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in North Sulawesi Province, Indonesia**

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'TO BE OR WHAT TO BE – THAT IS THE QUESTION' ON FACTIONALISM AND SECESSIONISM IN NORTH SULAWESI PROVINCE, INDONESIA*

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INTRODUCTION

I have chosen to paraphrase Shakespeare's famous line in Hamlet, 'To be or not to be – that is the question', as the title of this paper as it expresses the essence of a quest for an appropriate identity when one is confronted with a situation that demands a clear positioning. Such a demand has been important in post-Suharto Indonesia, where an authoritarian and centralised New Order regime has been replaced by a societal flux that questions the very foundation of what it means to be an Indonesian. The main impetus for initiating a quest for an appropriate identity in a volatile societal environment is the national programme of economic decentralisation and especially the regional autonomy part of it, initiated on 1 January 2001. This has led many Indonesians to believe that the national identity cultivated during Suharto's regime has lost its legitimacy and has to be replaced or at least come to co-exist with new identities that have their roots in local culture and history.

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From being a national ideological construct regulated in a top-down manner during the New Order, a regional quest for identity has now mushroomed throughout Indonesia. This quest is producing a localised multiplicity of identities understood as a set of tools to be used when navigating in the current changing social and political landscape. The main question is thus not just to be, but also what to be, where, and in which context. Such issues are now much more important as things such as national or provincial coherence can no longer be taken for granted. They too are being reorganised, or even reinvented, so as to be able to address and hopefully solve the current social and political crises. As such, questions of identity and thus belonging have become highly contested topics throughout the Indonesian archipelago.

Another issue that has a direct bearing on questions of identity is the link between identity and politics which has now become obvious to all. Using a growing interest in local culture for political mobilisation is a tendency that is evident in many parts of Indonesia. This is certainly the case in North Sulawesi, the province I shall concentrate on in this paper. The political profiling of the provincial government there vis-à-vis the central government in Jakarta is a case in point. This has become a political and ideological platform to be used when trying to create a sense of loyalty towards the province and not exclusively nor necessarily towards Jakarta. This is a very important point taking into account that North Sulawesi Province, through a reorganisation of its geopolitical set-up, has become a Christian-dominated province with little or no sympathy for Muslim initiatives working towards turning Indonesia into a Muslim state.

So (re-)defining local identities has a political momentum, especially when seen from the perspective of Outer Indonesia, where engaging local groups in the provincial hinterland is a must in designating new provinces and regencies. There are, however, some recognised dangers involved in these exercises. As will be discussed, much of the political initiative in North Sulawesi Province comes from one dominating ethnic group, the Minahasa. It is important for them to further cultivate Minahasa ethnicity so as to make sure they remain the main driving force in the province. When taking a closer look at this ethnic label, however, it becomes obvious that it is a Dutch colonial construct for forcing a cluster of related culture and language groups to unite. For the time being the underlying structures of this artificial construct are not articulated in the current political process. As such they constitute dormant social and political fault lines. In case they become activated the main part of the ideological foundation for the provincial government would be jeopardised as the ethnic label 'Minahasa' itself would become contested ground, thus initiating political counter-discourses throughout the province.

This paper explores these various strands of development by taking its point of departure in the introduction of the national programme of economic decentralisation and regional autonomy. The deconstruction of North Sulawesi Province in terms of both geopolitical structures and ideational paradigms leads towards a more fundamental question. Do the current social and political

developments, that can be traced in North Sulawesi Province, have the potential of triggering what can be termed a third generation of conflicts, not only in this province but throughout Indonesia where similar developments are experienced? The ultimate question is whether this 'third generation conflict' has the potential of triggering a Balkanisation of the nation or at least seriously destabilising it. The ongoing production of new ethnically and religiously homogeneous provinces and regencies is a case in point.

This paper opens with a short overview of the general background for initiating the decentralisation programme from a national political perspective. It then moves on to discuss how this programme has been received in Outer Indonesia, more specifically in North Sulawesi Province. A critical assessment is then offered on how the province has changed structurally since 1998 and up until 2002, and how these changes have influenced the ethnic and religious composition in the province. The paper then continues with a discussion of the politics of ethnicity and what it means for the cohesion of the province. The paper closes with an evaluation of whether these developments generate a new round of conflicts, not only in North Sulawesi, but in many other parts of Indonesia thereby further undermining the national motto of 'Unity in Diversity'.

ON THE RAMIFICATION OF THE NATIONAL SCHEME OF ECONOMIC DECENTRALISATION AND REGIONAL AUTONOMY

Introducing economic decentralisation and regional autonomy: The intensions

There is no doubt that the introduction of the national programme of economic decentralisation and regional autonomy was a historically conditioned necessity taking the centralised nature of the New Order regime into account. The scheme was fairly quickly initiated by President Habibie soon after Suharto was forced to step down on 21 May 1998. He had the two basic laws through the People's Representative Assembly (DPR) before he was replaced by President Abdurrahman Wahid in the October 1999 election after his accountability speech was rejected by the Peoples Consultative Council (MPR) in August 1999. The two laws, Autonomy Law No. 22/1999 and the Intergovernmental Fiscal Balance Law No. 25/1999, was passed by the DPR in April 1999 and were formally implemented by President Wahid's administration on 1 January 2001.

There are basically four main reasons for initiating this programme. The first is to address the general political and economic imbalances between Jakarta and Outer Indonesia. They were created during the establishment of the Republic of Indonesia in August 1945 in which the central government in Jakarta began extracting natural resources from the outer regions without compensating them adequately. Furthermore, most infrastructural development also took place on Java, revolving around Jakarta, with very little done in the outer regions. The New Order regime that replaced President Sukarno's so-called Guided

Democracy has but slightly addressed the grievances from Outer Indonesia. A decentralisation policy was being planned as a countermeasure and response to the violent outbursts in the provinces during the Sukarno era, and a law on autonomy of the regencies was also discussed at length under the aegis of the New Order. These initiatives, however, were only endorsed by Parliament after Suharto was forced to step down in May 1998.² The highly centralised nature of Indonesian nation building has thus not really been addressed and is now haunting the *reformasi* initiatives in post-Suharto Indonesia.

Second, besides addressing these old fault lines, the national programme of economic decentralisation and regional autonomy was also designed to initiate a dismantling of New Order society itself, politically as well as economically. It is in particular the regional autonomy part of the scheme that is responsible for dismantling its centralised and authoritative top-down structure. This is to be done by granting more room for provincial and in particular regional political manoeuvring vis-à-vis the central government. Economically, a decentralisation of a variety of economic means and grants should help initiate development plans organised by the individual province and regency, thus accommodating local grievances in this respect.

A third reason for implementing the decentralisation and regional autonomy programme is to engage Outer Indonesia in the current restructuring of the Indonesia State and nation. It is thus not enough that the provinces and regencies in Outer Indonesia and Java concentrate all their efforts on themselves. They are also expected to participate in the political reorganisation of the state and nation per se, thereby ultimately addressing the historical tension between Jakarta and Outer Indonesia. The aim is to break Jakarta's monopoly of initiating and executing political and economic power. The provinces and regencies are thus expected to become active partners in designing the future Indonesia.

The fourth reason behind the programme is to contain and perhaps resolve the various conflicts locally. This means that the central government leaves more room for conflict resolution to provincial, regional, and local leaders in the hope that this insider help will dissolve the conflicts as those taking part in the peace negotiations are locals. For example, in January 2002, Ambon leaders asked the government to withdraw its troops from Maluku as they felt they could manage the conflicts themselves. Basically they were afraid that parts of the army were engaged in the fighting on either side, thus prolonging the communal conflicts. This fear became real in May 2002 where many Ambonese suspected that unruly elements within the army and representatives from the Java-based Laskar Jihad were responsible for a new round of violence, which later turned out to be the case. The leader of Laskar Jihad, Ja'far Umar Thalib, was arrested in Surabaya, Java, on 4 May 2002 for inciting to violence in Ambon during Friday prayers on 26 April, two days before a Muslim group raided the Christian village of Soya on 28 April.

² Prof. Adrian B. Lopian, personal communication.

