

# Manifold connections

## The Minahasa region in Indonesia

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**Abstract:** This paper focuses on eastern Indonesia, and in particular on the Minahasa region of northern Sulawesi. It examines the links of this region with others in the archipelago, as well as with the state, from the early modern period through to the present, and tests the usefulness of the concepts of ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’ in understanding the nature of those links. A centre–periphery relationship is commonly defined in terms of geography, economy or power relations, but, as the paper argues, the definition can also rest on cultural or social factors. The paper also suggests the possibility of the simultaneous or successive existence of several centres and many peripheries.

**Keywords:** boundaries; economic history; ethnicity; Minahasa; Timor

‘Robust pluralism’ is Anthony Reid’s characterization of the political situation that has prevailed in the Indonesian archipelago for centuries (Reid, 1998, p 29). Before the heyday of colonial rule, many large and small realms and commercial centres, each with its own characteristics, spread their networks, based on tribute and trade, over the archipelago and beyond. Today, pluralism is back, or is at least more manifest. Unitary and dichotomous images of Indonesia seem to belong to the past: that is, to the late colonial period, and to the first 50 years of independence. The Republic of Indonesia, whose unitary structure and centralized functioning was for decades anxiously and vehemently defended by its rulers, is now being subjected to a process of decentralization. Furthermore, the dichotomous image presented in many studies, with Java and neighbouring islands as the politico-economic centre of gravity, needs some adaptation. Although the notion of a split between a centre and peripheries is not completely misleading, the reality is more complex. The polycentricity and diversity of the archipelago – its pluralism – although different from that in the nineteenth century, has continued to exist.

In this paper, I will focus on eastern Indonesia, and in particular on the Minahasa region in northern Sulawesi. The links of this region with others, as well as with the state, will be examined over a long period, and the usefulness of concepts of centre and periphery in approaching this issue will be assessed. These twin concepts may turn out to be convenient analytical tools when employed in a historical perspective, admitting the possibility of the simultaneous or successive existence of several centres and many peripheries, connected by complex links. A centre–periphery relationship is usually defined in terms of geography, economy or power relations, but the definition can also rest on cultural or social factors. In the following sections, I consider various dichotomies and their application to Indonesia. The subsequent discussion of the history of Minahasa and its connections may show that this region is of particular interest, especially in view of the recent developments in an increasingly pluralistic Indonesia.

### **Centre and periphery**

Before ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’ became household terms in social studies, a similar terminology was already in use in the official discourse about Indonesia. In colonial times, the Dutch allotted the tag of *buitengewesten* (outer regions or outer islands) to the regions outside Java, Madura and Bali. Later, such a division became familiar among an international academic public through the designation of Inner and Outer Indonesia applied by Clifford Geertz (1963, pp 12–37). He used the type of ecosystem as a criterion, pointing out the role of Western influence in the crystallization of the ‘radical economic dualism which came to characterize Indonesia’ (Geertz, 1963, p 62). Decisive, in his view, were the agricultural measures that the colonial government applied in parts of Java in the nineteenth century, which became known under the name of *Cultuurstelsel* (Cultivation System).

In the early modern period, Java, ecologically and demographically distinct in the South East Asian insular world, had a prominent role in trade, and some of its realms enjoyed far-reaching power. Soon after its arrival in the archipelago, the VOC moved its Asian headquarters from the Moluccas to West Java, which was closer to the main trade crossroads, the Straits of Malaka (Ricklefs, 1981, p 26). The latter zone was, until well into the nineteenth century, the economic centre of South East Asia. It is worth noting that some of today’s more marginal regions of Indonesia had closer and more intense connections with the

trade hubs such as Malaka and later Singapore, than had Java (Lindblad, 1996). This proves the relativity of 'Outer' and 'Inner', which is further underlined by Dick's expression 'Outer Island of Java' (cited in Lindblad, 1996, p 530). The situation changed however, and during the nineteenth century Geertz's distinction of Inner and Outer was more useful. Indeed, the intervention of the colonial rulers contributed significantly to the nature and scale of the present superiority of position of Java, both economic and political.

The very territory to which tags such as Outer and Inner were attached is another outcome of Western intervention. The borders of the colonial state had their origins in commercial and political contacts and other accidents of history. They were outlined in the course of the nineteenth century and reached their final shape by about 1914. The boundaries, calculated with great precision and transferred to maps,<sup>1</sup> would continue as the contours of the territory of the independent state of Indonesia, notwithstanding some notorious violations of this principle, especially in Timor.

With the clear demarcation of borders, the relations between the people residing on the two sides declined in importance and intensity. Neighbouring or previously connected regions, once absorbed into distinct states, had to resign themselves to acquiescing in different regulations regarding the mobility of commodities and labour. Tariffs (and the possibility of conflicts in cases of non-observance) curtailed interstate movements.<sup>2</sup> On Timor, for example, the border that was ratified in 1859 by the Netherlands and Portugal cut through areas inhabited by the same ethno-linguistic groups and formally severed links between indigenous realms that had stood in a mutual, or tributary, relationship. Quite often, the Portuguese authorities arrested inhabitants of Netherlands East Indies territory suspected of contraband trading.<sup>3</sup> But maritime borders also caused problems, as in South East Asia the sea was the main transport route and means of connection for many indigenous people, while Europeans tended to consider it a self-evident barrier.

