Since the resignation of the authoritarian Suharto regime in May 1998 and the beginning of a vital democratisation process (reformasi), Indonesia has been shaken by massive outbursts of violence in various parts of the country (see, for example, Coppel, 2006; Klinken, 2007). Due to an ineffective legal system and the Indonesian government’s inability to put together a functioning Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), peace still cannot be restored by legal means or through an official search for truth as is often so prominently promoted in the literature on reconciliation.¹ This applies to the Moluccas as well—an archipelago in the eastern part of Indonesia, where one of the most violent conflicts of the post-Suharto era was fought out, mainly between Christians and Muslims from 1999 to 2003. Thousands died and hundreds of thousands were displaced. Law has not been enforced to the present day to deal with the conflict, only a tiny number of perpetrators or minor masterminds having been convicted to date, and a fact finding team sent by the central government to the region after the official peace talks in Malino (Sulawesi) in 2002 never released the ‘truth’ they uncovered. Since the Moluccan people had suffered tremendously in all sectors (the economy, education, and in social affairs, etc.), they became increasingly war-weary after 2002 and began to search for their own means of returning to normalcy. Culture and tradition became one of the primary means promoted to build inter-religious bridges and a common Moluccan identity in order to prevent any future divide along religious lines. This chapter discusses the revival or re-strengthening of what Dieter Bartels (1977) has coined ‘Nunusaku religion’ (centred around

¹ The TRC was meant to determine who was behind the mass atrocities of the Suharto regime, but also in the period after this (e.g., in East Timor). For more details on the planned and failed TRC, see contributions by Bräuchler, as well as Sulistiyanto and Setyadi, in Bräuchler (2009c).
the traditional village alliance system called *pela*) as one of those traditional phenomena used as an integrating mechanism; however, it also reflects on the challenges that accompany such a revival for peace.²

**Culture and Reconciliation**

These tendencies in the Moluccas are in line with broader developments on an international scale, where truth commissions and law enforcement, justice and human rights, forgiveness and amnesty often fail as means of reconciliation. This has led to two worldwide trends in which the Moluccan case fits well: (1) the common people affected by mass atrocities are increasingly mobilising traditional institutions or conflict resolution mechanisms for peace and stability in order to compensate for the insufficiency or failure of national and international interventions; and (2) people and organisations involved in developing conflict-solving strategies have started to think about the integration of cultural factors into the reconciliation process. According to Paul Lederach (1997: 94), for instance, “The greatest resource for sustaining peace in the long term is always rooted in the local people and their culture.”

The time factor is crucial and an essential prerequisite for reconciliation based on cultural and collective identity transformation. Authors, such as Lederach (1997) and Bar-Tal and Bennink (2004), emphasise that reconciliation, first of all, has to be seen as a process and not a written agreement. Peace treaties, such as the aforementioned government-initiated Malino agreement for the Moluccas, usually fall short of establishing genuine peaceful relations between former adversaries since they involve only the leaders, who negotiated the agreement, whereas the majority of society members may not accept the negotiated compromises. They may help stop the violence and serve as an entry point for other initiatives but they usually fail to touch the root causes and the structural changes necessary to overcome them. They do not involve the society at large and also do not deal with the important process of trust and relationship (re-)building, i.e., the societal healing process, and the cultural dimension of it. The restoration of physical infrastructure is one important side but

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² This article is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the Moluccas between 2002 and 2008. The analyses and interpretations presented are based on observations and interviews in the field, when not indicated otherwise.