In order to stop having external elements involved in fighting, local leaders have to be empowered to deal with the conflicts. So far the Maluku people have not had the chance of handling conflicts themselves even though they signed a peace agreement between the warring factions in the South Sulawesi town Malino; the so-called Malino Agreement II. The first Malino Agreement was signed earlier in 2002 by Muslim and Christian leaders from Poso, Central Sulawesi. This agreement, which was purely a local initiative, still holds and will probably continue to do so unless external element causes new tensions in the region.

Papua Province is another example. Representatives of the Papuan people have rejected a central government suggestion of being divided into three provinces. They were convinced this would make it easier for the central government to play the different provinces against each other. They also rejected a December 2001 central government offer for an extended degree of political and economic autonomy and a greater share of the revenue from the exploitation of natural resources. The Papuans rejected this as yet another ploy by the central government to quell local demands of becoming an independent state. Instead the Papuans have begun creating networks between the different tribal groupings on the basis of *adat*, that is, on the basis of traditions that are thought of as being indigenous to the region, with the ultimate aim of becoming independent of Indonesia.³

Taking the above mentioned four main reason for implementing the economic decentralisation and regional autonomy programme into account the bottom line behind it is to knit together a restructured and coherent Indonesia that is based on a nationalist foundation as formulated by President Megawati Sukarnoputri, originally initiated by her father, President Sukarno, the first president of Indonesia.

The reality: important questions and problems

In evaluating the national programme a year after its implementation on 1 January 2001 there seems to be a tendency towards duplicating national elite politics on provincial level in different parts of Indonesia. By this I mean a lack of change in the New Order mind-sets on behalf of many politicians and bureaucrats. There is furthermore a drive towards political monument building, that is, politically motivated development schemes that are more designed to help the political initiators rather than the people they are expected to serve. Many politicians and top bureaucrats are still going to Jakarta to solve local political and developmental problems. They look to Jakarta for guidance and support instead of trying to find it in local political communities. This is an acknowledged problem and calls for a change of provincial and regional elite mind-set. This problem has to be solved before a regional or provincial loyalty can be established, replacing the current centralist outlook instilled by the New Order.

³ Unpublished report by USAID, 2002.

This problem links to another concerning the (re-)creation of civil society in Outer Indonesia. Both a political and civil society consciousness were effectively curbed by the New Order through ideological mechanisms such as 'floating masses' and P4 courses⁴, both of which were to indoctrinate the nationalist discourse of *Pancasila* (Sullivan 1991: 12). Basically 'floating masses' and P4 courses worked towards excluding people in both urban and rural areas from participating in the political process, as the state took it upon itself to be the sole developer and implementer of political initiatives and development schemes. It is this kind of 'mind set' that has to be changed in order to encourage people to participate in the current restructuring of the Indonesian State and nation. A friend in North Sulawesi explained that it was hard to change people's mentality in this connection as, during the last 32 years, they had been heavily politically pacified. This made it very difficult for them to be critical and innovative in forming or just participating in a civil society context, let alone in a political discourse. According to this informant, these capacities have to be learned all over again. That such a re-politicisation process, however, has already gained momentum following Suharto's fall, thereby gradually repudiating the above mentioned New Order mentality at local level, can be seen in a general reflection on what, for example, Minahasa ethnicity in North Sulawesi is all about. This is something that many NGOs and community groups in the region are currently deeply engaged in.

These initiatives resonate with a nationwide quest for identity and cultural roots, a quest that began not long after May 1998. Again, this has partly to be seen in the context of the (re-)introduction of freedom of the press together with other civil liberties initiated by the interim president, Habibie, in mid 1998, and partly by the national programme of economic decentralisation and regional autonomy. Both initiatives have created a new space in which an increasing interest in culture and local history has resulted in an incredible politicisation of large parts of the Indonesian population, which was evident during the period leading up to the June 1999 national election. This, however, also revived old and dormant tensions and splits within some provinces and regencies, whereby attempts to establish new ones have been seen as a natural outcome. For example, representatives from the island part of Riau Province in western Indonesia are currently attempting to set up their own province. Its foundation is to be based on a former sultanate as well as other forms of historically defined societal organisations otherwise forced into submission or oblivion by Dutch colonialism and New Order policies (Wee 2002). This tendency to establishing new provinces and regencies seems to be nationwide, as it can also be observed in North Sumatra, on Java, in North Sulawesi, and in the Malukus, just to mention a few areas in post-Suharto Indonesia.

⁴ 'Floating masses' refers to a de-politicisation of especially the rural population, and 'P4' courses, signifying the four Ps of its Indonesian name; *Pedoman, Penghayatan dan Pengamalan Pancasila*, roughly meaning 'Guide to the Realisation and Application of Pancasila', were especially designed for those employed in state controlled institutions and organisations.

A worrying side effect of this production of new provinces and regencies has been a tendency of making them more or less homogeneous in ethnic and religious composition compared to previously multi-ethnic and multi-religious political structures that was emphasised in the New Order nationalist ideology. There are no clear patterns or clusters of such homogeneous provinces or regencies in the Indonesian archipelago; on the contrary, they are spread throughout the area in a patchwork like fashion. In the following I will use North Sulawesi Province as a case study in trying to disentangle the various strands that determine how such processes of division actually take place.

NORTH SULAWESI PROVINCE IN AN ERA OF DECENTRALISATION

North Sulawesi in Megawati's Indonesia

Most politicians, academics, and intellectuals saw the implementation of the national programme of economic decentralisation and regional autonomy as a political concession towards the original objectives behind the *Permesta* rebellion in the late 1950s and early 1960s. At that time the main issue was to address and adjust the imbalance between the centralist government in Jakarta and Outer Indonesia, and especially that between Jakarta and North Sulawesi. The ultimate goal was to introduce or at least to suggest the introduction of a federal-like system to replace the unitary state implemented by the Sukarno government. The rebellion was crushed by the Indonesian army which then turned North Sulawesi Province, and Minahasa regency in particular, into a political backwater during the following decades.⁵

For the post-Suharto provincial government in North Sulawesi the national programme was a signal from the central government that it could go ahead with an economic revitalisation programme that was to reactivate the dormant East ASEAN Growth Area that originally consisted of Brunei-Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines, the so-called BIMP-EAGA growth triangle.⁶ The means for imputing new life into this economic construct was the launching of another economic programme called the Integrated Economic Development Zone: Manado-Bitung (Manado-Bitung IEDZ). The background for this programme originates from the Jakarta government that wanted to accelerate the development of the eastern part of Indonesia. This was an effort to conform to the State Guideline Policies on balancing East-West growth, and resulted in that the National Spatial Plan identified 111 areas throughout Indonesia that were to become designated as Integrated Economic Development Zones (IEDZ). Eastern Indonesia was appointed 13 of these zones. One of them, the Manado-Bitung IEDZ, was established in 1998 through a Presidential Decree number 14/199.⁷ It encompasses the *kotamadya* or

⁵ For details on the *Permesta* rebellion, see Harvey (1977).

⁶ The latest meeting in BIMP-EAGA was on 16-18 June 1996 in Manado, North Sulawesi.

⁷ KAPET: Manado-Bitung Integrated Economic Development Zone. Leaflet No.1 May 2000.

municipalities of Manado and Bitung together with the majority of districts in Kabupaten Minahasa.⁸

In order to accelerate economic growth in North Sulawesi, an upgrading of the international airport, Sam Ratulangi outside Manado, has been finalised. It is now, aside from the already established routes to Singapore and Davao City in the Southern Philippines, ready to create links with cities such as Manila, Taipei, Tokyo, and Hong Kong. Furthermore, the deep-sea port at Bitung in the north-east of Kabupaten Minahasa is also scheduled for upgrading to international standards. This includes the establishment of a huge container terminal that is expected to link with one in Singapore. It is expected to be fully operational in 2005. As Manado is the provincial capital and thus constitutes the political and administrative centre for the province, it is easy to understand that the point of political and economic gravity lies in Kabupaten Minahasa, reducing the rest of the province – Gorontalo, Bola'ang-Mongondow, and Sangihe/Talaud – to producing natural and human resources. A picture of a centre-periphery structure thus emerges.

The political aim of accelerating the provincial economic growth is to make North Sulawesi a hub of national, as well as international, trade and communication. In national terms, the strategy is to move the present centre of trade and communication from Makassar in South Sulawesi Province to Manado and Bitung in North Sulawesi Province in order to become the main focus point in Eastern Indonesia. This strategy will re-define North Sulawesi Province as an eastern 'gatekeeper'. It would control trade and communication in and out of this part of Indonesia, thereby managing the access to the huge market in Southeast Asia, especially towards those countries that participate in the growth triangle mentioned above.