<sup>1</sup> The 'geographical societies' had a major role here, for example in Portugal regarding Timor. See Locher-Scholten, 1994, pp 148–154; see also Anderson, 1991, pp 173–178; Pélissier, 1996, pp 180–183.

<sup>2</sup> Krugman, 1991, pp 71–72, 79, referring to Europe and North America.

<sup>3</sup> The usually less-than-kind treatment caused frictions. See Heymans, 1895, pp 56–58; Schouten, 2002b, pp 203–205. No data are at my disposal regarding any such actions by the Dutch.

In the Netherlands East Indies, control of the border areas was brought about through the expansion of the military and police forces, and of the corps of civil servants (Tagliacozzo, 2000, p 70). There were some complementary measures, especially those in the framework of the early twentieth-century so-called Ethical Policy, which, in addition to its stated purpose of raising the well-being of the native population, aimed at achieving a tighter state control (Schouten, 1998, p 189; Coté, 1996). These were elements of the colonial state formation process. During this process, the areas encompassed by the territory of the Netherlands East Indies became increasingly interrelated, economically and institutionally. A growing cohesion was favoured by government policy and by improving transport and communication techniques. Hence the realm under the sovereignty of the Dutch was ‘increasingly described as, for example in the Agrarian Law of 1870, a “state”’ (Tarling, 1998, p 5; see also Cribb, 1994, pp 3–5).

The links of the various regions with the rest of the Asian world, generally speaking, became less intense than those with Java. Thus, as Lindblad (1996, p 532) has remarked, the Outer Islands turned inwards. After the colonial period, political and economic power continued to be concentrated in Jakarta, the former Batavia. In the painful process leading to the official transfer of sovereignty in 1949, the Dutch had insisted on a federal constellation of the independent Indonesia. It would however take less than a year for the new state to adopt a unitary constitution, with Jakarta as its capital and central reference point.

### **A new dichotomy: the East is the rest?**

In recent years, it has become evident that, apart from the dichotomy ‘Java and the rest’, another division has been crystallizing in Indonesia. It is the one between the eastern and the western part, a division that, strikingly, coincides with the one common in natural history, based on the prevailing fauna.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the provinces considered to belong to eastern Indonesia were, in the period 1976–99: North Sulawesi, Central Sulawesi, South Sulawesi, Southeast Sulawesi, Irian Jaya, Maluku, Nusa Tenggara Barat, Nusa Tenggara Timur and East

<sup>4</sup> In the western part the fauna is typically Asian, and the East is the zone where animal life is like that of Australia and New Guinea. The East also includes the transition zone, Wallacea (roughly, the island of Sulawesi). See Wallace, 1962, pp 7–15; Severin, 1998, p 277.

Timor. Since 2000, several new provinces have been created through secession. The major development was the independence obtained by East Timor, the former Portuguese colony invaded and annexed by Indonesia in the period 1975–76.

In the final years of the Suharto regime, the eastern provinces were manifestly poorer than their western counterparts.<sup>5</sup> This can be blamed on natural conditions as well as on the type of interventions of government and private companies. For example, Nusa Tenggara Timur has a dry climate and few natural resources, and is further penalized by its location far away from markets. Because of these conditions, Timor en Onderhorigheden was probably the most neglected Residency in the Dutch colonial era (Robidé van der Aa, 1882, in Telkamp, 1979, p 72; Fasseur, 1997, p 79). Little has changed since then (Barlow *et al*, 1990; Barlow, 1991). On the other hand, Eastern Indonesia also encompasses the formerly thriving province of North Sulawesi. Its economic conditions have been going downhill, at least in comparison with Java, as is evident from its gross domestic product (GDP) which in the early 1970s was 80% of the national average, and in 1984 less than two-thirds (Sondakh and Jones, 1989, p 367).

The role of the regime in the growth of these disparities has been considerable. The development policy of the New Order was concentrated in the western islands, and projects focused on industrialization and the improvement of techniques for wet-rice cultivation. Irrigated rice fields, however, are to be found mainly in Java and Bali, and in only a few areas outside. Core and edges, or west and east: no matter which kind of division is applied, the political and economic superiority of Java was clear by the end of the twentieth century.<sup>6</sup>

### **Minahasa as a centre and as a periphery**

From a geographical perspective, North Sulawesi is a typical part of the periphery in Indonesia. It is a long way from Jakarta, and borders another state, the Philippines. A glance at the map may convey the feeling that the northernmost tip of Sulawesi, Minahasa, is like a finger that points outwards, away from Jakarta. The relations of this region with the state have been either strained or smooth, and sometimes both

<sup>5</sup> See the papers in Barlow and Hardjono, 1996.

<sup>6</sup> Soesastro, 1990, p 201; Booth, 1996, pp 120–121; Charras, 1993; Antweiler, 2000, p 147.

at the same time. In the course of the twentieth century, Minahasans through the medium of various tendencies and movements aimed for some special position for their region. This became most evident in the period around Indonesia's official independence, and some years thereafter in what has been called 'Indonesia's regional crisis'. Several studies about Minahasa's position within, and relations with, the Netherlands East Indies and Indonesia have been carried out, the most outstanding being that by David Henley (1996; see also Kosel, 1998).

