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# “Going Back Home”: The Mawale Movement and the Rediscovery of Minahasan Identity

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**“GOING BACK HOME”: THE MAWALE MOVEMENT AND THE REDISCOVERY  
OF MINAHASAN IDENTITY**

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Indonesia: Arts, Religion, and Social Change  
Fall 2015

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## **Abstract**

This paper aims to look at a cultural movement located in North Sulawesi, the Mawale Movement, seeking to refocus and rediscover Minahasan identity. Minahasa, a region in North Sulawesi, is predominantly Christian which has created an assumption that Christian identity and Minahasan identity are inseparable, or to be a Minahasan person means to be a Christian. The Mawale Movement is critically examining the idea of a Christian Minahasan identity and this paper explores the ways in which they are trying to refocus understandings of what it means to be a Minahasan person. By tracing a history of colonialism and Christianity in this area, I will introduce the Mawale Movement and examine the history, structure, and goals and missions of the movement. I will explore the ways in which Mawale tries to critically analyze this assumed Christian identity and work this rediscovered identity into Minahasan life by looking at their events and interactions with past traditions and Christianity. Ultimately, I will explore the question of what Minahasan identity is to the Mawale Movement and its importance in their lives as Minahasan people.

## **Acknowledgments**

Firstly, I want to thank Bu Ari, my Academic Director, for her constant reassurance and guidance throughout the semester. Your care and love for each individual student within the program is inspiring and has made my experience studying abroad in Indonesia a fruitful, growing experience. Along with Bu Ari, I am indebted to the SIT program staff, Pak Yudi, Ella, Edo, and Jo, for all they do to make our semester in Indonesia successful and fun. Another thanks to Jonathan Adams for his help with the ideas and edits within this work.

A huge thanks goes out to Erica Larson, my advisor, for going far beyond the responsibilities of her job. She not only arranged my living situation, acquainted me with North Sulawesi and the Mawale Movement, but served as translator, cultural guide, karaoke partner, and friend (to name a few!). This project would not have been possible without her and I am so thankful that she allowed me to invade her life and research in Minahasa for three weeks.

A thank you goes out to Grace O'Nelwan for being another amazing Minahasan guide and friend. I saw so much more of Minahasa, practiced my Indonesian language skills, and

experienced the wonders of Minahasan food because of your warm and welcoming presence. Also thanks to Grace and Erica for being so patient, reassuring, and helpful when my computer broke during my field work period.

Thank you to Denni and Erny Pinontoan for allowing me to stay in their home for the duration of my visit to Minahasa. Your hospitality and concern for my studies was amazing, whether that was connecting me with people in Mawale and helping set up interviews, allowing me to sit in on and join Mawale discussions, or ask countless numbers of questions on religion, culture, and Minahasa at any and all times of day.

An enormous thank you goes out to the Mawale Movement and all members involved. It has been an honor to learn about this movement and the extraordinary individuals involved. Thank you for allowing me to join discussions, attend events, and ask far too many questions about everything Minahasa and more. I have learned so much from the time spent with you and I am so glad I had the opportunity to interact and study what the Mawale Movement is all about.

As is clear above, this project could not have been completed without the help and guidance of so many people – the list goes far beyond what I have named above – and I am grateful for their knowledge, support, and kindness. Terima kasih!

## **Introduction**

Originally when brainstorming about the topic of my Independent Study Project (ISP), I found myself wanting to explore an area in Indonesia where Christianity was the dominant religion and learn about how Christianity interacted with traditional culture or religion. Throughout the semester we had the opportunity to stay in areas that were predominantly Hindu (Bali) and Muslim (Yogyakarta, Java) and learn about how local, traditional culture intermingled

with each world religion. I was fascinated by these places and these relationships and knew I wanted the opportunity to discover this in a Christian area of Indonesia.

The desire to study Christianity not only came out of this absence of study during my semester, but also because of my life and personal experiences with Christianity. I am a pastor's child and grew up in a Christian world with Sunday school, confirmation, youth group, and church every Sunday. As I transitioned into college, I found myself fascinated with the study of religion, and specifically Christianity. I was learning so much about the formation and complexities within Christianity that I had experienced throughout my life. When I was informed about a region in North Sulawesi that was predominantly Christian, I grabbed at the chance to stay and learn from people who possess the same religion as me, but may practice it very different. I wanted to see how they made meaning out of traditional practices and beliefs within a Christian context, and see how it transformed my understanding of Christianity. I quickly found myself on a plane going to this unknown land of North Sulawesi in hopes of learning much about the place and people within it.

What I found however, was different from what I expected. While Christianity seemed to permeate all aspects of this area – the countless numbers of churches and immense presence of Christian symbolism – I did not see this integration of traditional culture and Christianity. As questions arose as to how this came about, I became acquainted with a cultural movement known as the Mawale Movement. I became extremely interested in it because while they are interested in traditional religion and culture, they do so without a Christian lens. They want to use this knowledge of traditional culture and religion as a way to rediscover a Minahasan identity that is not an innately Christian one, despite the fact that most of the members are Christian themselves. Throughout my field work my focus shifted to this movement and questions about what this

Minahasan identity was to them, how they wanted to rediscover it, where Christianity fit in the picture, and why these conversations and rediscoveries were important to them.

This paper aims to look at a cultural movement located in North Sulawesi, the Mawale Movement, seeking to refocus and rediscover Minahasan identity. Minahasa, a region in North Sulawesi, is predominantly Christian which has created an assumption that Christian identity and Minahasan identity are inseparable, or to be a Minahasan person means to be a Christian. The Mawale Movement is critically examining the idea of a Christian Minahasan identity and this paper explores the ways in which they are trying to refocus understandings of what it means to be a Minahasan person. By tracing a history of colonialism and Christianity in this area, I will introduce the Mawale Movement and examine the history, structure, and goals and missions of the movement. I will explore the ways in which Mawale tries to critically analyze this assumed Christian identity and work this rediscovered identity into Minahasan life by looking at their events and interactions with past traditions. Because the Mawale Movement is a relatively small movement in the large landscape of Minahasa, I will also touch on a few non-Mawale individuals and their understanding of Minahasan identity. Ultimately, I will explore the question of what Minahasan identity is to the Mawale Movement and its importance in their lives as Minahasan people.

## **Methodology**

My primary data for this project was collected from 14 November 2015 to 30 November 2015 in the region of Minahasa, located in North Sulawesi, Indonesia. Most of my field work took place in either Tomohon or Manado, both cities within Minahasa, but other interviews and

data were collected in various villages around Minahasa. I was connected with the area and most of my informants through Erica Larson, my advisor, who is well acquainted with the Mawale Movement and other individuals throughout Minahasa. For my entire stay in Minahasa, I stayed in Tomohon with a Mawale member whose house was often a central meeting location for Mawale members, which gave me many opportunities to interact with Mawale members and informally interview them.

Throughout my stay in Minahasa, I had the opportunity to formally interview eight individuals, five of which were part of the Mawale Movement, and three who were outside of the group. I did not go into my interviews with a standardized set of questions, but rather with person-specific questions and broader ideas. I felt that this would be my best approach because I wanted interviews to feel more like a discussion than a pressured, formal interview so that my informants would feel comfortable with me and the situation. Topics within interviews ranged from Minahasan identity, traditional culture and religion, Christianity in Minahasa, and the Mawale Movement to name a few. Interviews took place at restaurants, Denni's home, informants' own homes, and universities. For informants specifically named throughout this paper, verbal consent was obtained. All but one informant gave me permission, and for the individual without consent I use a pseudonym. Along with formal interviews, I collected information and became better acquainted with the movement by attending events put on by Mawale as well as participating in discussions with Mawale members.