A more subtle aim is, however, to make North Sulawesi Province economically and politically less dependent on Jakarta, enabling it to rethink its position in Indonesia in case the Megawati administration moves towards making Indonesia a Muslim state. This means that North Sulawesi will only feel itself committed to the 'Indonesia project' as long as its national ideological platform is based upon *Pancasila* (Five Principles of belief in a Supreme Being, nationalism, internationalism-humanism, representative government, and social

⁸ The districts are: Likupang, Dimembe, Airmadidi, Kauditan, Wori, Pineleng, Tombariri, Tomohon, Tondano, Toulimambot, Eris, Lembean Timur, Kombi, Kakas, Remboken, Sonder, Kawangkoan, Tompasso, and Langowan. Why it is those particular districts that together constitute about two-third of Kabupaten Minahasa that has been selected in this connection and not the other districts in Minahasa or other districts from within the other three Kabupaten, Gorontalo, Bola'ang-Mongondow, and Sangihe/Talaud is not discussed in the Leaflet. A qualified guess as to why Kabupaten Minahasa and those 19 districts were selected for the Manado-Bitung IEDZ is that this part of North Sulawesi Province is the most developed in terms of economic infrastructure, health and education systems, transportation and road facilities, together with an abundant well qualified workforce. Furthermore, there are at least four universities and several high schools in this region. Taken together, this part of North Sulawesi Province certainly has most of the overall infrastructure to backup the Manado-Bitung IEDZ programme. No other parts of the province can match the chosen region.

justice). Should the central government change its ideological outlook and introduce, for example, the so-called Jakarta Chapter into the constitution and thus push Indonesia towards a *de facto* Islamic state, then North Sulawesi will reconsider its position. It will look for other options by, for example, creating closer ties with like-minded regions within the eastern part of Southeast Asia.

Organisational structure of the province from 1998 to 2002

In the following section, I change focus and concentrate on the tendency of making the current creation of new provinces and regencies throughout post-Suharto Indonesia more or less ethnic and religious homogeneous, compared to the previously multi-ethnic and multi-religious political structure enforced by the New Order regime. North Sulawesi Province has of course also been subject to this development, with major implications for the social and political constitution of the province and its prospects as a coherent, stable, and economically viable region. I begin by discussing the changing structural composition of the province during the period 1998 to 2002. This is followed by a discussion of the ethnic and religious consequences of the structural reorganisations. This section closes with a discussion of whether North Sulawesi Province is gradually becoming redundant as a geo-political entity with the potential establishment of Minahasa as a new province. The figures used in the following tables are based on the 2000 Population Census, the latest available, and are collected and compiled by the statistical office in North Sulawesi, *Biro Pusat Statistik* (BPS).

North Sulawesi Province was finally established in 1964 after previous administrative divisions of the Province of Sulawesi into South & Southeast Sulawesi and North and Central Sulawesi.⁹ The new province consisted of four Kabupaten or regencies; Gorontalo, Bola'ang-Mongondow, Minahasa, and Sangihe-Talaud, and two *kotamadya* (*Kota*) or municipalities. These were the predominantly Christian provincial capital Manado and the Muslim-dominated Gorontalo. Together they formed the *kota administratif* or major administrative units in the province, with the ethnically Minahasa-dominated provincial government in Manado (Sondakh and Jones 1989: 365-7). This organisation of the province remained the same in 1998, except for the creation of a new Kota, namely Bitung in Kabupaten Minahasa, established in August 1990. So in 1998 North Sulawesi Province consisted of four Kabupaten or regencies: Gorontalo, Bola'ang-Mongondow, Minahasa, and Sanghir/Talaud, and three kota or municipalities: Gorontalo, Manado, and Bitung.

Table 1 shows that in 1998 Kabupaten Minahasa was the largest Kabupaten in terms of population. Kabupaten Gorontalo was second, followed by Bola'ang-Mongondow and, the smallest, Kabupaten Sanghir/Talaud. It further shows that Manado was by far the biggest kota, about three times that of Gorontalo. Bitung and Gorontalo are almost of the same size but they are situated within, but

⁹ Prof. Adrian B. Lopian, personal communication.

independently of, different kabupatens, namely Kabupaten Minahasa and Kabupaten Gorontalo respectively.

Change began in 2000, when a number of districts in Kabupaten Gorontalo were turned into a new Kabupaten called Boalemo. The total number of kabupatens in North Sulawesi Province thus increased to five namely: Gorontalo, Boalemo, Bola'ang-Mongondow, Minahasa, and Sanghir/Talau.

Table 1: Population in North Sulawesi Province, 1998

Administrative area	Population	%
Kabupaten Minahasa	717,452	26
Kabupaten Gorontalo	660,470	24
Kabupaten Bola'ang-Mongondow	427,664	16
Kabupaten Sanghir/Talau	271,348	10
<i>Kota Manado</i>	414,768	15
<i>Kota Gorontalo</i>	136,164	5
<i>Kota Bitung</i>	108,745	4
Total population	2,736,611	100

As can be seen in Table 2, Minahasa still has the largest Kabupaten population, whereas Gorontalo has seen a decline in population through the creation of the new Kabupaten. Even though taking a small population increase into account and lumping both Gorontalo and Boalemo together this does not weaken the leading position of Kabupaten Minahasa. Table 3 uses the same population figures as Table 2, as no new population census has been conducted by BPS, the provincial statistical office in North Sulawesi, in 2001.

The creation of the new Kabupaten Boalemo can be conceived of as a prelude to the first major structural change in North Sulawesi Province. On 23 January 2001 Kabupaten Gorontalo became a new province, Gorontalo Province, with Kota Gorontalo as the provincial capital and Boalemo constituting one of the two Kabupaten in the new province. The other Kabupaten in Gorontalo Province is still called Kabupaten Gorontalo. After 23 January 2001 North Sulawesi Province thus consisted of only three Kabupaten: Bola'ang-Mongondow, Minahasa, and Sanghire/Talau. The number of Kota in North Sulawesi Province has subsequently gone down to two as Kota Gorontalo now does not constitute a part of North Sulawesi Province.

Table 2: Population in North Sulawesi Province, 2000

Administrative area	Population	%
Kabupaten Minahasa	769,120	27
Kabupaten Gorontalo	511,158	18
Kabupaten Bola'ang-Mongondow	429,409	15
Kabupaten Sanghir/Talud	261,473	9
Kabupaten Boalemo	184,023	7
<i>Kota Manado</i>	372,598	13
<i>Kota Bitung</i>	140,138	5
<i>Kota Gorontalo</i>	134,767	5
Total population	2,802,686	100

Table 3: Population in North Sulawesi Province, 2000-2001

Administrative area	Population	%
Kabupaten Minahasa	769,120	39
Kabupaten Bola'ang-Mongondow	429,409	22
Kabupaten Sanghir/Talud	261,473	13
<i>Kota Manado</i>	372,598	19
<i>Kota Bitung</i>	140,138	7
Total population	1,972,738	100

North Sulawesi Province lost 829,948 citizens or 30 percent of its population to the new Province. According to informants from North Sulawesi, however, this did not represent a big loss as many, especially Minahasa people, regarded Kabupaten Gorontalo as a financial problem as its economic and social infrastructure was rather weak. On the basis of such statements North Sulawesi Province actually seems to gain financially by the separation. If we turn the perspective around then one of the reasons for the Gorontaloese to leave North Sulawesi Province was that they felt discriminated against, especially by the Minahasa. As mentioned above, the economic and political strategy that the North Sulawesi government initiated in 1998 were heavily concentrated in Kabupaten Minahasa, including the two kotas, Manado and Bitung, leaving out both Kabupaten Bola'ang-Mongondow and Gorontalo, together with Sanghir/Talud. This was the final straw for the Gorontaloese, who for many years felt economically and politically marginalised. They thus began preparing for becoming 'masters in their own house', by establishing Kabupaten Boalemo. From this perspective the separation from North Sulawesi in January 2001

seems to be a logical step, by taking the economic and political tensions between the two parts of North Sulawesi Province into account. Before discussing some actual and anticipated structural changes in North Sulawesi Province in the latter part of 2001 and early 2002, I will examine the changes in the ethnic and religious composition of the province that have taken place as a result of the structural changes discussed above.