In eastern Indonesia, North Sulawesi was by the early 1990s the province with the least unfavourable social and economic conditions.<sup>7</sup> History, especially Minahasa's history, can in part explain why. In the early modern period, this region being the point of convergence between the Celebes Sea and the Moluccas Sea, it had a high strategic value in Asia's trade. For traders the maritime zone was central, and this was flanked by the land areas of Minahasa and Mindanao, an idea conveyed beautifully in a map from 1699, drawn by a VOC artist, now in the State Archives in The Hague (Henley, 1995, pp 33, 46).

Asian and European powers coveted and contested Minahasa or, as it was called at the time, the region of Manado. It was part of the periphery of Ternate, its marginality being underlined by its absence in the fundamental mythology of Maluku (Andaya, 1993, pp 51–54, 85, 111–112). However, in Minahasa itself, myths and lexical traits attest to links with Ternate (Henley, 1993, pp 53–56). Ternate's sultans had great difficulties in asserting themselves as sovereigns. In 1563, for example, Sultan Hairun failed in his attempts to impede Portuguese conversion activities in the Manado area. The 1,500 persons then baptized stood for a certain Portuguese influence, although this proved to be only temporary, and Ternate maintained its claims.<sup>8</sup> During the greater part of the seventeenth century, still another Asian power claimed sovereignty over the region of Manado: the South Sulawesi (Makasarese) kingdom of Gowa.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Azis, 1996, pp 83–84. This conclusion is based on 1990 data regarding social indicators, namely life expectancy, child mortality, nutritional conditions, number of households equipped with electricity. North Sulawesi consisted of the *kabupaten* Sangir Talaud, Minahasa, Bolaang Mongondow and Gorontalo, and the *kotamadya* Manado, Gorontalo and Bitung. In 2000, Gorontalo (predominantly Muslim) became a separate province.

<sup>8</sup> In 1603, North Sulawesi was included in the list the Spaniards made of the vassals of Ternate (Andaya, 1993, p 150).

<sup>9</sup> It was presented as such in the Treaty of Bungaya, which was to mark the defeat of Gowa in its struggle with the VOC (Andaya, 1993, pp 84–85; Ricklefs, 1981, p 62).

Of the European powers, the first to have more than a passing significance in north-eastern Sulawesi was Spain. For some decades, there was an intermittent presence of Spaniards, who arrived from Manila to obtain food and to preach the gospel. Minahasa thus became a distant periphery of Spain, at the extreme end of the chain connecting that Iberian country via Mexico and the Philippines with what is nowadays north-eastern Indonesia.

The Spaniards were eventually ousted by the VOC, which began in 1655 to construct a fortress in what would become the town of Manado. The VOC, soon the only European force in this part of the archipelago, was mainly interested in food supplies. It strengthened its presence after the subjection of Gowa and the withdrawal, in 1677, of the Spaniards from Siau, their last stronghold. The VOC subsequently made contracts with political unities in northern Sulawesi, but the one with the greatest consequences was that in which the representatives of political communities (*walak*) of the region around Manado declared themselves to be vassals of the Company (see Godée Molsbergen, 1928, pp 53–58). This agreement of 1679 marks the beginning of the colonial rule in this zone. Minahasa was administratively subjected to the Gouvernement Ternate, which came under the Governor-General in Batavia, and he in turn was accountable to the VOC headquarters in Amsterdam.

Economic reasons may have inspired the special bond between Minahasa and European powers, but economic contacts with the Asian world, centred on the trade in indigenous products, remained important. For centuries the area had exported gold, beeswax, resin and sandalwood. It also provided some major delicacies for Chinese cuisine, trade in which intensified in the second half of the eighteenth century. Birds' nests, turtle shell and sea cucumber (*tripang*) were among the exquisite foodstuffs harvested by Sangirese, Ternatans, Tidorese and Bajau off the Minahasa coast and to the east.<sup>10</sup>

An important centre for the trade of sea products was Manila, from whence the Chinese trading groups or kongsis shipped their wares to mainland China. In exchange, the Chinese brought commodities such as textiles, brassware, porcelain, opium and firearms to northern Sulawesi (Henley, 2004). Traffic with Manila intensified during the 1830s and

<sup>10</sup> Ten Siethoff (1845), pp 63–64. On birds' nests, see Warren (1998), pp 30–31; on *tripang*, see Sutherland (2000). See also Velthoen, 1997, pp 371–372. Birds' nests were gathered especially on the island of Lembeh, off Minahasa's east coast; see Douwes Dekker, 1956, p 83.

1840s, the heyday of Minahasa's production of cocoa, a commodity much sought-after in the Philippines (Clarence-Smith, 1998; Ten Siethoff, 1845, pp 64, 80). This coincided with attempts to demarcate the international boundaries, and the implementation of strict tariff regulations. Tariffs could, however, be dodged, especially when there were few functionaries to carry out the necessary inspections. The control exerted by the Netherlands East Indies authorities was probably not very harsh because of the importance of Manila's demand for cocoa (Clarence-Smith, 1998, p 96).