All interviews and discussions were done in a mix of English and Bahasa Indonesia or Bahasa Manado. For all of my interviews, I was accompanied to these interviews by my advisor, Erica Larson, or Greenhill Weol, a Mawale member with a degree in English Literature from UKIT (Universitas Kristen Indonesia Tomohon). All interviews were recorded with permission



from informants and notes were also often taken at interviews. At Mawale discussions and events, Erica would routinely translate the conversation, performance, etc. for me and would provide me with more extensive notes and translations after the event if they pertained to my studies.

Throughout my research and writing of this project, limitations, or ethical concerns, arose and need to be addressed. Firstly, I was only able to spend three weeks with this movement and in Minahasa which severely limits the number of people I spoke with and things I was able to see and learn. My understanding and conclusions of Minahasa and identity are influenced by the small number of people I interacted with, namely members within the Mawale Movement. There are many more ways people throughout Minahasa understand their identity than what I touched on in this paper, and what I have gathered is an extremely small representative of Minahasan people. The Mawale Movement is not only a small group of individuals, but their thinking is much more progressive and radical than the general population of Minahasan people. As an outsider coming for such a short amount of time, this greatly affected my understanding of Minahasan people and culture. If given more time I would have explored more perspectives outside of Mawale to gain a broader understanding of Minahasan identity.

This representation is not only small of Minahasan people, but also the Mawale Movement. I was only able to formally interview five individuals from the movement which does not encapsulate all members' understanding of Minahasan identity, tradition, or Christianity. The movement is a diverse group of individuals, resulting in the loss of many subtleties. Along with this, my research questions focused heavily about Christianity and Minahasan traditional culture which is only one facet of the work the Mawale Movement is doing. Along with this, my presence as a white, Western, outsider affected the information I was

given by both members of the movement and other Minahasan people. While I felt that the group was consistently honest and forthcoming with me, this may have been because of my outsider status thus possibly giving me skewed information and a false sense of reality in Minahasa. Going forward with these concerns in the movement, the conclusions I draw about this movement and Minahasa are a result of my questions and observations in this short research time. It does not sum up the complete work or voices of this movement.

Finally, my limited knowledge and experience speaking Indonesian and Manadonese greatly affected my ability to communicate with my informants. I attended many discussions and events that were done completely in Indonesian or Manadonese, and while I often had Erica or another English-speaker to translate at intermittent times throughout, I was not able to completely follow what was being said. I faced similar problem in my interviews. Most of these interviews were approached as a discussion, and my limited language skills did not allow me to fully engage because of the breaks in conversation for translation.

## **Background**

### **A. Minahasa, Colonialism, and Christianity**

Geographically, Minahasa can be found within the northernmost tip of the island of Sulawesi (Weichart 2004: 56). Minahasa is commonly referred to as both a geographical area as well as the dominant ethnic group within that region. This mountainous region covering about 4,800 square kilometers is volcanic with fertile land and a healthy climate. The area is surrounded by the sea on three sides and to the south meets with the highlands of Bolaang Mongodow (Weichart 2004: 59). The boundaries of the area are a result of an established

territorial region that was determined in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by the Dutch, who colonized the land at the time to extract rice from fertile rice-cultivating communities that were controlled by the Spanish at the time. Once the Dutch took control of the area, it “became an isolated island of directly ruled colonial territory called Minahasa” (Henley 1993: 93).

While the geographic term itself is probably less than a half-a-century older than the establishment of Indonesia, its identification as a perceived community and ethnicity “transcends the creation of the Indonesian nation” (Jacobsen 2002: 39). The term *minahasa* means “united, become one” and this perceived community was invented by the Dutch colonial rulers in order to bring together and rule the various sub-ethnic groups throughout the Minahasan territory. There are a total of eight of these sub-ethnic groups (*Tontemboan, Tombulu, Tonsea, Tondano, Tonsawang, Bantik, Bentenan, and Ponosakan*), all of which possess their own language but have similar cultures and religions (Jacobsen 2002: 39). Traditionally, being part of one of these sub-ethnic groups is the way in which one falls under the category of being Minahasan, although as I will explain throughout, part of the work the Mawale Movement is doing is promoting a change in this assumption<sup>1</sup>.

Today, Minahasa has the third largest Christian population in Indonesia with around 69% of the population identifying as Christian in a survey from 2000. It is one of the four regions (there are 32 regions total) in Indonesia with Christianity as the dominant religion, all of which are located in the eastern part of the archipelago (Jonge, Parengkuan, Steenbrink 2008: 419). The history and current presence of Christianity, as is the case in most other parts of the world, is directly linked to the area’s ties with colonialism. The large Christianization of Minahasan people was done by the NZG, *Nederlandsch Zendeling Genootschap*, or the Dutch Missionary Society between 1831 and 1891 (Henley 1993: 96). Although there was Christian contact and

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<sup>1</sup> They are exploring it in a more inclusive identity and not necessarily descendant-based.

conversion in the region prior to this massive conversion (1570s-1820s), there were only a few coastal villages, that were partially inhabited by outside traders and slaves, who identified as Christian (Jonge, Parengkuan, Steenbrink 2008: 419-420). From 1831 on however, Christianity started to take hold in the region as NZG missionaries started establishing schools in both coastal and inland areas. According to missionaries at the time, Minahasan people were drawn to the schools because they provided an appealing, Western education that improved literacy considerably in the area and gave more people the chance to escape poverty. Also, during the time of the first missionaries Minahasan people were subjected to compulsory coffee cultivation (up to 100 days a year) and road construction work (30 days per year for all adults), with much of the profit going to the chiefs of the village leaving the people in extreme poverty. Because of this compulsory work and impoverished state, missionaries stated that Christianity and their schools became “a strategy to overcome their cultural disorientation and social distress” By 1880, 80% of the population, or around 80,000 people were reported to be Christian converts. (Jonge, Parengkuan, Steenbrink 2008: 422).

Despite the successes of the NZG in Minahasa, the society fell into deep financial problems because of their expanding missionary fields and internal problems in the Netherlands. Out of these problems came the *Indische Kerk*, the Protestant Church of the East Indies. Under this new system, missions became much more regulated and standardized in terms of funding, salaries, and provisions provided from the Church. This new system standardized the Church and enforced European styles of management and forced many schools to adopt more religiously neutral policies that aligned with the *Indische Kerk* (Jonge, Parengkuan, Steenbrink 2008: 425-427).

The NZG and *Indische Kerk* not only converted countless numbers of individuals, but also introduced their European, western ways of life and implemented many of these within the communities they resided in. Many of the traditional cultural and religious practices were abandoned as missionaries deemed them heretical within their newfound Christian faith. For example, headhunting was widely practiced amongst villages but missionaries quickly suppressed this activity and promoted ideas of love and nonviolence instead of legitimizing the violence, it was a characteristic of traditional culture (Henley 1993: 97). While these compulsory laws and the general abandonment of traditional culture and religion changed much of traditional Minahasan life, they were met with little resistance by the people. As is the open nature of Minahasan people, Minahasans were eager to accept and adapt to this new western religion and the ways of life colonizers and missionaries brought with it.