Changing ethnic and religious composition during the period

These structural changes, spanning a period of three years, from May 1998 to the beginning of 2001, have had an impact on ethnic and religious compositions within North Sulawesi Province. A pertinent starting point in this connection is to first look at the ethnic composition in the province before Kabupaten Gorontalo became Gorontalo Province on 23 January 2001, again basing our survey on the 2000 national population census (see Table 4). Unfortunately, the census does not specify how it defines 'ethnic groups'. Furthermore, the ethnic group called 'Jawa' in the following tables is not an indigenous group to North Sulawesi which is also the case with the category 'others' mentioned in the survey. It is made up of immigrants from Java and other places within Indonesia, either through spontaneous migration or as part of the transmigration scheme initiated during the New Order regime.

Table 4 shows the distribution of ethnic groups *before* January 2001. As can be seen, the Gorontaloese constitute the biggest ethnic group, comprising 32 percent of the total province population. However, this numerical dominance was not translated into, for example, political influence as that had been the prerogative of the Minahasa people since the establishment of the province in 1964. On the contrary, the Gorontaloese has always occupied a marginalised position, partly because of poor education and partly because of colonial related factors that made the Dutch favour the Minahasa (see Henley 1996). The same applies for all other ethnic groups in the province. For example, the third largest ethnic group, the Sangihese, has also been marginalised in terms of political influence in relation to the Minahasa. They have mostly served as cheap labour for Chinese and Minahasa entrepreneurs in mainly Kabupaten Minahasa and in the two main Kotas in the region, Manado and Bitung. The fourth largest group, the Bola'ang-Mongondownese, has also suffered Minahasa domination in terms of lacking of political influence on provincial developments. I shall return to this below.

In relation to the ethnic distribution in the Kotas, it is clear that the Gorontaloese completely dominate in Kota Gorontalo but constitute only about 17 percent of the citizens in Manado, tailing behind the Sangihese, who represent 20 percent of the population there. Here the Minahasa dominates by constituting 41 percent of the population. In Kota Bitung, which is a rather new city, the surrounding Kabupaten Minahasa is not that dominating in terms of ethnic supremacy. On the contrary, the distribution between the three main ethnic groups, the Gorontaloese, the Minahasa, and the Sangihese, is 15, 24, and 40 percent respectively thereby making the Sangihese the biggest ethnic group

there. Before commenting on the ethnic distribution after Gorontalo became a new province let us take a look at the religious composition before January 2001.

Table 4: Ethnic group composition in North Sulawesi Province before January 2001

	Gorontalo	Minahasa	Sangihe	Bola'ang-Mongondow	Talaud	Jawa	Others	Total
Kabupaten Boalemo	153,952	1,394	3,207	207	5	8,620	16,638	184,023
Kabupaten Gorontalo	474,553	1,325	2,200	317	6	9,709	23,048	511,158
Kabupaten Bola'ang-Mongondow	42,727	55,196	31,428	209,663	930	14,253	75,212	429,409
Kabupaten Minahasa	17,420	576,215	51,192	5,629	960	5,525	112,179	769,120
Kabupaten Sangihe/Talaud	1,293	1,847	178,930	139	72,785	690	5,789	261,473
Kota Gorontalo	122,036	1,777	592	679	9	2,098	7,576	134,767
Kota Manado	64,502	153,464	73,575	6,551	1,791	18,292	54,423	372,598
Kota Bitung	20,752	33,482	55,686	1,564	3,352	5,432	19,870	140,138
Total	897,235	824,700	396,810	224,749	79,838	64,619	314,735	2,802,686

Table 5: Religious composition in North Sulawesi Province before January 2001

	Moslem	Catholic	Protestant	Hindu	Buddhist	Others	Total
Kabupaten Boalemo	177,360	513	4,481	1,611	14	64	184,043
Kabupaten Gorontalo	506,770	368	3,790	52	22	208	511,210
Kabupaten Bola'ang-Mongondow	314,699	5,086	99,069	8,923	212	1,486	429,475
Kabupaten Minahasa	74,097	55,658	636,452	194	179	2,716	769,296
Kabupaten Sangihe/Talaud	28,835	3,818	226,232	34	61	2,532	261,512
Kota Gorontalo	130,706	632	2,450	115	771	257	134,931
Kota Manado	117,126	22,387	226,406	527	2,505	3,936	372,887
Kota Bitung	46,920	5,216	86,708	150	217	1,059	140,270
Total	1,396,513	93,678	1,285,588	11,606	3,981	12,258	2,803,624

This table shows almost parity between Muslims and Christians (when combining the Catholic and Protestant categories): 50 percent Muslims and 49 percent Christians, with Hindus, Buddhists, and others sharing the remaining one percent. With regards to the religious composition in the three Kotas it can

be seen that Kota Gorontalo is dominated by Muslims, who also constitute 31 percent of the population in Manado and 33 percent in Bitung. In Manado, Christians constitute 67 percent of the population, and 66 percent in Bitung.

In other words, Christians dominates in both Manado and Bitung, both of which are surrounded by Kabupaten Minahasa, which itself is 90 percent Christian. The Muslims in the two Kotas, Manado and Bitung, thus constitute Muslim islands in a sea of Christians. Now, when looking at the ethnic and religious composition in North Sulawesi Province after January 2001 this picture changed dramatically after Kabupaten Gorontalo became a new province, taking Kabupaten Boalemo and Kota Gorontalo with it. Let us first take a look at the ethnic composition after January 2001.

As can be seen in Table 6, the ethnic composition in North Sulawesi Province has changed radically after the establishment of Gorontalo Province. Minahasa now constitute the largest ethnic group, comprising 42 percent of the population. The Gorontaloese has been reduced to 7.4 percent of the population, well behind the second largest ethnic group, the Sangihese, who now constitute 20 percent of the provincial population, followed by the Bola'ang-Mongondow with 11 percent. The ethnic composition in the two remaining Kotas is the same, as the changes in the Kabupatens are not reflected in the Kotas as the figures used in this connection are still based on the 2000 population census. It is thus not possible to evaluate how many Gorontaloese people from Manado and Bitung respectively went to Gorontalo after the latter became a new province. I am, however, sure that the figures given here, even though they are based on the 2000 census, represent a relatively clear picture of the actual situation in the two cities during early 2002. Let us now take a look at the overall religious composition in the province after January 2001 by using the same method noted above (see Table 7).

Table 6: Ethnic group composition in North Sulawesi after January 2001

	Gorontalo	Minahasa	Sangihe	Bola'ang-Mongondow	Talaud	Jawa	Others	Total
Kabupaten Bola'ang-Mongondow	42,727	55,196	31,428	209,663	930	14,253	75,212	429,409
Kabupaten Minahasa	17,420	576,215	51,192	5,629	960	5,525	112,179	769,120
Kabupaten Sangihe/Talaud	1,293	1,847	178,930	139	72,785	690	5,789	261,473
Kota Manado	64,502	153,464	73,575	6,551	1,791	18,292	54,423	372,598
Kota Bitung	20,752	33,482	55,686	1,564	3,352	5,432	19,870	140,138
Total	146,694	820,204	390,811	223,546	79,818	44,192	267,473	1,972,738

Again combining the Catholics and Protestants, in 2001, North Sulawesi Province was now 69 percent Christian, thus reducing the Muslims to second

place with a mere 29 percent, leaving the Hindus, Buddhists, and other religious denominations to share the remaining 2 percent. Computing all the above given information about the restructured North Sulawesi Province together with the concomitant changes in the ethnic and religious composition makes the Minahasa the biggest ethnic and religious group in the 2001 restructured North Sulawesi Province.