Moreover, the Manila traders often sailed under the colours of Sulu.<sup>11</sup> This strategy was adopted on the assumption that the Dutch were apprehensive about harming the relationship with the ruler of this maritime kingdom. The Sulu pirates were greatly feared (Jansen, 1858; Warren, 1981); furthermore, this realm bordered the territories claimed by the Dutch in Sulawesi as well as in Borneo (see Clarence-Smith, 1998, p 96). The Sulu archipelago, with Jolo as its epicentre, connected commodities and people from near and far in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It has been depicted by Warren as a 'borderless world', a place where different peoples and cultures met and intermingled (Warren, 1998, p 16; Warren, 1981). Sulu maintained a virtual autonomy during Spanish rule, and thereafter the USA concluded a separate treaty with its sultan (Tarling, 1998, p 22). Today, it is probably the most unsettled region in the Philippines, and the prevailing warlike values and customs were highlighted worldwide in the year 2000 when Sulu people kidnapped Western tourists from an island off the coast of Malaysian Sabah (North Borneo), which lies just on the other side of the international border, in the adjoining periphery of another state.

Sulu would become less important to Minahasa in the second half of the nineteenth century, and not just because of the decrease in its piracy.<sup>12</sup> Another factor was that the trade between Manado and the Philippines underwent some changes. The liberalization of trade, manifested in the new status of free ports for the Minahasa harbours of Kema and Manado in 1848 (De Lange, 1897) was of little use for the cocoa trade: by then a pod-borer plague had put an end to the cocoa harvests. In the 1880s, the trade with Manila ceased (Clarence-Smith, 1998, p 106).

<sup>11</sup> Or, as the Dutch said, of 'the emperor of Sulu' (*de keizer van Solok*). See Francis, 1846; Ten Siethoff, 1845, pp 63–64; Grudelbach, 1846.

<sup>12</sup> Partly because of more regular and technologically advanced patrolling, for example, using steamships.



In the administrative constellation of the Netherlands East Indies, from 1824 to 1864 the 'residentie' Manado<sup>13</sup> was part of the Gouvernement Molukken, with Ambon as its capital. From there the links went to Batavia, and thence to the Dutch government in The Hague. For the Batavia-based Dutch, Minahasa was a remote corner, and the journey could take an eternity, especially before the era of steam navigation. Eduard Douwes Dekker, after his appointment as Secretary of the Residency in 1849, needed eight months to reach Manado from Java (Van 't Veer, 1976, p 11). Economically, the links with Batavia were not very close initially. Like all ports in the outer islands, those of northern Sulawesi were considered as foreign in Batavia's trade statistics until 1874, reflecting the loose structure of the territory under Dutch control (Lindblad, 1996, p 540).

Despite the apparent nebulosity of such links, it was from Batavia that coffee from Manado was shipped to Europe, in particular to Amsterdam, where it always attracted high prices in the auctions. Coffee, the trade in which the state had a monopoly, was the predominant market crop in Minahasa in the nineteenth century. Manado coffee was regarded as about the best in the archipelago, but its quality seems to have been surpassed by the coffee grown in Portuguese Timor. This opinion was shared by many experts, such as Governor Affonso de Castro, naturalist Alfred Wallace, and others.<sup>14</sup> In the twentieth century, when in Minahasa and most other places in the archipelago coffee cultivation was abandoned, it continued in East Timor, and at some points there were marked booms in the cultivation of the crop. Coffee export figures prominently in the development strategies of an independent East Timor, as well as in the recommendations of the World Bank.

Minahasa was an outlying region, but in this respect it was clearly surpassed by Portuguese Timor. Administratively, this territory usually came under the Estado da Índia with its seat in Goa. The voyage by sea from Timor to Goa, using the route via Macao, easily took a year. From there to Lisbon took six more months (Schlicher, 1996, pp 141–149). After 1860 East Timor was included in the routes

<sup>13</sup> This encompassed Minahasa, Sangir Talaud, Bolaang Mongondow, Kwandang, Gorontalo, Buol and Bolaang Uki.

<sup>14</sup> De Castro, 1864, p 394; Wallace, 1962, p 151; Fontoura, 1942, p 60. Compare Clarence-Smith, 1992 and Aditjondro, 2000, pp 64–65. See, on de Castro and his role in coffee cultivation in eastern Timor, Schouten, 2002b; Pélissier, 1996, pp 64–65; Schlicher, 1996, pp 205–208.

of steamers of the Netherlands East Indies, but these services were probably not very regular or reliable. After her stay in eastern Timor, Anna Forbes had to make her return journey to Batavia by way of the 'far north', ie Manado. This was in itself an awkward detour, but it did provide her with the opportunity to put down on paper some precious notes about Minahasa and its inhabitants (Forbes, 1887, pp 303–304). For its Asian trade during the nineteenth century, East Timor was very much focused on Makasar, as was all of eastern Indonesia including northern Sulawesi.<sup>15</sup>

For the Minahasans themselves, their peripheral position in relation to the seat of the Governor General would hardly have affected them in the nineteenth century.<sup>16</sup> Minahasa was physically separated from Batavia by huge areas of sea and land not yet under effective colonial control. In contrast to those regions, Minahasa had a high density of Dutch officials, and government influence was patently tangible through the indigenous leaders, who were incorporated into the administrative system (Schouten, 1998, pp 75–104, 127–145). The Minahasans could, as it were, feel the nearness of the Dutch, whether officials, missionaries or traders, but the notion of 'Batavia' as the seat of colonial government was probably absent.