In the 1920s, low ranking Minahasan Christian leaders began speaking of a desire for independence from the controlling *Indische Kerk*. These leaders wanted the Church to be controlled by Minahasan people and yearned for the establishment of a more ethnically-centric church. *Indische Kerk* and Minahasan Protestants convened in a series of meetings that erected the Gereja Masehi Injili Minahasa (GMIM) as a partly autonomous church on September 30, 1934. In 1942 the Church elected its first Minahasan synod president to diminish the power of the *Indische Kerk* and from this time it has remained in Minahasan, local control. While GMIM was established as a local, ethnic church it did not reintegrate many cultural, traditional practices and the liturgy and theological teachings of the Church strongly resembled that of the Dutch Reformed Church. Despite this initial lack of engagement with traditional culture, GMIM became the largest denomination in the area and still today dominates the religious landscape in North Sulawesi.

However, there were periods of time throughout GMIM's history where there was an effort by the Church body to reintegrate cultural practices and values. In the 1970s-90s, GMIM leaders noticed that large remnants of the traditional religion were still being practiced, like worship to the ancestors, making offerings, or seeking the help of traditional healers. In response to this, they established a special synod department to give a theological framework to traditional practices, hoping to increase members' understanding of the importance of living a Christian daily life. While these efforts were signs that GMIM acknowledged the desires of its members to continue traditional practices in daily life, overall the practices, theological thinking, and liturgy within the Church has remained more closely aligned with its European roots rather than Minahasan traditional religion and culture (Jonge, Parengkuan, Steenbrink 2008: 439-446).

This very brief historical account of Christianity and colonialism in Minahasa is important to include because it reveals the close ties this region and its people have with Christianity and the colonial culture it often brings with it. Because it is the third largest Christian region in Indonesia and has had such an extensive relationship with Christianity, it often creates the assumption that this area is defined by its Christianity, or that Minahasan identity is synonymous with a Christian identity. The Indonesian government stresses the recognition of religion in the public sphere, like the inclusion of it on one's identification card, which has created an atmosphere that tends to define each area of Indonesia by its dominant religion. Not only does the Indonesian government stress this recognition, but when doing research about the region before arriving, one resource remarked that, "for many people Minahasa and Christianity are inseparable... there is probably no other region in Indonesia where so many people emphasize the close relationship between local or ethnic identity with Christianity" (Jonge, Parengkuan, Steenbrink 2008: 419). Therefore, having knowledge of

Minahasa's relationship with Christianity and colonialism sets one up to understand the landscape the Mawale Movement emerged out of and works within today.

Including GMIM in this historical account of Christianity and colonialism is also important because not only is it the largest denomination in Minahasa, giving it an immense amount of power not only religiously, but politically and socially, many members of the Mawale Movement are also members of GMIM. Some members of the movement are even professors or students at Universitas Kristen Indonesia di Tomohon (UKIT) a GMIM-affiliated university. As they try to separate a Minahasan identity from an innately Christian one, many are working within and through the Church to do so, making the history of this Church and history of Christianity important in the work of Mawale.

## B. First Impressions

As mentioned above, I came into this field work period with this impression that Christianity and being a Minahasan were inseparable entities. I had spent the previous months of my semester primarily in Bali where Hinduism is firmly embedded into Balinese culture that I expected to find this similar phenomenon in Minahasa. Within the first 20 minutes of my car ride from the airport, I spotted churches on almost every block and Christian symbolism wherever I looked. On a main road going through Manado, I saw a massive statue of Jesus on top of a hill overlooking Manado. His hands were extended, as if blessing the city. As I drove into Tomohon, almost every home had Christmas decorations up, whether signs reading "Merry Christmas!" with bright Christmas lights or large Santa Claus cutouts. The churches were grandiose with western styles of architecture donning huge portraits of a white Jesus.

I had originally come to study the relationship between local religion/culture and Christianity, so I came with this assumption that Minahasa had a Christian identity and nothing I saw or heard initially challenged this. As I discovered and became acquainted with the Mawale Movement, however, these perceptions quickly changed as I will discuss below. I include this first impression prior to my writings on Mawale and identity because in the grand landscape of Minahasa, the Mawale Movement is rather small and a majority of people do not have knowledge of the movement or their work. These first assumptions are not out of the ordinary, but rather fall more into line with the way outsiders and most Minahasan people see Christianity fitting into this culture, as noted in Jonge, Parengkuan, and Steenbrink's quote above.

### **The Mawale Movement**

#### **A. What is the Mawale Movement?**

It can be best described as a cultural movement that is working to rediscover Minahasan identity. In an interview with Denni and Green, two Mawale members, they relayed that Minahasa is characterized by its ever-changing nature and so it constantly adapts to changes happening to them. In the process of this change, Minahasan people have forgotten the roots of Minahasan culture and the traditions and values it was founded upon.<sup>2</sup> As Christianity and colonialism came, so did their western ways of socializing and thinking, both of which do not strongly emphasize traditional cultural values and caused a lack of roots in traditional Minahasan values and practices.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the Mawale Movement is focused upon rediscovering the traditions, values, and culture of Minahasa.

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<sup>2</sup> Greenhill Weol and Denni Pinontoan, peronal communication, 16 November 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Ibu Ruth Wangkai, personal communication, 23 November 2015.



However, this home is not solely found in the past. Mawale does not end at only looking into the past; they use modern modes of thinking and communication to understand and interpret the knowledge, practices, and values of the past. By doing this, tradition becomes relevant and important today. At an art event I was able to attend in my stay, many of the artists depicted aspects of traditional culture but put personal, modern spins on them. By doing this they created meaning that is important to them today, even if it is different from the meaning of the past.

A large part of Mawale's work is focused on contextualizing the information of both the past and present. In the interviews and conversations I had with members, they stressed that they are different from many other traditionalist movements because they do not stop by just looking into the past. Often those groups get stuck in the old tradition and have a hard time responding to modern society and the differences it has from the society of before. By putting the past and present into dialogues, they can find relevance in the past and use it to construct a future rooted in Minahasan identity. They contextualize the information using art, poetry, theatre, blogs, and discussions amongst members, to name a few. Some of their events and discussions explicitly address traditional culture while others center solely on current issues. In them all there is a common thread of making sense of being a Minahasan today. Mawale is a group of artists, theologians, and intellectuals who collectively found that they want to "go back home", which is what *mawale* roughly translates as. In an interview with a Mawale member, Fredy, he expressed to me that Minahasan people have been pulled out of their home, whether consciously or not, and in order for them to understand who they are and how they fit into the world, they need to "build a home" that gives meaning to being a Minahasan<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Fredy Wowor, personal communication, 23 November 2015.

## B. History of group

The Mawale Movement formed in the late 90s, and officially became a movement at the end of 2004. At the time of formation, many were at university and felt that they were lost and in search of an identity to hold on to. As Denni explained to me, he and the other founding members of Mawale felt that they had no idea who they were and how they fit into Minahasa as a place and identity. Some of them were involved with a literature group called “Manadonese Literature” that wrote poems and stories in Manadonese. At the time literature was almost exclusively produced in Indonesian, which they saw as a way the current regime was enforcing unification across the country and they felt oppressed by this “zombification” by the government as Freddy relayed to me<sup>5</sup>. Writing in Manadonese was not only a sign of opposition to the current regime, but it also allowed them to express themselves in ways that Indonesian could not. They felt at home in this language and found that it resonated not only in themselves but local people who read their work. Manadonese Literature then encountered theological and theatrical groups that had similar beliefs and yearnings for a Minahasan identity. Together they formed what is now the Mawale Movement. They quickly started putting on events, holding discussions, and having conversations amongst one another about how they wanted this movement to look and act. They liked that they were a movement filled with people who had different experiences and disciplines because it gave them the opportunity to explore many different facets of Minahasan life<sup>6</sup>.

