CHAPTER FOUR

A DIVISION OF LABOUR IN KILLING

In the middle of the April 2000 riot in Poso, the governor of Central Sulawesi visited Christians who had fled the city and made the following request to them, 'I would ask you not to seek revenge. Let it be God who strikes back.'¹ When the riot ended several days later, few people in Poso shared the governor's optimism that God would be the next to strike. Instead, many of the district's residents appear to have expected a more immediate and worldly resumption of the violence. Villages began to make local preparations to face possible further clashes; a sub-section of Poso's Christian community went one step further, and began to prepare to perpetrate large-scale reprisals.

The result of these preparations was a sudden and dramatic escalation of violence in Poso in late May 2000. For two weeks, law and order in the district broke down almost completely. This campaign of violence was ostensibly targeted at the known Muslim 'provocateurs' of these two riots, but in fact did not harm any of these men. Instead, crowds of Christians commonly referred to as the 'kelompok merah' (red group) attacked whichever Muslims stood against them, burning villages and public facilities, while some Christian combatants also killed overwhelmed adversaries and prisoners. In contrast to the preceding urban riots, the intensity of violence in this episode more closely resembled a largely one-sided war. When security forces finally moved decisively to halt the violence at the start of the second week of June, they found piles of bodies crudely buried in shallow mass graves, and others dumped in the river flowing from the highlands out to sea through the middle of the district capital. In all, at least 246 people, mostly Muslims, had been killed (Laporan Gubernur n.d.), while tens of thousands of others had fled the district by land and by sea.² The physical destruction wrought during this episode was also

² Given the breakdown of law and order and the political uses to which a lower or higher figure for casualties could be turned, no accurate figure is ever likely to emerge for how many people were killed in May-June 2000. Official estimates of casualties in large-scale Indonesian riots, such as the governor's estimate quoted in the main text, have generally been held to be conservative. The same governor's report provides a figure of just
immense, as crowds had burned thousands of houses and other buildings in villages spread across at least six different sub-districts.

Internecine violence of this magnitude, in this case mostly perpetrated with crude weapons, frequently conjures images of neighbour attacking neighbour. In his commentary on perpetrator accounts of the 1994 Rwanda genocide, for instance, Hatzfeld (2005:66) observes, ‘The killers did not have to pick out their victims [as Tutsis]; they knew them personally. Everyone knows everything in a village.’ In the context of civil war, Kalyvas (2006:330–363) notes that civil war violence across times and locations has been observed to be ‘intimate,’ a fight of ‘neighbour against neighbour, friend against friend’. He himself modifies this observation somewhat, arguing that most individuals are averse to themselves perpetrating homicidal violence, but nevertheless posits that civil war circumstances generate an abundance of malicious denunciations in which intimates and equals are given up to be killed.

A close look at the May-June 2000 violence in Poso reveals a different pattern. In general, neighbour did not kill neighbour. Instead, a stark division of labour was to be found at the heart of this violence, greatly facilitating its rapid escalation. A loosely organized core of Christian combatants, who trained and manufactured weapons prior to the violence, moved throughout the district and were responsible for the majority of the killing. Admittedly, in perpetrating their campaign of violence, these core combatants’ relied crucially upon the mobilization of crowds of ordinary community members as rank-and-file combatants. These crowds precipitated the breakdown of law and order which provided the space required by this core group to operate. Moreover, many of these rank-and-file were recruited ad hoc to attack neighbouring villages, thereby creating the space for killing to occur. But such clashes typically produced few deaths, meaning that few rank-and-file murdered an adversary. Instead, the majority of those killed were overpowered combatants or prisoners. This division of labour thereby aided the escalation, because most community members needed only to tacitly approve of deadly violence, rather than directly confront the moral dilemma of killing.

The existence and importance of such a division of labour has rarely been emphasized in the study of the large-scale post-Suharto communal conflicts. But observers of mass killing, genocide, and civil war have

_*under 70,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs). Much as this figure represents approximately one quarter of the district population, it may also be conservative._*