The massive acceptance of Christianity and schools, on which a change in lifestyle and manners was attendant, enhanced Minahasans' feelings of 'difference' from their neighbours and underlined their proximity to the Europeans. The Dutch would consider Minahasa the major success story of their civilizing mission, a shining island in a sea of Muslims and pagans. As one of the few regions in the archipelago in which some advanced education was available, Minahasa attracted young people from elsewhere in eastern Indonesia. The literacy rate of the Minahasans themselves was high, and all over the archipelago they were to be found in positions requiring qualifications, such as missionary assistants. Minahasans became agents in spreading the new creed, assisting European missionaries, for example among the Karo Batak in

<sup>15</sup> In the 1860s, according to De Castro (1867, p 337), the Makasar perahus unloaded commodities such as brandy, gunpowder, firearms, knives, cotton cloth, ivory bracelets and opium in Dili, where they loaded beeswax, coffee and sandalwood. See, on Makasar trade, Sutherland, 2000; also Wallace (1962, pp 163, 309–311). In the twentieth century, the coffee from Timor went almost entirely to Makasar (Telkamp, 1979, p 80; Fontoura, 1945, p 17).

<sup>16</sup> Parts of this and the following paragraphs correspond to the ideas put forward by Henley (1996, pp 41–43, 78–86).

northern Sumatra and the Sa'dan Toraja in South Sulawesi (Plaisier, 1993, p 99).

Minahasa's status as a stronghold of Christianity in the archipelago did not alter the fact that its church life was dependent on institutions that were presided over by Europeans. The real religious centres for Minahasan Protestants were in the Netherlands (Rotterdam, and later Oegstgeest) and in Batavia, where the headquarters of the NZG, the Netherlands Missionary Society, and of the Indische Kerk (Church of the Indies) were located. In 1934, the Minahasan Protestant Church became formally independent, with its seat in upland Tomohon.

### **Integration and peripheralization**

In the twentieth century, Minahasa's integration into an international web as well as into the constellation of the Netherlands Indies became more noticeable, and this was to a large degree because of economic developments. Copra became Minahasa's main export product, and its major role in the region's economy would persist throughout the setbacks caused by the World Depression and wars.<sup>17</sup> Although copra in Minahasa was produced mainly by native smallholders, there were some coconut plantations, owned by Dutch, Chinese and (in the 1930s) Japanese (De Vries, 1996; Buchholt, 1990, pp 91–92; Henley, 1996, p 72). In general, outsiders purchased the copra (in particular, ethnic Chinese), while Dutch, Danish, American and Japanese trading firms engaged in exporting (Leirissa, 1995, p 7). The product went directly from Manado to its markets in Europe, Japan and the USA (Leirissa, 1995, p 8; Wellenstein, 1933, pp 2–3; Buchholt, 1990, p 91). Thus, through its copra, Manado had links with many countries and nationalities. But contacts with the other ethnic groups of the archipelago, especially from other parts of Sulawesi, also increased. Coconut harvesting and processing was not usually carried out by the smallholders themselves, but by hired labourers from elsewhere. As an economically more developed area, Minahasa had for a long time attracted labour from near and far.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> In the first three decades of the twentieth century, during the economic expansion of the outer provinces, a large proportion (up to 40%) of Indonesia's copra was shipped through the harbour of Manado (Boediono, 1972, p 71; Buchholt, 1990, p 86; Lindblad, 1994, p 99).

<sup>18</sup> The administrator of a private enterprise in the 1880s, the Moluksche Handels-Vennootschap, D. de Vries, reports that his coolies included 'Manillese, Ambonese, Ternatans, Sangirese, Minahasans, Chinese, Papuas', thus providing 'an excellent opportunity for anthropological research' (De Vries, 1996, p 101.)

In the meantime, Minahasa's position became less distinct in the process labelled 'modernization' that was taking shape in the Netherlands East Indies, with such manifestations as Western education, access to the press, diversification of professions, and faster and more efficient communication. These were also ingredients of the process of state formation, which implied more interaction between the various regions, especially between the centre and peripheries, and the effective establishment of state control. The development of the outer islands' export economies was fundamental to their integration into the colonial state, and this had to be facilitated through a reliable and Dutch-monitored infrastructure (Lindblad, 1994; Touwen, 1999, p 145; à Campo, 1994).

Minahasans had to accept the fact that some of the recently pacified zones in the outer islands had more significance to the export economy than their own region. The elite position of Minahasans as a well educated ethnic group, though by no means eclipsed, became less exclusive, as schools also became a common phenomenon in other regions, and the quality of education in Minahasa decreased. Consciousness of belonging to the wider state of the Netherlands East Indies had taken root among Minahasans, and thought was being given to creating an independent Indonesia.<sup>19</sup> In the period following Indonesia's Declaration of Independence (August 1945), a great diversity in ideas regarding the administrative future of the region came to the fore. These ideas ranged from incorporation into the Dutch state via an autonomous status of Minahasa in a federalist Indonesia, to absorption into a unitary Indonesian republic. Unrest and even secession was expected by Dutch observers, much more than in Ambon.<sup>20</sup> It was, however, in the latter region that a major rebellion against inclusion in the Republic of Indonesia would take place in 1950, some months after the formal transfer of sovereignty (Chauvel, 1990, pp 346–392). Among the Minahasa population, by contrast, integration into Indonesia met with no strong opposition.