From this formation time and on, the Mawale Movement has remained very active and passionate about their work, hosting events and discussions frequently and involving themselves in art and culture events put on by friends, whether these friends are participating in the

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<sup>5</sup> Freddy Wowor, personal communication, 23 November 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Greenhill Weol and Denni Pinontoan, personal communication, 16 November 2015.

movement or not. They do not have official membership<sup>7</sup>, set leadership roles, nor are they registered with the government as an organization. They want to avoid institutionalizing the movement at all costs because it was a central reason the group formed in the first place. From my own perspective, it appears that Mawale has about 20 active members<sup>8</sup> but around 50-70 individuals who attend Mawale's larger events. There is not pressure to attend every event, but to help out and attend when you can and if you want to. As is the spirit of Mawale and Minahasa, their arms are always open ready to welcome an old friend or a newcomer.<sup>9</sup>

### C. *Kita ya Kita!*

The following is a personal account of a Mawale event I was able to attend during my second week of staying in Minahasa. I close with this personal account before leading into identity, tradition, and Christianity because it gives a glimpse into the kinds of events Mawale puts on regularly. They discuss, show art, and try answering difficult life questions amongst their group of smoking, long-haired men. This personal account provides only one perspective of the Mawale Movement, but it is important to reveal this creative and passionate group of individuals and the kinds of questions they ask on a regular basis. They are a movement full of diverse ideas and people who are doing many things, and this event showcases that well:

I come upon a large two-story wooden house, one that appears very traditional in style – the entrance of the house is on the second floor, with the bottom floor gutted out and bare, as is typical of traditional homes – and am greeted by three or four men who usher myself and Erica,

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<sup>7</sup> While they do not have this official membership, I will refer to individuals involved in the movement as members out of ease and to avoid any confusion. From what

<sup>8</sup> By active I mean those who attend every Mawale meeting, all discussions, and events and are individuals who frequently organize or contribute to the movement.

<sup>9</sup> Greenhill Weol, personal communication, 20 November, 2015.

my advisor, to a small room that contains many different paintings and sculptures. I look around at the different paintings and see that some depict owls and others portraits of women, to name a few. Most paintings are in black and white, with only a few containing splashes of red paint. One picture hangs in the middle of the room, one side depicting a naked woman with a chained heart protruding from her chest, and the other side is a winged object that I am unsure how to accurately describe. Ken, the artist, comes up to us explaining that the painting is made out of recycled materials, namely egg cartons and newspaper. People shuffle in and out of the room and some are seated in this small room engaged in conversation with one another. Many of these people are men, most of whom have hair that goes beyond their shoulders and are wearing ripped jeans and t-shirts that have some religious or political symbolism.

After a while, these hippy-looking, scruffy men come together in this gallery-like room and one man, Ken, announces that a discussion will begin. Men seat themselves on the floor and begin smoking and passing around a bottle of *captikus*, a local liquor. Ken begins talking about how this event is put on by a community of independent artists who wanted to put on art shows in each other's homes. He said that fancy hotels are normally the only venue for artists to showcase their work, and for most artists this is not something they can afford nor is it a place where their art would be received well. They chose to show their art in each other's homes because it not only is a more laid-back environment, but it also gives more artists the chance to get involved in showing their work and gives the community an opportunity to see local art.

They chose to theme the event "*Kita ya Kita*", which roughly translate to "I am me." This theme came about at one of Mawale's events where they were discussing what it means to be a Minahasan woman. One woman present exclaimed, "*Kita!*" which means "me" in Manadonese. She said that in order to understand something about Minahasan women, one has to just look at

her. They loved the idea of “I am me” because it also answered the question, “Who are you/where are you from?” which they wanted to address in this exhibition. This theme gave viewers and artists alike a way to understand how the artists looked at Minahasa. While the art may have not been a concrete depiction of an element of Minahasan culture or tradition, it still revealed a way that these artists saw themselves and because they are a Minahasan person it tells a broader story about how they see Minahasa.

From here, the discussion shifted to broader questions of what they are trying to accomplish with this event and what it means to the communities that are outside of Mawale and those close to the movement. Some talked about the importance of moving these events from village to village so that they can get more artists involved and give more people from the villages the opportunity to see art that is produced by members within their own community. Fredy, a Mawale member, brought up that this event goes against the assumption that people in this generation do not care about culture or its continuation. They are coming together as Minahasan people who have something to say about Minahasan culture. Whether this is by depicting elements of traditional Minahasa, like a painting of a *waruga*, a traditional tomb, or modern portraits of Minahasan women – they all speak to broader messages of Minahasan culture in their own way.

This discussion continues for the next few hours with different people contributing thoughts and ideas, and people come and go from the discussion quite frequently. At one point a few men start playing a ukulele and begin singing traditional Minahasan tunes. It came out of a remark by Denni who said the atmosphere was too formal and traditional music would relax the environment. Personally, I did not know a situation could be more relaxed seeing that everyone was seated on the floor while smoking and drinking *captikus*. However, this singing seemed to

make conversation more easy-going. The atmosphere was laid-back and inviting and although I was an outsider I felt welcomed and included in the discussion.

This is the second Mawale Movement event I was able to attend throughout my three-week stay in Minahasa and it closely resembled other discussions or events I was able to attend. As mentioned above, I close this initial section about Mawale with my personal account of the event because it demonstrates their questions and discussions around Minahasan identity. It is a good starting place because with this background knowledge of the group and its history, the movement's integration of the arts with broader themes of Minahasan identity becomes apparent. They are a movement filled with long-haired men wearing ripped up jeans who all want to find roots and meaning in what it means to be a Minahasan person. Going forward, the work that Mawale is doing in building this home of Minahasan identity can be found in many different places whether that is the art on the wall or the discussions on the floor. They discuss the artists' work and how it connects to broader themes of being a Minahasan, demonstrating the kinds of questions Mawale is asking on a daily basis. Not only that, but this personal account of the event shows the ways I see and understand the movement. I find this important because the movement is built up of a diverse group of individuals who think in vastly different ways. Going forward, this event reveals the search for a Minahasan identity is a complicated, yet fruitful endeavor the members of Mawale constantly seek after.

## **Identity, Tradition, and Christianity in Mawale**

### **A. Identity**

Because my study heavily focuses on a people's understanding of identity, it is worth noting what I mean when using the word, 'identity.' While there is an extensive amount of

anthropological work on identity, my use of the word is primarily based upon the ways that the Mawale Movement and my informants spoke about identity. From a scholarly point of view, however, Rita Smith Kipp provides a helpful perspective with her studies of on identity in her book *Dissociated Identities*, referring to it as the way that people understand and make up their sense of self. An identity is the result of many different forces, like religion, ethnicity, or class, within a given region or community. While she is able to articulate how each of these forces contributes to the creation of identity, my short research period only allows me to look at identity in her more general description of the term. Within her work she discusses ethnic identity extensively, and her idea that a sense of self draws from a larger community relates to my study of the Mawale Movement and Minahasa (Kipp 1993: 3-7).

The Mawale Movement regularly discusses the idea of identity and I wanted to work alongside what I heard in order to honor their work and ideas. Ultimately this is my interpretation of identity based on Kipp as well as the conversations, discussions, and observations I had with members of the movement. Throughout this paper, I will refer to identity as one's sense of self that comes out of a set of common characteristics and culture within a particular region or area. I understood Mawale using identity in both this collective and individualistic way because it employs both shared traits of a created community and one's personal understanding and reflection of these traits, which, as I will shared later, is important in the formation of a Minahasan identity. I will refer to identity in this fashion, unpacking what the assumed Christian Minahasan identity means to the Mawale Movement and how they are attempting to rediscover it.

