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WORLD & NATION

In Indonesia, 1998 violence against ethnic Chinese remains unaddressed

By John M. Glionna, Los

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Reporting from Jakart ne afternoon a mob ransacked her tiny ha th the business and her faith in justice in

More than a decade l er: She is part Chinese.

In May 1998, during ters killed 1,000 people and raped 87 ed in their homes as the rape squads, repo f Jakarta, the Indonesian capital.

The petite Ruminah, ore than her shop that day. Her develop y looters at a nearby mall.

"I'm not a smart pers uslim whose grandmother married a Chinese merchant here, "but I know my son died that day because he looked Chinese."

Many of the 5 million ethnic Chinese here, who represent a scant 2% of the population in this predominantly Muslim nation of 248 million, have for years awaited the results

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of a government investigation of the attacks. Twelve years later, no arrests have been made.

The inquiry stalled years ago when investigators said they failed to find hard evidence of military involvement. The Indonesian government has recently suggested that it will no longer pursue the ma were instigated by soldiers influenced b

Without an official re on whether the rapes even occurred.

For ethnic Chinese, l mic woes, life after the 1998 riots has be onesians have run for public office and a ealed. Yet many still feel like unwanted ou hant class with allegiances to Indone

Without question, an ster of President Suharto, whose gover esian names and banned Chinese char

After the dictator was s that many believe he fomented, Indone re.

"The lot of ethnic Chi but that doesn't mean the riots' under uryadinata, a professor at Singapor uses on Chinese Indonesian issues. "Issues of poverty, ethnic tension and a gap between rich and poor that led to the violence are still very much alive."

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Many say the rise of Islamic fundamentalism has further marginalized ethnic Chinese. In one rural province, clerics recently disrupted a Chinese parade, arguing that the noise of firecrackers and running dragons interfered with Muslim prayer rites.

"Many Indonesians still believe people with Chinese blood keep close allegiances to Beijing," said Andy Y on Violence Against Women. "The idea is c Chinese will come back to harm Indone

Discrimination again he Dutch colonial era, when thousands ese were also attacked in the Indor the mid-1960s.

In the 1980s came ca se business conglomerates that n most ethnic Chinese were considered to b y were actually small-business men,

In Ruminah's lower- er as Chinese, even though the mother of e roots. She can't speak Chinese and do ots.

"They would ask the e poor? We know that all the Chinese a

Local boys teased her his learning disability. "They hara . "He would come home crying, and my husband would tell him to ignore the taunts. He said they were just words."

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That changed during the 1998 Asian financial crisis, when mobs took to the streets and attacked ethnic Chinese they blamed for the economic downturn. Many analysts believe Suharto encouraged the violence to take the pressure off his government for the loss of jobs and rising prices.

On the first night, Ru to watch a fire at a local mall. Later, wea spected hundreds of corpses laid out in th

She never found him voice breaking.

For years, Indonesia se. In 2004, a U.S. court granted politica descent who claimed that a return tence. She was just one among the tens c fled the country.

Even now, as ethnic C nue.

Sofyan Tan was recer edan, the capital of northern Sumatra. Ir n political candidate said opponents wage would sell the nation to China.

"More hard work is r d on race and religion," he said.

Activists say there ar anto, the former son-in-law of Suharto, met last summer with ethnic Chinese to publicly explain for the first time that he was not involved in the mayhem.

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“Many are still ambivalent about his story,” said Jemma Purdey, a research fellow at the Center of Southeast Asian Studies at Monash University in Australia. “But if you meet someone and they tell you straight to your face they didn’t have part in things, you have to respect that.”

Last fall, government uage for Indonesian school textbooks ack hed actually happened.

“The scar from that v ion leader. “How much Indonesians w

For now, Ruminah is ic violence. She runs her beauty shop out

She has seen Muslim e-age daughter once they learn of her Chi got the chance to come to terms with h

Still, she says, she wo lonesia since the riots.

“I’m not ashamed of e else can I go?”

john.glionna@latime

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Las Vegas. He cover about everything
from people to polit ef on the
newspaper's foreign thquake and
tsunami and the sul n Jong Il. He has
also written extensi course at the
University of Nevad

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