, the PPP and PDI-P.

**Violent Youth Groups**

The GPK is probably the strongest, best organized and most violent of the youth organizations in Yogyakarta.³⁰ The GPK in this case is the
abbreviation for Gerakan Pemuda Ka'bah (not to be confused with Gerakan Pengacan Keamanan, or Security Disruption Movement, which is a general New Order term on resistance movements in, for example, East Timor, Aceh, and Irian Jaya). The organization is established at the national level with branches in twenty provinces. The Yogyakarta branch claims to be one of the leading GPK groups in the country with 3,000 formally registered members. The province leaders are proud of their strength and openly admit close bonds with leading political figures in Jakarta, indicating that physical pressure is effective to win competition for government posts. The organization is strategically based on the system of lasykar, which are locally based militia groups. There are fifty-seven such militia groups in the Yogyakarta GPK, each with somewhere between fifty and 700 members.

Yogya GPK was formally established in 1999. Their main slogan is *Amar Ma'ruf Nahi Munkar*, or “Command the Kindness against the Evil”. They are formally not an organization under the PPP, but party membership is a precondition for GPK members. The GPK in Yogyakarta has its roots in the PPP lasykar established in Kampung Kuncen back in 1987. (This is an area of the city where the PPP got more than 90 per cent of the votes in 1999.) As a rule, only a small leadership of the GPK is armed with guns, the ordinary members only with swords, sticks, or knives. The organization arranges routinely religious meetings for ideological strengthening. The chief of the provincial branch of the PPP, Mr Fauzi, said in a newspaper interview that violent groups have emerged as the means of articulating the youths’ enthusiasm in defending their beliefs. If the PPP had not provided a forum, the youths would have acted in a more anarchic way. Under the supervision of his party, the youngsters learn Islamic teachings twice a week. This also shows the rising awareness among the Indonesian young generation of the importance of implementing Islamic teachings within their society, Mr Fauzi said.31

Social problems in the society are stated as the basic background for establishing the organization. Discotheques, alcohol, and drugs, gambling, and prostitution are examples of social problems. The organization takes responsibility for forcing people to follow proper
Muslim morals and rules. According to the GPK Chief: "Firstly, we give a warning; if the warning is ignored, we make forced dismissal." Actions taken by the organization are based on surveillance done by the GPK members. Sometimes, the GPK Chief admits, there is a lack of co-ordination and control by the leadership. Members may have gathered in smaller groups, and the lasykar may have a lot of influence on the emergence of violent episodes. One recent violent conflict episode in Yogyakarta, where a gay gathering and seminar was "dismissed", can be explained by the presence of "security officers" from the gay community stirring up trouble when the GPK had to compel the closure of the place. "We gave them a warning but they ignored. What they did was against the religion." Other examples of "dismissals" presented by the Chief included the closing of gambling spots, cafes serving alcohol, and brothels.

A majority of the GPK members are high school graduates, and 90 to 95 per cent of them are without formal employment. All members are male, most of them under the age of thirty. The membership entrance fee is 10,000 rupiah, and monthly contributions from members to the organization are only voluntary. There is a strong feeling of solidarity between the members. "'Fist for Fist' is our slogan", and fighting is also with sticks and swords "if our enemy takes the sword", says the Chief. Formally, the GPK is not involved in the security business; what the members and lasykar do is another thing, according to the Chief. Says one GPK member:

The first thing I do in the morning is to call some friends to talk about what we can do and where we can earn some money. I feel strong when we come together. In special events, we wear black clothes with the sword symbol.

Gangs of GPK members regularly patrol their respective areas, demanding money for security and showing muscles (to threaten) if unpaid. They could easily mobilize members of neighbouring lasykar when necessary, for instance, in keeping control over businesses and in conflicts with the police. Regular conflicts with the police, according to GPK leaders, occur over the right to protect discotheques and gambling spots. The power of both the police and the military is clearly challenged within certain geographical areas.
Violent Youth Groups in Indonesia: Yogyakarta and Nusa Tenggara Barat

GPK groups regularly clash with members of the Barisan Shirotol Mustaqim (BSM), which was a group established in June 1999 in Yogyakarta. The groups are locally based, and violence episodes and gang fights occur occasionally over regional and border disputes when one group enters the other’s territories of economic and ideological dominance. Members of the GPK and the BSM are able to draw precise demarcation lines on a map between areas in towns dominated by each of the two organizations. When members were asked why they turned violent, one of them (GPK) answered: “Often they have taken something [drugs, alcohol] before going out. They get mad easily, even over the slightest problem. They feel very strong together.” In February 2002, at least three people were killed and dozens injured in several episodes of fighting between the two gangs over economic and ideological issues.