## B. Mawale and Christianity

As mentioned previously, for most people within Minahasa and outsiders alike, Christianity is an integral part of Minahasan identity. The area of Minahasa is often defined by a permeating Christian culture, and for most Minahasans the inclusion of Christianity within their identity is not problematic but life-giving and necessary. Mawale does not aim to reprimand or deny its inclusion in the formation of identity; rather, they are trying to think beyond it. To them, problems arise when Christianity is the qualifier for being a Minahasan person. Increasingly there are more and more people in Minahasa who do not identify as Christian, but if Christianity remains the set requirement for qualifying as Minahasa, where would this leave the increasing amount of Minahasans who do not identify as Christian? Their sense of self would be denied, and Mawale wants Minahasa to embody the values of openness, inclusivity, and respect it was founded upon.

During many of my conversations about this with Mawale members, they mentioned an example of a Muslim community in Minahasa, known as Java Tondano. They are originally from Java, but were forced to leave many centuries ago and found solace in Minahasa, marrying local Minahasan people and adopting Minahasan cultural practices and values. Ibu Ruth, a professor at UKIT and Mawale member, expressed that they strongly identify as Minahasan people today and it would be wrong for other Minahasans to deny their sense of self because of their Islamic practices.<sup>10</sup> She also relates this to the thinking that a Minahasan person can only be someone who can trace ancestry back to the founders of Minahasa, believing Minahasa is becoming a more and more diverse place and so our understanding of Minahasan identity needs to be fluid

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<sup>10</sup> Ibu Ruth Wangkai, personal communication, 23 November 2015.



and ever-changing.<sup>11</sup> Other members of Mawale shared similar sentiments, finding that they do not want to inhibit or prevent people from finding their sense of self in Minahasa.

One of the most fascinating aspects of the Mawale Movement is that while they are trying to critically analyze this assumed Christian identity, a large majority of members in the movement are Christian. Not only that, but many are professors or students at the local Christian university, or active participants within their church community. In my mind, I would have thought that people associated with Mawale would not strongly hold a Christian faith because many of their conversations revolve around the construction of an identity without the requirement of a Christian faith. What I learned, however, is that *individually* their Christian faith means something to their Minahasan identity. The difference from them and other Minahasans outside Mawale is that their Christianity, or whatever religion they possess, is part of their own personal construction of identity, not the collective identity of being Minahasan. Mawale focuses much of their work on discussions and at events where people discuss what Minahasan identity is as a whole. This has led to the shared view that it is more impactful and fruitful to put Minahasan traditions at the forefront, and not religion.<sup>12</sup>

Along with this, Denni pointed out that the Christian identity that is assumed to be the foundation of Minahasa identity is a fractured one. In Minahasa, there are many denominations all of which hold very different practices, doctrine, and ways of expressing their denomination of Christianity. Putting Minahasa and its people under the umbrella of a Christian identity creates many problems, forcing people into a box that has porous and underdetermined walls. The Mawale Movement wants to give people the tools to forge a Minahasan identity that frees them

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<sup>11</sup> Ibu Ruth Wangkai, personal communication, 23 November 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Greenhill Woel and Denni Pinontoan, personal communication, 16 November 2015.

from any of the limitations or boxes they once felt constrained within. Because of this, they avoid Christianity in their collective dialogue about Minahasan identity.<sup>13</sup>

From my time with Denni and other Mawale members, I have found that their motivation for leaving out Christianity not only comes from this fractured Christian identity that Minahasa possesses, but also their personal experiences within the Church, specifically GMIM. Most of the Mawale members are part of GMIM, whether they are professors or students at UKIT, a GMIM-affiliated university. While GMIM started out as a church grounded in tradition and what it means to be a locally-based Minahasan person, the Church has shifted their focus away from tradition and now onto what Mawale refers to as a “success theology.” The Church has become institutionalized to a point where they are now more concerned with making money and giving power to the leaders of the Church. According to Denni and Green, they are becoming an increasingly exclusive church, especially with their rejection of the LGBT community and lack of interfaith dialogues with Muslim communities. They are centralizing the Church to limit the amount of voices heard from church members, and the Mawale Movement has found discomfort and problems with this direction. Thus, they are vocal about their qualms with the Church in hopes that action will be taken, but at this moment little work has taken place.<sup>14</sup>

The Mawale Movement carries out work that directly conflicts with GMIM, which has led me to believe that a possible reason why the movement is working to disassociate Minahasan identity from Christianity is because the most powerful Christian voice in Minahasa continues to preach messages that run counter to the ideals of inclusivity and respect they believe Minahasa was founded upon. Also, GMIM tends to reject traditional practices within worship, not seeing the cultural and spiritual value in embracing Minahasan traditions as ways of worshiping today.

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<sup>13</sup> Greenhill Weol and Denni Pinontoan, personal communication, 16 November 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Greenhill Weol and Denni Pinontoan, personal communication, 16 November 2015.

GMIM favors streamlined doctrine and ways of thinking, which directly opposes Mawale's push for critical thinking and self-interpretation.<sup>15</sup> The Mawale Movement generally does not like powerful institutions because they silence many people by giving power to a few, and GMIM is increasingly a culprit of these actions. This relationship with GMIM is a source of motivation for Mawale's critical analysis of Christianity within Minahasan identity. It is not only about allowing for a fluid, dynamic, self-interpretive identity, but is an act of criticism and resistance against the dominating Church of Minahasa.

Ultimately, the Mawale Movement is concerned with collectively searching for an identity that is grounded upon the traditions of Minahasa and modern modes of communication. When an assumed Christian identity conflicts with Minahasan people's ability to construct an identity, the Mawale Movement is trying to critically analyze this assumption and bring to light the multi-faceted identity that can emerge without the presence of Christianity. Christianity can be part of one's personal identity as a Minahasan person, but the Mawale Movement is trying to show that it is not a requirement to construct and live out a meaningful Minahasan identity.

### C. Mawale and Minahasan Tradition

As mentioned throughout, the Mawale Movement heavily emphasizes looking back into traditional Minahasan culture and religion to find roots and meaning today. Throughout my interactions with the movement, I was able to attend events about traditional culture and religion and converse with many members about what this tradition was and what it means to them today. Along with members in Mawale, I asked others outside the movement how they understood and thought about traditional Minahasan culture. In conversations with members and outsiders I found similar stories and values of traditional life, but different ways of interpreting what they

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<sup>15</sup> Ibu Ruth Wangkai, personal communication, 23 November 2015.

mean today. In all cases they made meanings out of the past, but these meanings had a different role in the formation of a Minahasan identity today.

As I just pointed out, for Mawale, it appears that the past is not a static book of facts and stories but a collection of signs and ideas that ground them in the land and their ancestry as people from Minahasa. They look back on Minahasan tradition to critically analyze the assumed Christian identity and forge one grounded in tradition and modern thought rather than Christianity. They construct meaning from the past by putting it in dialogue with modern modes of communication. Traditional Minahasan culture and religion, as I will explain below, are spaces that all Minahasan people belong, regardless of ethnicity, religion, or ancestry.