Table 7: Religious composition in North Sulawesi after January 2001

	Moslem	Catholic	Protestant	Hindu	Buddhist	Others	Total
Kabupaten Bola'ang-Mongondow	314,699	5,086	99,069	8,923	212	1,486	429,475
Kabupaten Minahasa	74,097	55,658	636,452	194	179	2,716	769,296
Kabupaten Sangihe/Talaud	28,835	3,818	226,232	34	61	2,532	261,512
Kota Manado	117,126	22,387	226,406	527	2,505	3,936	372,887
Kota Bitung	46,920	5,216	86,708	150	217	1,059	140,270
Total	581,677	92,165	1,274,867	9,828	3,174	11,729	1,973,440

Towards a Minahasa Province? On ethnic and religious domination

It needs to be noted that the structural changes in North Sulawesi have not ceased. Throughout 2001 and continuing here in the first half of 2002, new fractions within the remaining Kabupaten have emerged. I base the following discussion on interviews with various informants during fieldwork in March and July 2002 respectively. I begin with the current situation in Kabupaten Bola'ang-Mongondow and then turn to Kabupaten Sangihe/Talaud to end up in Kabupaten Minahasa.

Forum Peduli Bola'ang-Mongondow ('Take care of Bola'ang-Mongondow') is an NGO that deals with various social issues and specific cases such as the exploitation of the national parks in the Kabupaten. When asking the leader of this NGO how the Bola'ang-Mongondow people regarded the Minahasa and whether he could verify rumours that the Kabupaten had submitted an application to the Jakarta government to become a new province, he gave the following explanation.

Concerning the general perception of the Minahasa most Bola'ang-Mongondow people regard them as quite dominating, as neo-colonisers, and during the Dutch time the latter's right hand. They are dominating because they currently occupy the positions as governor, vice-governor, have 29 seats of the 45 in the provincial assembly, and occupy 80 percent of the seats in the regional assembly in Kotamobago, the biggest city and major political and administrative centre in Kabupaten Bola'ang-Mongondow. They are neo-colonisers as they

have moved the border between Kabupaten Minahasa and Kabupaten Bola'ang-Mongondow 50 kilometres into the latter's territory, have massively settled down in the border region and in areas with the best agricultural land together with migrants from Bali, leaving the remaining stone infested soil to the Bola'ang-Mongondow people. By saying that the Minahasa were the right hand of the Dutch colonialists is to say that they abandoned their independence in order to be able to beat, together with the Dutch, the Sultan of Bola'ang-Mongondow in the latter part of the 17th Century. This is why the Bola'ang-Mongondow people today are the 'under-dogs' in their own Kabupaten.

With regard to rumours that Bola'ang-Mongondow has submitted an application to the central government of becoming a new province, it is true that such an application has been filed, but neither by the regional assembly nor the regent. Rather, it has been made by a group of students, as a protest against the dominant position of the Minahasa. It is perhaps in this light that one has to understand the current efforts of turning Kotamobagu into a new Kotamadya or municipality as a way of preparing it as a future capital in a new province.

There are several NGOs that work towards enhancing the Bola'ang-Mongondow people's consciousness about the situation in the Kabupaten to prepare them for a more active role in their own Kabupaten. The first step is to make Bola'ang-Mongondow people control the development within Kabupaten Bola'ang-Mongondow, as the Minahasa people do in Minahasaning Kabupaten Minahasa. They also prepare the Kabupaten for becoming a new province, primarily run by Bola'ang-Mongondow people. The resources for becoming a province exist, especially in the agricultural sector, even though minerals, gold, for example, have been depleted and the infrastructure, especially in terms of roads, badly needs repair and upgrading. The Minahasa in neighbouring Kabupaten Minahasa has been successful in attracting provincial and national developmental funds, thus leaving less funding for the Bola'ang-Mongondow people to redevelop their Kabupaten.

If we make the unthinkable thinkable and envisions that Kabupaten Bola'ang-Mongondow becomes a new province, a vision that is not new to many Minahasa people I have spoken to, then the ethnic and religious composition in what is left of North Sulawesi Province would look like structure set out in Table 8.

As we saw in Table 6, in 2001 the Minahasa constituted the largest ethnic group, comprising 42 percent of the population. This figure will almost certainly go up if Kabupaten Bola'ang-Mongondow becomes a province, as many Minahasa people might be forced, by various policies initiated by the new Bola'ang-Mongondownese elite, to move back to North Sulawesi, probably preferring to resettle in their own Kabupaten Minahasa. Table 8 shows that suppose Bola'ang-Mongondow, which is two-third Muslim, withdraws from North Sulawesi Province the latter will become a totally Christian-dominated province, with 82 percent of the total population Christian, thereby leaving the Muslims with a mere 17 percent. Hindus, Buddhists, and other religious denominations

would share the remaining one percent. Put together, in terms of ethnic group and religious affiliation the Minahasa will become the largest ethnic and religious group in a future North Sulawesi Province.

Table 8: Religious composition in North Sulawesi should Kabupaten Bola'ang-Mongondow leave the province

	Moslem	Catholic	Protestant	Hindu	Buddhist	Others	Total
Kabupaten Minahasa	74,097	55,658	636,452	194	179	2,716	769,296
Kabupaten Sangihe/Talaud	28,835	3,818	226,232	34	61	2,532	261,512
<i>Kota Manado</i>	<i>117,126</i>	<i>22,387</i>	<i>226,406</i>	<i>527</i>	<i>2,505</i>	<i>3,936</i>	372,887
<i>Kota Bitung</i>	<i>46,920</i>	<i>5,216</i>	<i>86,708</i>	<i>150</i>	<i>217</i>	<i>1,059</i>	140,270
Total	266,978	87,079	1,175,798	905	2,962	10,243	1,543,965

The internal division of North Sulawesi Province has not stopped there. In early 2002 Kabupaten Sangihe/Talaud became divided into two new Kabupatens, namely Kabupaten Sangihe and Kabupaten Talaud thereby increasing the number of Kabupatens in the current North Sulawesi to four, namely; Bola'ang-Mongondow, Minahasa, Sangihe, and Talaud, and two Kotas; Manado and Bitung.

The splitting up of Kabupaten Sangihe/Talaud does not threaten the dominant position of the Minahasa as, besides being the largest ethnic and religious group in North Sulawesi Province, they also dominate provincial political life, as mentioned above. Actually, the division has more to do with a power struggle between the two islands Sangihe and Talaud. The inhabitants of the former regard themselves as more important in terms of political and economic influence towards the Minahasa-dominated provincial government than the latter. Talaud is regarded as an outlying island with nothing but cheap labour power and palm products to offer the province. From the Talaud point of view, the division is their chance of making their presence felt. They feel capable of making polities development plans according to their own needs and ideas, not having to deal with the provincial government through a joint council perceived as dominated by Sangihe people. What the two islands, despite their differences, still have in common, however, is their animosity towards the Minahasa, who they perceive as too assertive in governing the province. This is an animosity that is not just imagined, but something that can be proven with hard facts and testimonies. However, at present there is nothing the two new Kabupatens can do to enhance their situation given the current structural changes together with the social and political developments that are taking place in the province.

Let me provide two examples of how the animosity towards the Minahasa comes forth. I make no claim to for the veracity of the views, but they do give a flavour of the feelings of some people. During a dinner with two painters from

Talaud in Manado in March 2002 they complained how Minahasa artists almost always dominated exhibitions and cultural performances. They gave an example of an art exhibition in 2001, where all the artists and painters came from Manado and Minahasa and none from Sangihe and Talaud or from any other regions in North Sulawesi Province for that matter. They gave another example from a recent cultural performance in which a traditional dance was performed by artists from their Kabupaten, the so-called *Masamper*. It did not attract the attention from the organising committee. They only paid attention to the dancers from Minahasa, who did their *Maengket*, a well-known religious thanksgiving dance. The committee even paid for new costumes for this group, but not to the group from Talaud. When ever there is a music contest, a traditional dance or choir contest on provincial level, groups from Sangihe or Talaud always lose to the Minahasa groups even though many of the latter's instructors come from their region. Paradoxically, this seemed to encourage the two painters, as they said: 'This means that the people from our region have the talent and thus the potential, especially within the arts and culture, to make their presence felt in future competitions. The only thing we have to do is to persuade those people now training the Minahasa groups to return to their home region in order to train the local groups there.'

Returning to the ongoing division of North Sulawesi Province, the southern part of the current Kabupaten Minahasa has filed an application to the central government of becoming a new Kabupaten, called *Minahasa Selatan* (Southern Minahasa Kabupaten), the northern part of the current Kabupaten is working on setting up *Kabupaten Minahasa Utara* (Northern Minahasa Kabupaten), and the major Minahasa town of Tomohon is becoming a Kota in the near future. It is not unlikely that other part of the current Kabupaten Minahasa is tempted to create their particular Kabupaten. The sub-division of the original Kabupaten Minahasa is thus continuing.