<sup>19</sup> It seems that most preferred a federal state, guaranteeing a degree of political and cultural autonomy for the various *suku bangsa* or ethnic groups. See Henley, 1996, pp 118–140.

<sup>20</sup> The Dutch government's commissioner, A.H.J. Lovink, stated in 1949 that '[o]nly in the Minahassa is there a question of a strong movement for withdrawal from East Indonesia' [The latter one of the republics to constitute the independent Federal Indonesia, ms] (cited in Chauvel, 1990, p 283, note 22). See also Chauvel, 1990, pp 206, 298; and Schouten, 1998, pp 213–214.

But soon the feeling grew that the region was being relegated to a position of low priority. A lack of balance was perceived between, on the one hand, the income from North Sulawesi copra accruing to the Indonesian state, and on the other hand, government investment in this region. There were objections to the monopoly in East Indonesian copra exercised by the Copra Foundation, founded as the *Coprafonds* by the Netherlands East Indies government in 1940, and continued as *Jajasan Kopra* (Harvey, 1977, pp 34–36). The North Sulawesi brokers, therefore, shunned the ‘centre’, the Coprafonds headquarters in Makasar (later moved to Jakarta). Instead, they exported directly to Macao, from where the copra was transported to the USA, and especially to the Philippines, avoiding trade regulations and duties (Sondakh, 1984, p 11).

Several incidents related to this contraband trade, which was directed by North Sulawesi military men, led to the proclamation of the Permesta or ‘total struggle’ in Makasar in 1957. This movement operated initially in various parts of the outer islands (western Sumatra, southern Sulawesi and northern Sulawesi) and aimed to achieve policy reform at the national level in favour of decentralization and a relaxation of rules governing the copra trade. It was a movement in defence of regional interests, and did not have separatist objectives (Harvey, 1977, p 51; Booth, 1996, pp 106–107; Schwarz, 1999, p 63). In 1958, Permesta developed into an armed conflict, and in Minahasa the revolt would not be totally suppressed until 1961.

The New Order, established in 1965–66, with its strongly centralistic policy and tight government control, reinforced the pivotal status of Java and the marginal one of regions such as Minahasa. However, compliance and even agreement with the regime seemed to be the general attitude of Minahasans found during my fieldwork, and this was apparently confirmed by considerable local support for the Golkar party. This attitude may have been inspired by the peaceful conditions that finally prevailed in the region, as well as by the new feeling of prosperity.

It was this very prosperity that also carried within it the germ of new tensions towards the centre. The new wealth was derived mainly from the production of cloves, an ingredient in the *kretek* cigarettes manufactured in Java. The increasing popularity of the *kretek* and the suitability of conditions in Minahasa for clove growing brought wealth for some producers, and even more for middlemen and inter-island traders, especially in the 1970s and early 1980s. However, it was inevitable that the expansion of clove planting elsewhere in Indonesia would cause

a fall in prices. The volume of clove production in other provinces such as Lampung and East Java, which were much closer to the cigarette factories, surpassed that of North Sulawesi in the 1980s. Accordingly, cloves lost some of their importance in Minahasa.

Then there was the blow inflicted on Minahasa clove producers by the most central people of the centre, the Suharto family, in the person of Suharto's youngest son, Tommy. He was the leading figure of the Badan Pembelian dan Penyangga Cengkeh (BPPC – Clove Trading Board) created in 1990. This organization took over the monopoly on clove purchase and distribution, replacing the inter-island traders. Tommy presented his BPPC as coming to the help of the smallholders, protecting them against the whims of the middlemen. The BPPC offered high floor prices to the producers, but, as could be expected, also required a high profit margin for itself. This all had to be compensated for by the sales price. As a result, demand from the *kretek* companies decreased, curtailing the marketing possibilities of the smallholders. Objections to the clove monopoly and the related dealings of Tommy Suharto were to be heard among producers and cigarette companies alike, but also in other sectors such as banks, and even among members of the People's Consultative Assembly. It was a not inconsiderable factor in the destabilization of the Indonesian economy. After the eventual outbreak of the financial crisis in Indonesia, the abolition of the BPPC was one of the demands made by the International Monetary Fund in January 1998. It would take some months before Tommy ceded to this requirement.<sup>21</sup>

### **Today's tensions**

During my stay in Minahasa, from 1981 to 1983, smallholders expressed bitter feelings towards Java and the Javanese because of the location of the cigarette factories. A comparable situation applied to the producers of copra, since this was not usually processed in coconut-oil factories in northern Sulawesi itself. Under government policy, the bulk of the copra was shipped to Java at considerable expense (see also Sondakh and Jones, 1989).