To give a brief overview of Minahasan traditional culture and religion, it is best to start with the story of Lumimu'ut and Toar, the mythical Mother and Father of Minahasa. In my interviews, when I would ask about traditional Minahasan culture and religion, almost every informant started by telling me the story of the origin of Minahasa. The story varies between each sub-ethnic group or village, but each version I heard contained a similar plot and ending. The story starts with Lumimu'ut, the first human in Minahasa. There were differing opinions about where she came from, some saying she came from the earth itself<sup>16</sup> and others saying she was a Chinese princess thrown into the region.<sup>17</sup> She gave birth to Toar and raised him to adulthood. After Toar grew to a man, the two were approached by a spirit or messenger<sup>18</sup>, Karema, who told them they needed to separate from each other and go out and multiply. Karema went to a tree and pulled off two sticks, the same size, and handed Lumimu'ut and Toar each a stick. Karema told them that if they met someone with the same size stick they cannot

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<sup>16</sup> Pdt. Renata Ticonuwu, personal communication, 17 November 2015.

<sup>17</sup> Judi Turambi, personal communication, 16 November 2015.

<sup>18</sup> I was never given a clear picture of who Karema was, other than being some sort of messenger. I am not sure if Karema (also unsure of Karema's gender) is divine or human, but in interviews people referred to her as they would refer a Christian angel.

marry him or her because it means they are mother and son. If the sticks are different lengths however, they are no longer mother and son and can marry and reproduce. They head off in opposite directions and they travel all over Minahasa searching for a partner to reproduce with. As they travel, Toar's stick begins to grow and change. Eventually Toar and Lumimu'ut stumble upon one another and notice their sticks are no longer the same length. Because their sticks are different, it means they are no longer mother and son and can marry and reproduce with each other. They marry soon after and reproduce, becoming the mother and father of Minahasa.<sup>19</sup>

This story is useful in many ways to understand traditional Minahasan culture and its relation to Minahasa today. Firstly, it points to how Minahasan traditional religion is heavily focused on nature and the signs and life it can create. Traditionally, nature was the way Minahasan people understood the world around them, taking signs from the weather, plants, and animals—as we met in the origin story. In an interview with a *tonaas*, a traditional Minahasan healer or spiritual guide, who is also an active member in Mawale, he emphasized how central nature is in traditional culture and religion. Because humans came from nature, it should be celebrated and respected. We are not better than other animals or the environment because we all ultimately came from God.<sup>20</sup> Humans are in relationships with the environment, and these relationships require care, respect, and communication. Because of this, many of the traditional practices revolved around being in nature and values formed out of this respecting relationship.<sup>21</sup> In many of my interviews, when we discussed traditional religion they would almost always refer to the ways in which people worshipped stones, water sources, rain, or other parts of the

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<sup>19</sup> Paraphrased from two separate interviews: 1. Pdt. Renata Ticonuwu, personal communication, 17 November 2015. 2. Judi Turambi, personal communication, 16 November 2015.

<sup>20</sup> When he referred to God in our interview, I do not think he exclusively meant the Christian God. He did not mix Christian language when he spoke about Christian religion, which leads me to believe that to him, God is the same God as before, and is the Higher Being regardless of religion.

<sup>21</sup> Rinto Taroreh, personal communication, 26 November 2015.

natural world. Some informants, especially those outside the Mawale Movement stressed that this worshipping of stones was really a disguised act of worshipping the Christian God.<sup>22</sup> Others, especially those within Mawale, saw the traditions in a broader sense and more as ways to understand each other and the world around them.<sup>23</sup> In both cases, however, they all acknowledged that Minahasan traditional people were intertwined in nature.

This relationship extends beyond a person's relationship with nature, and speaks to Minahasan values of how to treat one another: working together without expectations, being open and inclusive, and respecting and caring for one another. These values extended across all peoples I talked to and they took pride in sharing them with me. While for some people these values persisted as a result of Christianity taking hold in the region<sup>24</sup>, everyone I talked to spoke of these values as Minahasan and believed them to be unique to Minahasa and its people.

Most people also relayed to me that Minahasan people are extremely open, ever-changing people, and this stems from traditional Minahasan culture. I heard many times that when confronted with change Minahasan people accepted it with open arms and very little resistance. The story of Lumimu'ut and Toar speaks to this message of their ever-changing spirit when Toar's stick grows in length giving him the opportunity to reproduce with Lumimu'ut and create the future generations of Minahasan people. He readily accepted this growth and change without any resistance, and Minahasan people have embraced this characteristic up until today. When Christianity came then, Minahasan people exhibited this openness by accepting the religion and the western ways of socializing and thinking that came with it.<sup>25</sup> While they were accepting Christianity and western ways of living, many left behind the traditional practices they were

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<sup>22</sup> Judi Turambi, personal communication, 16 November 2015.

<sup>23</sup> Rinto Taroreh, personal communication, 26 November 2015.

<sup>24</sup> Judi Turambi, personal communication, 16 November 2015.

<sup>25</sup> Greenhill Woel and Denni Pinontoan, personal communication, 16 November 2015

founded upon. This was a result not only of their ever-changing nature, but the suppression of practices by missionaries. If they appeared to conflict with Christianity in any way they were forbidden. Through this, their close relationship with nature diminished and people became more preoccupied with modernization and western progression.

The moment when Christianity entered into Minahasa, is precisely the moment when many Mawale members believed Minahasan identity began to wane. While the tradition was not completely forgotten, it became an idea of the past and many people stopped using it to construct meaning in their lives. As mentioned earlier, the founders of the Mawale Movement realized that they did not have anything to ground themselves upon and felt as if they were without an identity that was grounded in Minahasa. Eventually, Christianity permeated almost every aspect of Minahasan life, and for most Minahasans their identity became inseparable from it. Mawale does not want to fight the Christian presence in Minahasa, but rather have found that people need to think beyond their Christianity to find an identity grounded in their homeland. They find that looking back at the traditions of the past and its values has allowed them to feel like they belong in Minahasa and possess an identity with meaning<sup>26</sup>.

Mawale intentionally constructs meaning out of the past. As mentioned before, compared to many other traditionalist groups throughout Minahasa they do not treat the past as a static entity. Others find themselves stuck in the past because many traditions and ways of life within these traditions are not compatible with life today. The Mawale Movement has recognized this conundrum and tries to pick through the past and find how it is relevant today. While some traditions need to be left in the past,<sup>27</sup> others need to be rediscovered in the context of today. More often than not, meaning can be found when looking into the past as long as one approaches

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<sup>26</sup> Paraphrased from Fredy Wowor, personal communication, 23 November 2015

<sup>27</sup> Like headhunting, which Minahasa practiced widely before Christian missionaries came to the area, for example.

it with a willingness to apply it to life today.<sup>28</sup> Practices and traditional culture need to be contextualized into life today because Minahasan people are facing different problems that are very different than the Minahasan people of the past. Members of the Mawale Movement constantly stressed to me that they need to contextualize everything because whether it is Christian doctrine or a traditional dance, meaning needs to be read within a Minahasan context. Only then will it be relevant to the formation and rediscovery of Minahasan identity today. The meaning that is created out of this contextualization is ultimately up to the individual, but through meanings often looking back to the ideals and values that Minahasa was founded upon like openness, inclusivity, and respect for both humans and nature.<sup>29</sup>

I often heard people from the Mawale Movement discuss this rediscovery of the past at length and found myself confused as to how this contextualization was implemented and expressed. Fortunately, I was able to attend one of their major events, a *Pesta Seni Budaya* or an “Art and Culture Party.” It was an amazing opportunity to see precisely how the Mawale Movement attempts to rediscover Minahasan identity and contextualize the past through art, dance, theatre, literature, and music.