Computing all the developments that have been discussed so far – structural changes, the concomitant changing ethnic and religious composition, and emerging new splits within North Sulawesi Province after Gorontalo became a new province – creates a picture of a province that is gradually changing or disentangling its original structure thereby initiating a thorough social, cultural, religious, and political reorganisation of the whole North Sulawesi region.

This development, which was mainly initiated and thus legitimated by the implementation of the national programme of economic decentralisation and regional autonomy, together with a nationwide local quest for culture and identity in a volatile political landscape, has so far resulted in a tendency towards ethnic and religious homogeneity on the provincial as well as on the regency level thereby making these new entities so much more vulnerable towards ethnic and religious conflicts. I return to this question in the final section of this paper. I now turn to how this homogeneity has been reinforced by some other local forces which have not so far been touched upon. I will use Kabupaten Minahasa as a case study. I begin by outlining the relationship

between ethnicity and politics, and then apply it in the form of a theoretical model of to conceptualise the Minahasa as an ethnic group.

ON THE POLICY OF ETHNICITY

Ethnicity as a political tool

It is important to delineate an approach of how to perceive the relationship between ethnicity, identity and culture in order to understand why this constitutes a vehicle for (re-)creating an imagined political community used by politicians in their jockeying for creating a new profile vis-à-vis Jakarta, as described in an earlier section in this paper. In the following I depict a combination of a situationalist, constructivist, and instrumentalist approach, which I found stimulating when studying ethnicity. For example, Vermaulen and Covers (1997: 22, note 2) define these approaches and how they relate to each other in the following way:

‘Circumstantialism’ is used in the literature as a synonym of situationalism. Both indicate approaches that explain the strength of ethnic bonds primarily by reference to the situation or circumstances. The term interactionism refers to the notion that ethnicity is a product of the interaction between groups, not of isolation. Instrumentalism is used to indicate a conception of ethnicity that emphasizes its instrumental role in politics and that it conceives of ethnic groups as interest groups. Situationalism, interactionism and instrumentalism are very much related and often used to refer to the same authors (Vermaulen and Covers 1997: 22, note 2).

This approach was initiated by Fredrick Barth in the late sixties and continued to flourish to the early eighties, and was instrumental in criticising earlier views on ethnicity, which it condemned as being based on primordial perceptions of culture. According to Vermaulen and Covers (1997: 5), like situationalism, constructionism is sometimes opposed to primordialism even though it is more appropriate to contrast it with essentialism. Like situationalism, constructionism opposes a view of ethnic identities as static and given, and pays more attention to anti-essentialist concerns like the variability, fuzziness and discontinuity of identities, which questions the notion of boundaries. Finally, they maintain that constructionism implies a shift of relative emphasis from ethnicity as an aspect of social organisation to ethnicity as consciousness, ideological or imaginative.

In an attempt of avoid conceptual confusion I employ these approaches, especially situationalism, constructionism, and instrumentalism, in a sequential manner. I do not employ interactionism as I perceive this to be an integrated part of the relationship between the three other approaches. On the basis of constantly changing social, political, and economic circumstances at various societal levels people react according to concrete situations that in one way or another have a major impact on their (daily) life. They thus construct

different scenarios as foundations for an assortment of social and political strategies that are aimed at dealing with this floating and unpredictable social, political and economic landscape. They use these strategies to construct, for example, different types of identities that provide them with a sense of belonging thus creating a base from which to orient and structure an otherwise volatile world around them.

By linking situationalism, constructionalism, and instrumentalism in this way it is possible to conceive this as constituting a causal way of explaining how changes are perceived and reacted upon. However, the causal chain does not bite itself in the tail, so to speak, as the way in which social and political strategies are employed always lead to other types of unpredictable situations that demand to be reacted upon thereby leading towards new types of strategies. Because of the unpredictable nature of the response to a given strategy the sequential use of situationalism, constructionalism, and instrumentalism employed here is not leading to a structural-functional model of explaining societal changes. Instead I am talking about open-ended processes and developments that have to be dealt with in a situational manner.

The following analytical approach towards ethnicity is thus based on such a sequential methodology to social, political and economic changes with an extra input of atavistic conceptions of using the past for present purposes (see Wee 2002), as the main ingredients behind the creation of a given ethnic group as a culturally-specific imagined community. This form of representation seems to constitute a cornerstone in contemporary identity formation among many ethnic groups.

Kipp (1993: 17-24) has defined ethnicity as something that cannot be determined by simply noting the differences between people. Instead one has to concentrate on what differences matter to people and how these differences become culturally embedded. Employing this broad definition of ethnicity, I concur with Anderson (1987: 10) that the politics of ethnicity has its roots in modern times, not ancient history, no matter how they are ideologised.

Ethnicity, then, can be conceived of as an imaginative framework that encompasses a variety of related identities. The latter are understood as products of ascription and self-ascription and generally based on beliefs in common descent. Furthermore, following Verdery (1994: 34-35), ethnicity can be conceived of as constituting a matrix for a social organisation. The enculturation of such a matrix is generally based on ethnographic and archaeological artefacts that, besides being important aspects in local socialisation processes, also constitute a reservoir of identity markers that representatives from a given social organisation relate to when expressing themselves in terms of ethnicity. The point of departure for analysing ethnicity, according to Verdery and others, is thus not culture *per se*, but rather the potential social or political manipulation of such constructed identities thereby underscoring their situational character.

Hichcock and King also employ these assumptions when arguing that ethnicity is a highly relative and contingent concept, and that people primarily define themselves in relation to others whom they perceive as different. They furthermore maintain that ethnic groups are in themselves an *ad hoc* assemblage of traits and elements, which are given some sort of significance in ordering social relations of similarity and difference. They stress that:

What we must avoid is attributing ethnic identity a firmness and immutability which it does not possess. We may think of identity as a set of symbols, a matrix of significance and meaning, relative and contingent, a process rather than a fixed entity. The social communication of cultural difference may be observed and described, but cannot be reduced to a fixed system of signs (Hichcock and King 1997: 6).

As can be seen, linking ethnicity to social organisation makes it contemporary, not primordial, meaning that an ethnic identity is not based on some ancient objective culture features, but incorporates atavistic conceptions in order to stress a historical legitimacy. Ethnicity and affiliated identities are thus situational, constructed, and fluid in content thus stressing its political potency.

Contributory Factors towards Reinforcing Minahasa Ethnicity

Having thus outlined the political potential of ethnicity and, at the same time, emphasised its situationalist and constructionalist qualities, thus making it susceptible to political manipulation, I will argue that the Minahasafication of North Sulawesi Province is based on such a dynamic perception of ethnicity. In trying to further excavate those forces that lead towards making Kabupaten Minahasa for Minahasa people only I would like to direct attention to some factors that reinforce this development.

First of all, there are a whole range of NGOs, which utilise a local quest for what is conceived of as a more appropriate understanding of a cultural inheritance in order to further their own ends. I will not go into detail here, as I have done that in another place (Jacobsen 2002). Here it suffices to describe three main categories of these NGOs. The first are those that concentrate on the atavistic aspect of revivalism, that is, reviving and incorporate various aspects of the pre-colonial Minahasa cultures, which should, from a pragmatic point of view, be capable of providing some answers to those Minahasa people who are searching for their cultural roots in the present social and political unstable post-Suharto Indonesia. The second group are those NGOs that work towards empowering especially Minahasa women, thereby trying to break or transform the paternalistic family pattern that the Minahasa has inherited from the Dutch during the colonial period. The final category are those NGOs that focus on making Kabupaten Minahasa mainly for Minahasa people, that is, they are working to 'de-Javanise' the political and administrative apparatus, both the regional and the provincial one, which is a left over from the New Order's obsession with control over all societal levels.

Then there are the Churches, and especially the biggest one, the Christian Evangelical Church in Minahasa (GMIM), which is also engaged in reviving some of the pre-colonial cultures. Again, I will not go into details here but simply note that the church has an almost natural interest in convincing contemporary Minahasa people that there is no contradiction between being a Christian and a culturally reinvigorated Minahasan. Judging from the extensive influence that the churches, and especially GMIM, exert on their congregations through their complex network of Christian working groups then it is legitimate to maintain that they have been highly successful in co-opting the members of the various cultural revival movements.

