

Prevention of violence

By Dr. Margret Rueffler - 16 October 2008

a project which began in 2000 in Indonesia has entered another phase, the first one being in-depth involvement with a Balinese village. Also, we have become familiar and worked with multi-ethnic groups in Kuta Slum, a tourist area, the target of the terrorist bomb in October 2002 in Bali. (More information www.pppi.net / Psychology of Nations / PsychoPolitical Action Projects)

In past visits, I worked with various people and groups to learn more about the different faces of Islam in order to gain a better understanding of Muslim beliefs and practices in Indonesia, a country with one of the largest Muslim populations on this earth.

Encounters with Islam

Surabaya, Java

In 2002 I began to cooperate and work closely with a university in Surabaya, Eastern Java. The city of Surabaya is one of the potential tension spots in Java. In 1998 The Chinese Catholic minority was victimized by radical groups and deeply traumatized, not a widely known event on the international level.

Being invited to stay at the home of my Javanese colleague to experience the Javanese way of life and the way its religion is practiced proved an in-depth introduction.

Every morning, while in Surabaya, the first early morning sounds were the chants of the Muezzin, amplified by the loudspeakers, which aroused me from my sleep. Within ten minutes, they multiplied, each in a different rhythm. Initially it seemed a cacophony of male voices, then it grew and eventually melted into one harmonious melody, flowing in and ebbing out. The early morning skies seemed filled with the sound. About one half hour later the voices subsided, one by one again.

While facilitating a seminar for lecturers at the university I saw different male participants disappearing and reappearing. It was not until later that I realised that some of my colleagues observed prayers several times a day. Women, slipping into a white long dress, head covered, bowing in the direction of Mecca, prayed in the back of the classroom while the seminar went on.

I did not see too many gilbabs (traditional muslim headscarf) at the University among my colleagues and students, many whom were of mixed ethnic and religious backgrounds.

In Indonesia, women do not have to wear the gilbab, nor are they segregated from the men in everyday life, except when visiting the mosque.

Indonesian women seem very much at the forefront of many organizations and businesses. A woman also has to give her consent if her husband wishes to marry a second wife. Two wives are legally permitted, whereas in other Islamic countries up to four are allowed.

Padang, West Sumatra

The visit to Sumatra, Padang in the Western part of the Island, the heartland of the Minang Kabau people, brought me in contact with one of the last matricentric ethnic groups trying to hold on to its

traditions, which are slowly changing. Land and property are passed on in the maternal line to the oldest daughter. When women marry, the husband, upon invitation from his wife, visits the house at night.

The population is Muslim and the women wear the traditional *gibab* in many beautiful and decorative variations and materials. At Lake Minandao the marketplace was filled with tall, proud women selling their goods. Minang Kabau women are known to be very good businesswomen and the Minang Kabau have a reputation as one of the economically most successful ethnic groups in Indonesia.

Presently no visitors are allowed in the area due to the separatist Aceh movement in the North and the deployment of the Indonesian military.

Islam arrived here first in the fourteenth century and established itself firmly at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when war erupted between the Islamic fundamentalist Padir movement and the supporters of the traditional Minang Kabau law.

The early inhabitants of today's Indonesia practised ancestor and spirit worship. When Hindu – Buddhism spread into the archipelago it was overlaid on this culture. Although Islam is today the predominant religion, it seems rooted in Hindu – Buddhism and animism. The old beliefs persist, are deeply imbedded in the culture and can be found in many places.

Hinduism moved from Java to Bali when Islam overran the Islands in the seventeenth century. Most Buddhists in Indonesia today are Chinese and practise a blend of Taoism, Confucianism and ancestor worship.

Java

Java is the most populated island in the Indonesian archipelago. Eastern Java is the home of several Islamic groups. The terrorists who bombed Bali, and the radical perspective they embrace, have their roots here as well.

I visited a **religious Islamic organisation** in the city of Surabaya, the second largest city in Java. It provides shelter and education for street children. To help the poor is one of the five pillars of Islam. This charity work is done by volunteers motivated by love for the "brother." Several young men and women were working in the streets in their free time approaching the children. One of the "sisters" told me she was teaching children who work and live in a graveyard. Homeless **street children** and child labor are part of everyday life here.

The staff of this organization desired more professional training and wanted enhanced counselling skills in order to approach and handle the children in a different way.

Their main approach, aside from introducing basic reading and writing skills, is to familiarize the children in the streets with values contained in the Koran.

The staff of this organisation involved in charity work wanted to integrate professional know-how and counseling training with their own field experiences and expertise. This approach brings the focus to the here and now and to the innumerable challenges of today's Indonesian society.

The person in charge, a young man, communicated clearly that his organization was interested in peaceful interaction with other cultures and religions.

East Java

He invited me to accompany him to his home town in East Java to meet his father, seemingly a well known Kiyai (Islamic Guru and teacher) and to see the family organisation.

Two sons of the spiritual teacher accompanied me there. One began to tell me the story of their father. They expressed great respect and awe when speaking about him, a spiritual teacher well known in the area. Years ago the father had a vision and was told by Allah to change his life and teach. He dedicated all his money to feeding the poor and taking in orphans and street children. I asked about the mother – upon which I was told I would meet her. The sons also spoke with great respect of their mother – yet in a distinctly different way. The suffering the mother endured seemed in the foreground and commanded their respect.

At the end of a small country road, built by their father I was told, a sprawling cluster of simple buildings housing about four hundred and fifty people came into view. The complex included an Islamic girls boarding school, an orphanage, a large room for older people, and other structures. No mattresses or beds were visible except in the older people's room. Several large, smoke-blackened kitchens with open wood fires produced the food for all, four hundred fifty meals daily.