I walked into the auditorium at UKIT, the local Christian university in Tomohon, and I saw chairs lined around the room with a large banner at the front depicting a large, colorful owl with the words *Pesta Seni Budaya* and *Merayakan Minahasa Hari Ini* (Celebrate Minahasa Today) in big bold letters. Next to this sign were paintings, many of which I had seen at the art exhibition earlier this month.<sup>30</sup> There were newspapers all along the back wall on the left side of the stage there was a large *waruga*, a traditional tomb, made out of these same newspapers. Throughout the day I witnessed dances and theatrical performances and listened to poetry and

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<sup>28</sup> Greenhill Woel and Denni Pinontoan, personal communication, 16 November 2015.

<sup>29</sup> Greenhill Woel, personal communication, 20 November 2015.

<sup>30</sup> This is the same art exhibition I describe above.



short stories. Everyone who went on stage was passionate and committed to their performance. Their performances seemed important and, even though I could understand little of it, appeared to have a higher purpose than entertainment.

The first performance I saw was the *kawasaran* dance, a traditional Minahasan dance, performed by the *tonaas* and some members of the Mawale Movement. It was performed with all men who were holding swords and shields dressed up in red garments with feather headdresses and skulls of various animals sown in various places on the costume. The performance was intense to say the least, with the dancers yelling and swinging their swords at one another. Their eyes were intense and threatening, and I got the impression that this was some sort of war dance. This was the first time since arriving in Minahasa that I had seen someone in traditional clothing, which led to the realization of how little Minahasan traditional culture exists, at least visibly, today.

While I watched this performance, I came to understand why the Mawale Movement is performing traditional dances, or writing and reading poetry that speaks of traditional Minahasan values. As Fredy explained to me, they are trying to use tradition as a vehicle to live today. While the *kawasaran* dance was created in the past, it is still performed today, giving them the opportunity to construct a modern meaning for it. “To embrace culture means to live today,” as Fredy put it. Their ancestors performed this dance and embraced the tradition while they were living, making meaning out of it for their life at that time. Minahasan people today remain connected to their ancestors through the dance, but have the opportunity to construct new meanings. Not only in this dance but in all forms of art, a new purpose that celebrates being a Minahasan today can be found.<sup>31</sup> These words helped me understand the importance many Mawale members hold in the continuation of tradition. From my understanding, they do not see

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<sup>31</sup> Fredy Wowor, personal communication, 24 November 2015.

the tradition as a static entity but as a fluid, modern performance that was only created in a past time. This dance alongside the modern forms of art creates this dynamic picture of celebrating Minahasa today because as they often remark, both tradition and modern worlds contribute to constructing an identity as a Minahasan person today. Minahasa is a diverse, ever-changing place and by putting on events that showcases a diverse body of people doing both modern and traditional performances, the Mawale Movement is making a statement about finding a future rooted in Minahasan identity that draws from all parts of Minahasa, whether in the past or present.

The Mawale Movement is also showcasing that Minahasa and Christianity do not need to be connected in order to celebrate being a Minahasan person. They are not denying Christianity or even critically analyzing it throughout the event but rather showing the beauty and complexities within Minahasan identity that can be found outside the Church. From my short time there, I noticed that outside of Mawale, most large community events revolve around the Church or Christianity in some way, whether that is church every Sunday, or the constant funerals, weddings, and confirmations I noticed from the car every day. Mawale created a space of celebration and discovery that is based upon the dialogue between tradition and modern culture. While for most Minahasans modern culture would include Christianity, the Mawale Movement sends a message of inclusivity and openness to all peoples of Minahasa. As Green and Denni relayed to me, “Mawale is trying to think without a Christian identity and think beyond it. Mawale is trying to think of Minahasa as a home for everyone because all people will have the right to live in this future Minahasan home.”<sup>32</sup> This traditional and modern event aids Mawale in the building of their open, inclusive, ever-changing home.

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<sup>32</sup> Greenhill Woel and Dennis Pinontoan, personal communication, 16 November 2015.

Based on the previous discussion, the Mawale Movement is utilizing traditional Minahasan culture to channel and aid in this rediscovery of Minahasan identity. They draw from a variety of sources that all return to the ideals and values that Minahasa was built upon: openness, inclusivity, respect, and its ever-changing spirit. By looking back on traditions, they give Minahasan people the opportunity to find meanings from the past that are relevant today, allowing them to craft a personal Minahasan identity. An event like *Pesta Seni Buaday* is a perfect example of this work because it demonstrates that there are countless, diverse ways of thinking and expressing one's feelings and identity. The event is a celebration that opens and welcomes all Minahasan people to search and embrace their Minahasan identity. By avoiding Christianity throughout the event, they send a message that Minahasan identity can be celebrated and discovered without Christianity. This traditional and modern event is another step in building a home in Minahasa that is characterized by the Minahasan traditional values of being open, inclusive, and ever-changing.

#### E. Mawale and Minahasan Identity

Throughout the course of this paper, I have explored the ways in which the Mawale Movement is exploring and attempting to rediscover Minahasan identity, but what exactly is this Minahasan identity? What is this home Mawale refers to and why does it need building? The history of Christianity and colonialism revealed that traditional culture and religion was suppressed, but through interviews I had with non-Mawale individuals, these individuals only painted a positive picture of the “modern, western, Christian place” that they understood as Minahasa today.<sup>33</sup> Christianity was always part of the picture for these non-Mawale people's identities and Mawale goes against others' collective Christian identity by preaching a message

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<sup>33</sup> Bobbi (pseudonym used), personal communication, 16 November 2015.

that did not necessarily include this overtly-present religion. Also, Mawale's relationship with GMIM influences this avoidance of Christianity in their events because of their power over continuing this assumed Christian identity and conservative, institutional actions. In opposition of GMIM and the overall assumption of a collective Christian identity, they put on events and discussions that celebrate the richness found in Minahasan tradition.

While I laid out ways they draw on tradition and embrace its values in their programs above, the question of what Minahasan identity is to the Mawale Movement still remains. Minahasa is an increasingly diverse place and the more conversations I had with Mawale members the more I wondered what they thought Minahasan identity was within such a diverse body of individuals. They constantly talk about inclusivity and openness being part of a Minahasan and the thought of pinning down a definition of identity within this pluralism confused me.

After a week in Minahasa I was able to more formally interview Denni and Green. They often speak about identity explicitly within discussions and on social media, so I bluntly asked what Minahasan identity was to them. To my frustration and relief, they only told me that this was a difficult question to answer.<sup>34</sup> I realized that their difficulty in responding was not that they are unsure what Minahasan identity is; difficulty arises because they do not want to give a set, definitive answer. They are confident in what being Minahasan means to them but they do not want to define the collective experiences of all Minahasan people because it is a diverse, ever-changing place. By being too definite and concrete, troubles quickly arise: voices in the movement who might disagree with a concrete definition would become outsiders; questions would arise as to who has the power to define Minahasan identity; and, if concrete answers were given, could they change in the future? These troubles were contributing factors to why the

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<sup>34</sup> Greenhill Woel and Denni Pinontoan, personal communication, 16 November 2015.

Mawale Movement began in the first place and instilled caution in institutions and definitive, unmoving ideas.