I will dwell more on a less discussed aspect of reinforcing the Minahasafication of Kabupaten Minahasa and of North Sulawesi Province in general. It is the existence of four Christian militias in Minahasa: *Legium Christum* (Catholic), *Militia Christi* (Protestant evangelical), *Bani Jousua* (Pentecostal), and *Brigade Manguni* (several denominations). They represent a real response to a volatile social and political situation that haunts current Indonesia, namely the ethnic and religious conflicts throughout the nation. North Sulawesi is special in this connection as it has not experienced such clashes as occurred in Kalimantan, Maluku, and Central Sulawesi. Nonetheless, the Minahasa are keenly aware of these, as especially those in North Maluku and in Central Sulawesi are on their doorstep, so to speak. Arguably, these militias have constituted a bulwark against ethnic and religious clashes through their efforts to protect Christian values and property.

Militia Christi, *Bani Jousua*, and *Brigade Manguni* are regional militias that cover their particular areas within Kabupaten Minahasa. Their main aim is to defend their respective areas and the population against attacks from especially Muslim organisations from within the Kabupaten, from the province, and from more nationwide Muslim organisations. According to informants *Legium Christum* (LC) is somewhat different in that it can be defined as a kind of rapid mobile force. In the following I go more into detail about this particular militia.

The following is a summary of an interview with the leader of LC, a young man about 35 years old. When not heading the militia, he is a specialist medical doctor at one of the hospitals in Manado. He is the leader and founder of the mainly Catholic organisation, which has as its main objective to defend the church; all Christian churches, regardless of denomination. He had the inspiration for LC via a revelation he had one day while praying. The revelation, besides telling him to defend the church against enemies, especially against the Muslims, also instructed him to tell the first person he met when he left the room from where he was praying about the vision in order to start organising LC.

As explained to me, LC is a militia whose main aim is to defend the church, as are the aim of the other three Christian militias. However, they are not dedicated towards violence as LC is. The leader told me that there were no formalised cooperation between the four organisations, but he would like to suggest the following plan to them: in case a church somewhere in Minahasa was blown up by, say, representatives from Laskar Jihad, then the militia from that particular

area should confront the attackers. The other militias were not to leave their areas in order to help the first group fighting as that would leave their areas vulnerable to another attack. Instead they should call on the LC, thus reinforcing the fighting group very rapidly. According to this plan, LC sees itself as a kind of provincial wide 'rapid deployment force'. Interestingly, other groups like, for example, *Brigade Manguni* has expressed their willingness to cooperate with the other militias, but no initiatives have yet been taken in this connection.¹⁰

There is no formal cooperation between LC and the Catholic Church, or any other Christian church. The interviewee explained that the church is not dedicated to violence. Its 'natural' reaction in a case where it was attacked would be to turn the other cheek to the enemy, choosing not to fight. His organisation would take up the fight for the church, thereby making a clear distinction between his organisation and the church. This was done, he said, for the love of the church and Christianity. In contrast, *Brigade Manguni* is openly supported by high ranking representatives from the GMIM church, so support for these militias seems to differ according to which Christian denomination they relate to.

LC consists of a ready fighting force of some 6,000 men, with a group of supporters of about another 23,000 men. The 6,000 can be divided into three main groups. The first is a small group of about 200 that is ready to take on suicide missions both within and outside North Sulawesi Province. The second group is a special force consisting of about 2,000 that can undertake special missions, mostly within the province, but can also be sent elsewhere. For example, to Poso in Central Sulawesi, where they have already been fighting for some time. The rest of the 6,000 can be deployed anywhere in the province within two hours. He did not explain when and how the 23,000 supporters would be deployed.

The 6,000 man force is trained in several jungle camps throughout the province. The training consists of intensive prayer sessions, physical training, and weapons training, including how to make explosives. In relation to intensive prayer sessions, these are meant to focus each fighter on what he is fighting for, and to be prepared to fight without regarding for safety or their life. The 'protection' of their religion is an essential part of their fight, and like Laskar Jihad, LC fighters are promised passage directly to heaven when killed in action. When asked about LC's weapons, the leader was imprecise. 'About two to five rifles and about 60 revolvers', he said. In relation to bombs, he said that they could only make 'small' bombs, but did not elaborate further. It was clear that he did not want to discuss such topics.

I then asked about intelligence work. That is, how and from where did LC obtain their information about, for example, the movements of Laskar Jihad? The leader replied that LC had an extensive network of informers throughout the province, in the Maluku, and in Central and Southern Sulawesi. He said that he

¹⁰ Interview with representatives from *Brigade Manguni* July 2002.

knew there were at least six representatives from Laskar Jihad in North Sulawesi at the time of the interview. He knew their names and their whereabouts. They were trying to infiltrate the Muslim communities, especially in Manado and Bitung, in order to start revolts against the Christians. When he obtained this information, he went to the armed forces chief commander in Manado, asking him what the army would do. The commander said that there was not much he could do, due to a lack of funding. He added that the army might not be effective as many soldiers were Muslims. On this basis, the leader felt that LC had to be prepared to take action as no other official force would.

It seems that the strongest weapon LC has is psychological terror. By this I mean that it is easy to spot LC fighters as they wear black clothes and the leader is open about his organisation, what it does and what it stands for. He is well known throughout North Sulawesi, gives speeches in many places and even travels to other parts of Sulawesi in order to network with like groups. He had been awarded a medal by a government institution in Jakarta but declined to receive it for two reasons. The first was that he feared it was a trap luring him to Jakarta in order to 'pacify' him; and second, he felt that it was not him but his organisation that should have been awarded the medal. He feared that this was a tactic for creating a split in the organisation, between him and other LC members.

The following is an example of LC's use of psychological terror. During Christmas 2001 a number of Christian churches were blown up in Jakarta. This had the effect that the Muslim community in Manado were afraid of celebrating the *Fitril Idul*, the end of the fasting period, in late February 2002. They were afraid the Christians would attack them as revenge for the church bombings in Jakarta. The LC leader contacted the Muslim leaders in Manado and suggested that LC fighters could protect them during the celebration. They accepted his offer and the event took place without problems. This was a strategic move by LC as it showed the Muslims that it had the means to protect them, thereby also sending a signal to them that LC also had the means to attack them if need be. It was thus a show of strength that could not be misunderstood.

When speaking about Muslims my informant became tense. He said several times that they were not to be trusted. When we discussed the structural changes in North Sulawesi Province he said he was quite satisfied with the fact that Kabupaten Gorontalo was no longer a part of the province. This change made it more Christian and turned the remaining Muslims into a minority. He was not, however, ignoring the possibility of a Muslim conspiracy against Christians in North Sulawesi, despite this change. Gorontalo was still there and even though having become a province on its own, could develop into a Muslim stronghold, thus threatening the Christians and might constitute a platform for attacks from Laskar Jihad. He and his commanders were closely monitoring the situation there.

Finally, when he was asked about the possibility of the national government changing the constitution from the present one, based on *Pancasila*, to one that

based on the Jakarta Chapter, he became quite angry and agitated. In such a case, he would fight for making North Sulawesi, or at least Minahasa, an independent state. He would under no circumstances live in a Muslim state.

One might wonder whether there is a connection between LC and those forces that worked towards making Kabupaten Minahasa exclusively for Minahasa people with the long time goal of turning it into new province and perhaps into an independent state? When discussing LC with church leaders, they all claim that the church, regardless of Christian denomination, does not support the organisation but on the other hand would not declare it unwanted. As they said: 'We have had, after all, no ethnic or religious clashes as in many other part of Indonesia since 1998 when Suharto was forced to step down'. This indirect support for LC seems to suggest that there is some form of cooperation with the Church as is the case with *Brigade Manguni*.

If we now compute all the changes discussed so far– the current trends within provincial politics, the structural, ethnic and religious reorganisation of the province, together with a renewed interests in questions of identity and pre-colonial cultures, further fuelled by a varieties of NGOs, the church, and Christian militias – then it is pertinent to ask whether there is a connection between these different developments. In my opinion there is. It is clear that there is a push for setting up Minahasa as a province in its own right.