Members of the BSM are also PDI-P members. The basic ideology is nationalism, as taught by Bung Karno (Indonesia’s first president Soekarno). A main objective of the organization is to solve problems related to civilian arms and self-help justice, and to avoid the scary scenario of Yogya becoming like the Maluku or Aceh, thrown apart by religious conflicts. According to the leader of the organization, the means of operation is firstly by persuasion, secondly by using weapons like sticks and swords. “Spiritual weapon-magic” is an important element in the operation, and Islamic discussions are part of the organization’s activities. In addition to the Religion Division, there is the Skills Division of the organization, the purpose of which is to train and create jobs for its members. The chairman claimed there were approximately 5,000 members in Yogyakarta province. He claimed that in an hour, he could gather a force of 1,500 men. All members are male, mostly young, and without formal employment. According to the chairman, the GPK is a major enemy. The leader is aware that its members are busy in the “security business”, but this is outside the responsibility of the organization. Talking with an ordinary member of the BSM, he said: “You can make a contract with us; you can hire me for guarding your house in Yogya, paying between 100,000 and 200,000 rupiah a month.” says another BSM member with university education: “My member
friends are mostly uneducated and unemployed, so it’s easy to give them orders. The leader doesn’t have to explain and justify the order.”

6. Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

Empirically, this paper draws mainly on recent interviews with leaders and members of violent youth groups in the two provinces and on secondary data from newspapers and reports from NGOs. The groups under study are characterized by their composition of young, male, and unemployed members, and their violence business is bound with identity creation. The data support the conclusion that problems of criminal and vigilante violence have increased over the last few years, and that several factors, including unemployment and weakened state institutions, contribute to the phenomenon.

The experiences of colonialism and military rule seem to have done much to lay the foundations for gangster politics, in Indonesia as elsewhere in Southeast Asia. The phenomenon of gangster groups exerting coercive pressure on commercial structures until the latter agree to pay a regular contribution has been common in Indonesia for decades. In return, the racketeers protect the businesses from the encroachment of competitors. The system seems to have expanded substantially, however, in the two provinces studied here. Previously, small gangs of *preman* have grown into large and uncontrollable organizations comprising ordinary, unemployed male youths who are primarily non-criminals. The operation of the system seems to be based on a “two-arms principle”: one conducting criminal actions, creating violence and fear, while the other supplying security services and guarding. The organizations must create conflicts to legitimate their existence and modes of operation, and to strengthen themselves. Groups of members also use their organization’s uniforms and symbols for individual identity strengthening, group dynamics, and creating respect and fear in other milieus. Leading gangs, as observed in Yogyakarta and Lombok, drawing strength from their links with Muslim leaders and mysticism, also lend legitimacy to their violent actions. Especially in the province of the NTB, illegal armed structures have become larger and also more intricately organized and multi-functional. In addition to the
simple operations involving petty racketeering and neighbour-hood surveillance, a supra-territorial function has appeared, and the commercial activity has broadened. This is organized crime with similarities to mafia organizations. In both provinces there are clear connections between the violent groups and members of the élite at the local as well as national level.

A weakening of Indonesian state institutions, such as the police and the judiciary, creates a condition conducive to the rise of violent youth movements. The destruction of the state’s monopoly on executive, legislative, and judicial power provided new opportunities for the protective services of the organized youth gangs. It may be argued that the fierce actions of a growing number of gangster groups are still minuscule compared with the systemic waves of murder and general exploitation that characterized the authoritarian New Order regime. However, a main challenge under the present conditions in Indonesia is developing new institutions and transparent government procedures that can fill the power vacuum after the fall of the authoritarian system.

A leading question is if the state monopoly of legitimate force and violence can be retrieved by means other than recovering weapons of military terror and fear. From a maelstrom of state violence in the 1960s and partly through the New Order era, an Islamic democracy movement emerged that played a central role in the 1998 overthrow of the Soeharto regime (Hefner 1999a, p. 49). In explaining how this achievement was possible, Robert Hefner (2000) emphasizes the importance of civil institutions and public civility. Against portrayals of Islam as inherently anti-pluralist and undemocratic, he shows that Indonesia’s Islamic reform movement repudiated the goal of an Islamic state and championed democratic ideals. A striking “feature of religious life on these islands is their inhabitants’ sense of obligation to live, and learn to live, with one another” (Hefner 1999b, p. 235). Cultural and geographical boundaries coincide less closely on Indonesian islands than most places, but people there are used to living with each other and accept otherness, without necessarily having to mingle socially or actively learn to appreciate the habits of other cultures. Social distance may result in indifference and thus cultural integrity, which may be a good solution as long as one is
not threatened. Hostility does not start with social distance and foreignness but with feelings of injustice and relegation. People without an income, marginalized from the benefits of modernization and consumerism, easily develop hostility while losing esteem in the eyes of others. Being economically marginalized by the process of liberalization and the lasting economic crisis, and culturally detached from secularization and consumerism, people sympathizing with traditional religious organizations may use these movements as a means of survival and dignity. In order not to perish, distancing from the mainstream may be a strategy for organizations and individuals. Religious movements elevate themselves, and thereby the dignity and pride of their members, by using contrast: comparison and clashes with communities regarded to be less worthy, like Christians, and homosexuals and criminals, as in the cases of the GPK and Amphibi presented here.