In general, Minahasans possessed a negative image of Java and the Javanese, and often reproached the latter for alleged presumptuousness. The frequent statement by Javanese, that it was their ethnic group

<sup>21</sup> Saptari, 1996, p 174; Hill, 1992, pp 23–24; Schwarz, 1999, pp 153–157, 354.

who had introduced wet-rice cultivation to Minahasa in the nineteenth century, was considered a grave insult. Being very much aware of their position as a religious minority in Indonesia, Minahasans have often attempted to emphasize their distinctiveness from Javanese and other ethnic groups. The most tried and tested method has been through the promotion of what is perceived as traditional Minahasan culture. Associations with song and dance performances, and also with the publication of works on mythology and history, have been common since colonial times. During the New Order, such initiatives were strictly controlled and usually limited to the performance aspects of culture. For these, government bodies provided instructions detailing the way dances and songs should be performed.<sup>22</sup> In any case, the performances were obviously not a revival of those in the distant past. Ritual dances such as *kebesaran* and *cakalele* were introduced into Minahasa less than two hundred years ago.<sup>23</sup> The sarongs worn by the women in the *maengket* or rice harvest dance are, contrary to what is commonly stated, not derived from Minahasan tradition.

Expressions of 'traditional' Minahasan culture have almost always taken place within a framework of Christian practice (with, for example, Christian prayers added), and thus any suggestion of incompatibility between tradition and Christianity was avoided, while Christianity was implicitly presented as the major identity marker of Minahasans. As Christians, they would distinguish themselves from the Muslims in particular, a distinction that became increasingly necessary as the numbers of Muslims in their region increased, and especially as more and more of those Muslims came to represent the power of the centre. The higher officials of the state bureaucracy or the armed forces placed in North Sulawesi were often Muslims (and Javanese).

The organization of the national Koran recital contest in Manado in 1980 provoked criticism and worry among Christian Minahasans. According to research carried out by D.P. Abdullah in 1990:

Protestants had difficulty in coping with the fact that Muslims, contrary to their past position were no longer a silent minority and were making their presence felt.<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, Minahasan Christians, a clear minority in Indonesia, felt that they were losing something of their supremacy in their own

<sup>22</sup> See also Yampolsky, 1999, pp 28–29; compare Acciaioli, 1985; Yampolsky, 1995.

<sup>23</sup> See also Kosel, 1998, 87–89.

<sup>24</sup> Van Dijk, 1995, p 88.

region, to Muslims who represented power and who might well abuse this power. On the pan-Indonesia scene too, times are becoming harder for Minahasans. For generations, they have been well represented among higher military staff and in the civil service, but in recent years it has become almost impossible for Christians to attain the top positions.<sup>25</sup>

It seems that religion has become the main means of identifying and defining outsiders.<sup>26</sup> The more strongly felt presence of 'others', whether Javanese in Minahasa, or Minahasans in the broader Indonesian context, increases the need for self-affirmation, especially if the 'others' are considered a menace. Ethnicity or collective identity and their perceived attributes emerge as important precisely in the confrontations with other groups, as has been argued by Fredrik Barth (1969) in his discussion of the role of 'boundaries'.

It may be assumed that Minahasa is a potential hot spot in Indonesia. The already tense inter-religious relations that built up during the New Order may boil over in the post-Soeharto period, when much of Indonesia is facing major problems. Muslims in Minahasa may easily become scapegoats, as they may stand for the difficulties that, according to Christian Minahasans, have been caused by the governments of the New Order and after. The special societal and cultural characteristics of Minahasa mean that this region is far away from the political and economic centre, and not only in the literal sense. There have been many reasons for Minahasans to feel ill at ease within Indonesia, and in the course of the region's history this dissatisfaction has repeatedly come to the fore. The long story of movements that claimed a special status for the region is certainly not finished yet. The existence of refugee camps for people from the Moluccas and elsewhere in Sulawesi may also cause unrest. At the time of writing, however, no major tensions have been registered. A tentative explanation would be the local population's comparatively longer familiarity with the institutions and structures of a modern state; this may channel their feelings of dissatisfaction. The church organization, and in particular the leadership of the Gereja Masehi Injil Minahasa (GMIM), also seems to have had a soothing role.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> See the fate of Major-General Johny Lumintang (May 1998), recorded in Schwarz, 1999, pp 370–371.

<sup>26</sup> This corresponds with Huntington, 1996. Recent developments in Indonesia apparently support his grim view about the growing fundamentalism among Muslims. However, a more balanced view is called for. See Woodward, 1996, p 3.

<sup>27</sup> The data on this aspect are derived from dispersed news items and personal correspondence and communications, especially from David Henley.



## **Conclusion: distance matters**

The history of Minahasa as an ‘Outer Island region of Indonesia’<sup>28</sup> shows the importance of context in the labelling of a region as a centre or as a periphery. Sometimes it is hard to apply those concepts, for example when considering Minahasa’s place as a major link in a trade network stretching from the south-eastern islands to China. In the early modern period, the region was formally a periphery of the realms of Ternate and Makassar. In addition, for decades it had a place at the very extremity of the line that crossed the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, with its starting point in Spain. Later Minahasa became a remote outstation of the VOC, and this spatial isolation from the headquarters of European overlords continued in the nineteenth century. Minahasa seemed to be a periphery, but at the same time it was a centre as a result of its significant and quite autonomous position in what became the colonial state. In the nineteenth century, its relationships with Batavia were loose and mainly formal. Because of its vanguard position in the fields of Western-style education and the Christian religion, as well as its special economic characteristics, Minahasa became the centre for nearby regions. As the colonial state crystallized, it lost its special and privileged position, a process that was accelerated after Indonesia’s independence.