As they explained to me, going forward in the movement they wanted to avoid these troubles as much as possible and steer their group in a direction that allowed them to collectively search for ways to answer personal questions of identity and belonging within a Minahasan context. This collective search is what makes Mawale unique in my eyes. They want to work together as a community to rediscover Minahasan identity because they all share a common past, Minahasan traditional culture, and want to forge a better tomorrow. This area has been so greatly affected by outsiders who brought other cultures and religions, that searching alone for a lost identity within a place that has left little cultural remnants on the surface is near impossible and far less fulfilling. Collectively they can have conversations and spaces to work through complicated questions with people who are dealing with similar questions and issues. The Mawale Movement “mobilizes people” to discover the importance of traditional culture and the fruitful dialogues it creates when given meaning in their lives both today and tomorrow. These events and discussions are the mobilizers that create intentional spaces for people to ask honest and personal questions about what it means to be a Minahasan person today.

Furthermore, by avoiding a concretely defined Minahasan identity the group is allowed to function inclusively and have room to grow in the future. Fredy explained to me that Mawale has not been the same from the beginning of movement’s formation but has changed and grown with the times and the needs they see present in the Minahasan community. They now understand what it means to be a Minahasan person differently, and this actually reinforces and encourages their rediscovery of Minahasan identity. Instead of being frustrated and stuck in a concrete conclusion, it makes rediscovery not a static, but a dynamic process that encourages constant

dialogue and conversation amongst individuals in and outside the group.<sup>35</sup> Ultimately the decision lies within the individual to make sense of what these events, discussions, and personal discoveries mean to them, but the Mawale Movement wants this personal discovery to be amongst friends and those who similarly care about defining what it means to be a Minahasan person.

From these conversations with Mawale members, my personal discoveries, and the knowledge gained from the ideals and practices of traditional Minahasan culture, I constructed what I found Minahasan identity to be to the Mawale Movement: a dynamic, fluid, self-definitive identity that is based upon traditional Minahasan values of openness, inclusivity, and the yearning for togetherness. The way a Minahasan makes meaning of this broad understanding of identity is solely up to them, but from what I observed in the past three weeks, all Mawale members I spoke to and observed shared these characteristics in the way they spoke about Minahasan identity. They want to separate themselves from an assumed, uniform, Christian identity and create a space for honest, creative, important dialogue amongst one another that not only aids in personal discovery but builds them a home where they belong. *Mawale* means “building a home” and by establishing a foundation rooted in their traditions and values, a house full of progressive, intellectual, creative, grounded individuals is built. It is not only the house for today, but the house for the future.

While I am only scratching the surface of Minahasan identity and the work Mawale is doing, this is a good place to start. As Green said to me about his idea of identity, “This is not a conclusion, but a starting place to understand the Mawale Movement and our work in rediscovering Minahasan identity.<sup>36</sup>” My ideas and conclusions are not set or definitive

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<sup>35</sup> Fredy Wowol, personal communication, 23 November 2015

<sup>36</sup> Greenhill Woel, personal communication, 30 November 2015.

definitions either, but rather places to understand from one perspective how the Mawale Movement is working to mobilize people with the tools to look back on traditions and make them relevant today. They want Minahasa and its people to embody its traditional values of openness, inclusivity, and respect. To achieve this goal, they are crafting collective searches for personal meaning and fulfillment.

## **Conclusion**

I have found through my short three weeks in Minahasa that the topic of identity is a complicated endeavor to embark upon. It is impossible to come to a concrete conclusion, yet trying to understand one's identity is extremely important to understanding yourself. The Mawale Movement has fully embraced this endeavor making it one of my fascinations with the movement during my stay in Minahasaa. They love asking hard questions and critiquing the social and political systems they were part of, all the while smoking far too many cigarettes. They are a movement that comprises a wide range of individuals, from those who express themselves through photography, others who perform modern theatrical pieces, or others who engage with theology to find meaning in their lives. This diversity allows them to explore Minahasa and each other. Ultimately this group wants to engage themselves and the wider Minahasan community in a dialogue about who they are today and who they want to be tomorrow.

This paper aims to address this dialogue they are trying to engage in by asking the question, "What is Minahasan identity to the Mawale Movement?" Through my conversations, discussions, and observations, I was able to draw conclusions as to how I see them understanding Minahasan identity today and what they want it be in the future. Any conclusions I formulate are

not definitive, or even necessarily representative of the beliefs of the Mawale Movement, but they are a result of the limited amount of conversations, discussions, and events I attended in my short time in North Sulawesi.

In brief summary, the Mawale Movement is critically analyzing the assumption that Christianity identity and Minahasan identity are inseparable. By looking to the past and engaging it with present forms of communication they construct a meaning that is relevant to life today. This critical analysis of Christian and Minahasan identity does not aim to delete Christianity from the picture of identity, but rather position Minahasan people to think beyond it. I found that it emerged from two main sources: the first from the growing diversity in Minahasa. The Mawale Movement wants to embrace this openness and inclusivity and an assumed Christian identity would not allow all to be welcomed into the Minahasan community. The second is Mawale's relationship with GMIM. GMIM is incredibly powerful, preaching a message that embraces the Christian Minahasan identity, and in opposition to this and their conservative policies, the Mawale Movement tries to disassociate itself from Christianity. By looking back on the tradition and the values that founded Minahasa, all people are welcome to embrace a Minahasan identity. The home they build becomes rooted a tradition they all share and can draw upon for personal meaning.

These conversations and observations about Christianity and Minahasan tradition gave me glimpses into how the Mawale Movement understands identity. I have found that they are striving for a dynamic, fluid identity based upon these traditional Minahasan values of openness, inclusivity, and Minahasa's ever-changing spirit. The Mawale Movement strives to collectively search for identity while ultimately leaving its meaning and significance up to the individual. They are a movement that mobilizes people and provides them with the tools to come to a



personal understanding of who they are and how they fit into the world around them. The Mawale Movement is building a house full of creative, progressive, intellectual individuals. It is rooted in the richness of being a Minahasan person today. However, this house is not just for today, but for tomorrow and all days to come.

To conclude this study of Minahasan identity, I wanted to again thank the Mawale Movement for their patience, understanding, and openness with me as I attempted to research a topic far more complicated than I have demonstrated within this paper. Not only did I learn so much about Minahasa, Christianity, and identity, but I learned so much about myself. The Mawale Movement constantly exhibits characteristics of love, respect, and humility and my short time with them set an example of how to be a good person for my life. I will go forward with my life taking the lessons I learned from you with me. Thank you again!

### **Suggestions for Further Study**

There is so much more about the Mawale Movement that can be explored. I was only able to look at one small part of the Mawale Movement and the work they are doing. Some suggestions within the Mawale Movement would be to look at how the Mawale Movement interacts with art and other creative mediums, as I briefly explored within this. The ways they are expressing themselves and trying to convey broader messages about Minahasa is really unique and fascinating. It would also be very interesting to look at how the Mawale Movement is working alongside social justice and activist groups in the Minahasan area. They are doing quite a bit of work with the LGBT community and other interfaith groups, to name a few. They are an extremely open and inviting group, making whatever study interesting and engaging. Also, there

are other traditionalist movements in Minahasa, like *Brigade Manguni*, that would be fascinating to compare and contrast to the work the Mawale Movement is doing.

Besides Mawale, there is so much that can be explored in Minahasa as well. Compared to Bali or Java, the region has not been studied extensively, making for so many avenues to explore. It would be fascinating to look at the role of Christianity in Minahasa, specifically looking at the various denominations and how they interact with the greater Minahasan community. Also, it would be interesting to look at interfaith dialogues and religious tolerance within the region, especially because there is a growing Muslim population in Minahasa. The list of research possibilities is endless in the region, and I personally enjoyed going to Minahasa because it allowed me to see another part of Indonesia that is very different from areas visited prior.

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