The family, according to the count of the two sons, lived in great harmony. It was composed of a first wife who had borne ten children to the patriarch and a second wife who had borne ten children as well. All twenty children, in great deference to their father, worked in the family enterprise, which now has twelve branches throughout the Indonesian islands.

A green carpet was spread in the shade in a hall between two buildings, divided by a green curtain. Behind the curtain were sitting a few women, their heads enveloped in the traditional gilbab.

The Kiyai, a man of about sixty-five, with a white beard and traditional pecil (hat) on his head, appeared and was treated by those present with great reverence.

As he lectured on Allah, various other groups of local visitors joined.

The lecture seemed to be addressed solely in my direction and for my benefit, with three major ideas presented. One, Allah is everywhere and everything. Two, we have to fight the inner evil, Satan, in each of us, such as bad habits, thoughts, etc. Third, this life is to be led simply and in service to the poor and to Allah, and with a perspective on its benefits -- paradise in the afterlife.

Then, of course, there was M, "the honorable woman," called simply Ibu. A beautiful fiftyseven year old, with a gilbab and muslim dress, the first wife of the Kiyai. Many years ago when her marriage was arranged, she insisted on seeing and meeting her husband to be before being married, which was unheard of and exceptional in those days. He asked her to become his wife in this life and especially the afterlife – and she agreed. Her whole life is dedicated to him and to supporting his devotion to Allah, giving away their worldly riches, living simply and taking care of poor people. She herself chose to get a second wife for him. As she told me, she wanted polygamy. Someone was needed to look after the big family, the ten children she had borne, and the orphans and homeless, so she could travel and teach. She also wanted a younger wife for her husband so he could be more active and lead a longer life, as she put it. The second wife also gave birth to ten children. Ibu had decided to be with him in the afterlife and therefore everything in this life was a preparation for that future event.

After a private lunch with the patriarch (with fourteen family members present) I was permitted to ask a few questions. I was given a pamphlet in English about the organization and the great projects to be realized for world peace. The material, I found, was the same set of spiritual guidelines presented at the children's street shelter and by the patriarch in his talk.

Even though charity work is a must to a devout Muslim, the focus in life is not in the here and now; rather, the action of the here and now is focused to gain merit for the afterlife, paradise. It reminded me somewhat of the Church in medieval Europe, promising access to paradise after death, urging the people to purchase scripts issued by the Church to pay for the construction of the cathedral and the papal treasures. This, as a consequence, leads to the idea that the here and now becomes the means for reaching a glorious afterlife. In more radical approaches the goal can justify any means and methods.

Bali

In Denpasar, Bali – where presently the terrorists and their leader, involved in the bombing on October 12, 2002, which killed over two hundred people of many nations, are being tried in court, the main offender has refused all personal responsibility: All was Allah's will – Allah, since the accused is fighting his cause, also helped them find the monetary funds. That the four young accused men, robbed a jewelry store to provide the money to produce the bomb committed a criminal act is of no importance. His killing people is glorified as serving Allah for a greater cause. Individual lives are not important. The terrorist wishes to be executed for then he will be a hero and paradise will be assured -- his actions are merit for his afterlife.

Central Java

It was quite a special opportunity to visit a Pencak Silat training and observe the students. A mixture of Karate and Kung Fu, - a style which originated here in Indonesia. Seventy to eighty students clad in black uniforms; doing push ups on the ground, in between a few patches of grass here and there. I was extremely pleased to see a row of female participants. Some wearing the "gilbab" the traditional head-scarf. The female trainers practiced also sparring techniques with each other and male partners.

The intensity of the training left a deep impression, as well as the large number of trainees. The Guru (teacher) estimated the overall number of members of his school in this location and a thirty km radius at 12'000. A very impressive remarkable number.

South East Java

A visit in a **children's prison** in the Southeast of Java where about hundred children, mostly teenagers, have been imprisoned for various crimes, including robbery, theft, and murder, was impressive. I had received an exceptional permit to enter the facility and speak to some of the children in the presence of the wardens. I was told that the youngest child ever to have been there was eight years old. The facility is simple, looks clean and there are five to six boys to a white tiled room, with barred glassless windows opening into a central courtyard – no mattresses. When I arrived most of the boys were out in the courtyard. They are locked in the cells from four pm to eight am. Many are teenagers in puberty. One can only imagine the tensions arising while they are locked up together. Presently no girls are detained here. Several rehabilitation possibilities are available, yet not fully used. The wardens complain about the children's lack of motivation. When speaking with several of the inmates, I got the distinct impression that their hearts could be reached and a lot of potential could be activated here.

A whole group of youngsters expressed the desire to play guitar and drums. Playing drums as well as guitars would be a very appropriate way to help them express their feelings. The PsychoPolitical Peace Foundation would like to support the youth.

The author, Dr. Margret Rueffler also teaches as a guest lecturer at a University in Java.

Our present activities in Tanggayuda village, Bali:

- Five new children were sponsored for high school.

- Seven young adults are being sponsored for university studies.
- Four jobless men are training as electricians.
- A youth center is being built (septic tank, electrical wiring, canalisation and telephone wires are already in place).
- Five young people are in the process of designing and implementing a chicken farm for egg production.

Kuta Slum area, Bali:

- The volleyball field needed re-cementing after the rainy season.
- Three more children are now in primary school.
- One family is being supported with medical expenses.

We would appreciate your financial support and sponsorship of Tanggayuda village, Bali:

- High school children need sponsoring.
- Young adults want to study nursing, accounting, and to attend the police academy.
- The youth center needs financial support for its building.
- Our small business projects, such as the chicken farm, need capital.

Kuta Slum area, Bali:

- Additional volleyballs are needed.
- Support is needed to send more children to school.

Children's prison, East Java:

- Guitars and drums are needed.

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