Instead of balancing violent youth movements with state terror to regain the monopoly of force, more should be done to minimize the reasons for hostility. Policies of economic development need to be more sensitive to problems of unemployment, marginalization, and social inequalities. Employment creation should be emphasized in economic policies and regarded as an integral part of efforts to improve the human rights situation. A further strengthening of press freedom and transparency, both at the central level and down to the local ranks of politics and business, is of crucial importance to restrain illegitimate use of violence and to prevent human rights violations.

NOTES

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2. Redham (Relawan Untuk Demokrasi dan Hak Asasi Manusia, or Volunteers for Democracy and Human Rights) was established in January 2000 and has received financial support from the USAID.

3. The LBH (Lembaga Bantuan Hukum, Legal Aid Institute) is the respected national legal aid organization; AYOHAM (Aliansi Yogyakarta untuk Penegakan HAM, Yogyakarta's Alliance for Human Rights Enforcement) is a local human rights organization established in 1999.

4. According to a criminologist at the University of Indonesia, Adrianus Meliala (*Jakarta Post*, 13 June 2002).


8. Among the most influential radical and militant Islamic groups operating in the open at a national level are the Islamic Defenders Front (Front Pembela Islam, FPI), the Liberation Party (Hizb al-Tahrir, HT), and Laskar Jihad. The HT claims tens of thousands of members in twenty-six Indonesian provinces and operates under the names Sabab Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (SHTI) and the Youth of Liberation Party (Pemuda Partai Pembebasan). Laskar Jihad is a para-military organization claiming 15,000 members, mostly engaged in eastern Indonesia, especially in the Maluku.


10. Interview with Mr Haji Lalu Said Ruphina and Mr Gatot Dwi Hendro, Fakultas Hukum, Universitas Mataram, 16 August 2001.


15. Interview with Mr Musa Shofoandi, general secretary of Amphibi, Mataram, 18 August 2001.

16. Kepolisian Negara Republik Indonesia Daerah Nusa Tenggara Barat (Indonesian National Police, West Nusa Tenggara District Office), Mataram, May 2001: *Data Kepengurusan dan Anggota Pam Swakarsa yang Mempunyai Kekuatan Besar* (Data of board members and members of Pam Swakarsa with great power).

17. Interview with anonymous members of Amphibi, West Lombok, 17 and 19 August 2001.

18. Interview with Mr Haji Lalu Said Ruphina and Mr Gatot Dwi Hendro, Fakultas Hukum, Universitas Mataram, 16 August 2001.
21. The survey is based on a questionnaire printed in *Lombok Post*. The results of the survey are presented in a report from Pusat Penelitian dan Pengembangan (P3P, or Center for Research and Development for Rural Areas), Universitas Mataram, June 2001: *Laporan Hasil Polling Program Advokasi Penyusunan PERDA Pam Swakarsa* (Report on the polling results of the advocacy programme to set up the regional regulation of Pam Swakarsa).
23. Figures collected from Yogyakarta Police Office.
27. Interview with Mr Budi Santoso, head of the Yogyakarta branch of the LBH, in his office on 7 August 2001.
28. Reported by AYOHAM in its bulletin *Digniti*, no. 3, June 2001. Information from the bulletin was brought up and discussed in an interview with leaders of the organization (Mr Mustafa and Mr Ipung, in their premises in Yogyakarta, 9 August 2001).
30. The following information is derived mostly from an interview with the chairman (Mr Muhammad Lufti) and the secretary (Mr Akhada Maulana) of GPK Yogyakarta, in the premises of the PPP in Yogyakarta on 10 August 2001.
32. The following information is derived mostly from an interview with the chief of the Yogya branch of the BSM, Mr Dunak, in his residence in Yogyakarta on 9 August 2001.

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