The structural fission of North Sulawesi Province seems to help reinforce this vision by 'peeling off' various parts of the province that might counter making the Minahasa the largest group in North Sulawesi in terms of geo-politics, ethnicity, and religion. This fact seems to seep into the political life of 'North Sulawesi Province', as the politicians work towards making the province an economic and political powerhouse, hijacking the cultural revival movements in the process, and using it as its ideological foundation. That this economic and political profiling towards Jakarta seems to have worked as a catalyst in many Minahasa communities can be seen when analysing the activities of NGOs, the church, and the militias. Every informant I spoke to about these developments pointed towards the potential establishment of Minahasa as a province. For them it was just a question of time before this was a fact. If this is to eventuate, then it means the exit of North Sulawesi Province as a coherent economic and political entity and recreation as a collection of new provinces within a region called North Sulawesi. If this scenario materialises, then the New Order mind-set I discussed earlier will be replaced by a regional equivalent that redirects the question of loyalty towards the region and not exclusively towards the nation state.

Having said this, however, I would like to take a closer look at this future construct. Paradoxically, it seems to harbour the seeds to its own destruction. In other words, the processes of societal fission do not stop with the deconstruction of North Sulawesi Province but seem to continue all the way down to a societal bed-rock that bears little resemblance to what was the original intention in 1964 when establishing the province. The dangerous aspect

of this is that it appears to constitute a tendency that can be observed in other parts of Indonesia, as noted in the introduction. I shall elaborate on this in the following section.

NEW ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS FAULTLINES: TOWARDS A BALKANISATION OF THE INDONESIAN NATION?

Political power and the question of identity

In a thought provoking article, Mahmood Mamdani (2001: 661) warns us that we need to recognise that the past and future overlap, as do culture and politics, but they are not the same thing. Cultural communities rooted in a common past do not necessarily have a common future. He argues that the major challenge is to define political identities as distinct from cultural identities without denying the link between the two.

When assessing the current political rhetoric from both provincial and regional politicians, academics, and representatives from NGOs and the church, there is a heavy element of Minahasa ethnicity to it. It is fused with a perception of *Minahasa Wangko* or 'Minahasa the great', and as such constitutes a political foundation for an emerging Minahasa Province. There is, however, a downside to it as it is a feeble foundation indeed. An attempt to use Minahasa culture and ethnicity as the basis for a provincial identity might prove to be a Pandora's Box.

Minahasa, conceived of as an ethnic label, is a Dutch colonial construct that in itself only refers to the historical fact of establishing a political alliance or union between the indigenous groups that, in pre-colonial time, lived in the region of North Sulawesi. It does not relate to a specific culture or language group, but rather to a Dutch imposed *Landraad* or council of chiefs who convened for the first time in 1789 to receive Dutch instructions and resolve internal disputes among the groups occupying the region. It was not until 1822 that the term 'Minahasa' was used in a geographic and ethnic sense (Lundstrom 1981, Schouten 1998, Henley 1996). The concept 'Minahasa' is thus an artificial umbrella concept for eight culturally related, but slightly different, language groups that incessantly fought each other, the Sultanate of Bola'ang-Mongondow, and later, the Dutch, until they were pacified and became known under the common name 'Minahasa'. It is this colonial construct that is currently being transformed into a political strategy that is to give ideological substance to a future Minahasa Province.

The eight cultures and language groups in present day Kabupaten Minahasa are very much alive, but subdued due to heavy Christianisation and the New Order regime emphasis on ethnic and religious harmony. They now constitute dormant social and political fault lines that may be activated as needs be. And this might not be in the too distance future as the structural reorganisation of North Sulawesi Province tends towards smaller units in the form of more regencies, thereby expanding the present number of Kabupatens in the province.

This is an important point as the current national programme of economic decentralisation and regional autonomy is not aimed at the provinces but the regencies. This means that we have a situation in which we encounter weakened provinces and empowered regencies. One can only guess why the national policy makers made the regencies and not the provinces the main targets of the economic decentralisation and regional autonomy programme. A qualified guess, however, is that in case they targeted the provinces then the central government might create the opportunity for initiating its own disempowerment, as the units to which they decentralised would be in a position of becoming rival power centres to the one in Jakarta. As I understand the national programme of economic decentralisation and regional autonomy, it is a tool for the national government to stay in power and to preserve the present unitary state. The implication of this interpretation is that the political elite in Jakarta are not that concerned with national cohesion. Rather, it is the preservation of the status quo in terms of clinging to political power in Jakarta that really counts.

The problems created by the national programme of economic decentralisation and regional autonomy do not stop there. Precisely because decentralisation is directed towards the regencies and not the provinces, this has created intense rivalries between the provincial government and regencies, and between the regencies. This was acknowledged in interviews with representatives from both the provincial and the regional assemblies. The provinces in general are expected to decentralise many of their functions to the regencies in order to make them function as autonomous political and administrative entities, a process that is too slow according to many regencies. And as this process is not carried out evenly between the different regencies in, say, North Sulawesi Province, rivalries between the regencies intensifies. There is empirical evidence that this is now occurring in North Sulawesi Province.¹¹ Taking a deconstruction of Minahasa ethnicity into account and examining it from the point of view where ethnicity and questions of identity constitute an ideal platform for political mobilisation, as outlined in the previous section, then an activation of the above mentioned dormant social and political fault lines could further fuel tensions between the regencies, and even within them, as the different language groups are turned into political imagined communities.

It is here that the danger lies for a future Minahasa province. The regencies that are 'in the pipeline' in the present Kabupaten Minahasa might begin to fight amongst themselves in order to get as much political influence and economic assistance as possible, not from the provincial government but directly from the central government in Jakarta. But this would undercut the overall political ideology of being Minahasa. Instead they will be referring to themselves as *Tontemboan*, *Tombuluh*, *Tonsea*, *Tondano*, *Tonsawang*, *Ponisakan*, *Ratahan*, and *Bantik*, as the pre-colonial language groups were, and still are, labelled. If this scenario were to eventuate, then the deconstruction of North Sulawesi

¹¹ Personal communication with provincial and regional assembly members, March 2002.

Province will come back to haunt Minahasa Province and nobody would have gained. In fact the contrary would be true.

Where does all this take us? It might point towards a new generation of conflicts in post-Suharto Indonesia which is, strangely enough, the outcome of the national programme of economic decentralisation and regional autonomy. I see this as a new generation of conflicts, for in another paper I have discussed the possibility of grouping the current conflicts in Indonesia into two types or a first and second generation of conflicts (Jacobsen 2002). The conflict discussed here will thus be third generation as it begins to appear, not only in North Sulawesi but in many other parts of Indonesia.

In short, the first generation of conflicts have their roots in New Order policies of resource extraction and transmigration schemes, together with economic and political marginalisation. The second generation of conflicts have their roots directly from the implementation of the post-Suharto national political programme of economic decentralisation and regional autonomy as it has rejuvenated provinces like North Sulawesi to demand political concessions from Jakarta in order to be part of the current restructuring of the Indonesian State and society. The third generation of conflicts might be generated by the production of new provinces and regencies that are characterised by more or less ethnic and religious homogeneity. The main problem with this ethnic and religious patchwork scenario is that the individual parts are not lumped together in affiliated groups or in specific areas of the Indonesian archipelago, but are spread in an erratic fashion throughout the nation.

This means that a whole new set of social and political fault lines is coming to the fore, thus making it almost impossible to predict how and where the next conflict will emerge, and with what kind of consequences on the neighbouring regencies and provinces. Such a development jeopardises the national motto of 'Unity in Diversity' and shows that the official rhetoric of multiculturalism and pluralism is hollow. It does not touch on the important question of whether the societal umbrella is big enough to encompass a growing real diversity of the nation. The development of a new set of destabilising factors thus carries the frightening possibility of initiating a drive towards a Balkanisation of the Indonesian nation.

In the beginning of this paper I wrote that the intensions with the national programme of economic decentralisation and regional autonomy could be explained in four main points: (1) to address the general political and economic imbalances between Jakarta and Outer Indonesia; (2) to initiate a dismantling the New Order society, politically as well as economically; (3) to engage especially Outer Indonesia in the current restructuring of the Indonesia State and nation; and (4) to contain and perhaps resolve conflicts locally. When assessing the basic aims of this programme, namely to knit together a restructured, more democratically inclined and coherent Indonesia, then one is tempted to say that these aims have become stuck in the rhetorical realm. The

reality seems to contradict them by threatening Indonesia with the possibility of opening yet another Pandora's Box.

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