The remoteness from the centre turned out to carry heavy penalties, and this qualifies the assumption that today’s rapid means of transport and developments in IT greatly reduce the importance of distance. It is true that in the centre–periphery discussion the spatial factor has become of less importance, and attention has frequently been drawn to the fact that centre and periphery may adjoin each other, or even intermingle, as is the case in most cities. But that distances do still matter is a fact that will be endorsed wholeheartedly by Minahasan smallholders, handicapped as they are by the location of the cigarette factories and coconut-oil mills in Java. As for Nusatenggara Timur, its outlying position is often pointed to as one reason for the poverty of the islands that comprise it. The same applies to what is now the independent state of East Timor. It was far away from its colonizing power, Portugal, but the trauma of the occupation by Indonesia motivated its political leaders to seek close cooperation with Portugal after the vote for

<sup>28</sup> As it is characterized in the subtitle of a recent publication of essays (Scheffold, 1995).

independence. Historical and emotional reasons seem, however, to be eclipsed by practical considerations, and East Timor is now focusing on the surrounding area as well, especially Australia.

Distances were also a decisive consideration when authorities wanted to drop unwanted elements. Minahasa, remote, and in colonial times well controlled, Christian and apparently peaceful, was viewed as an ideal place to which to banish people, particularly Muslim rebels. Famous nineteenth-century personalities such as (from Java) Prince Dipo Negoro and Kijayi Mojo and (from West Sumatra) Imam Bonjol forcibly spent part of their lives there. Moreover, East Timor, that periphery of a periphery, was a dumping ground for persons considered undesirable in Portugal, especially political prisoners – euphemistically labelled *deportados sociais* – many of whom thus headed for a ‘living death’ (Forbes, 1887, p 262). Few ever returned to their native country. Even today, the remoteness of Manado may prove useful when order in the centre needs to be maintained. A much-publicized case of the transfer of a potential source of trouble from Java to North Sulawesi took place during the national football league tournament in 1999. Its final stages were marred by numerous incidents, claiming several lives, and consequently the finals, in which two Javanese sides (PSIS from Semarang and Surabaya-based Persebaya) would confront each other, bristled with problems. The authorities then decided that the venue would be the Klabat Stadium in Manado, far away from the traditional venue in Jakarta, and from the home bases of the teams.<sup>29</sup> Presumably the choice of Manado was inspired by its location at the fringes of the country, as well as by the comparatively peaceful atmosphere at that time in Manado.

Another element in the spatial dimension is the state border, a phenomenon that is losing weight due to such factors as the expanding role of transnational institutions and the apparently ‘new geography’ of civilizations.<sup>30</sup> Traditionally peripheral regions are those that adjoin other states, which is true for northern Sulawesi and the southern Philippines. These regions, with cultural affinities, somehow managed to maintain their trade contacts after the settlement of the borders. It is also noteworthy that political developments in the Philippines, especially in the 1930s, exerted influences on political

<sup>29</sup> The match brought a victory for PSIS (Anam and Navrianto, 1999. See also Schouten, 2002a, pp 84–86; Colombijn, 2000, p 195.

<sup>30</sup> See Huntington (1996, pp 34–35) on the increasing permeability of state borders.

life in Minahasa (Bootsma, 1986, pp 82–83, 110; Henley, 1996, p 145). In the second half of the twentieth century, the borders between Indonesia and the Philippines were heavily controlled and direct contacts discouraged, a policy emanating from the autocratic nature of the regimes that controlled both countries for decades. A direct air link between Davao City and Manado operated for only a few years. Various initiatives and proposals for more trans-border contacts, especially from the Philippines' business world, brought no response (Tan-Cullamar, 1993, p 46). In his recommendations for a closer partnership between regions of East Indonesia and foreign countries, in 1990, leading Indonesian economist Soesastro (1990, p 203) did not even mention the Philippines, reflecting the negligible partnership existing between the countries up to that time. In the same article, he proposed Darwin as a place with an important trade role for East Indonesia. Today, this Australian town indeed fulfils a key function for a former part of eastern Indonesia: East Timor. This is not by virtue of any historical or cultural connections, but because of the practical factor of proximity.<sup>31</sup>

Between Minahasans and Javanese there have been not only the divisions of geographic distance and unequal power relations. There is also the religious gulf. Although at times displaying a compliant attitude, Minahasans often projected their feeling of being disadvantaged on the people from the centre, the Javanese, who were easily identified with Muslims. Religion is thus a major dimension for distinguishing outsiders from insiders, even when the main problem seems to be that of power disparities. This is common practice. In East Timor, a region that has been even more of an outlying enclave than Minahasa, the Roman Catholic religion has been the foremost point of reference for its people. It forged a sense of unity during the occupation by Indonesia (Indonesians being identified with Muslims, despite the relatively high number of, for example, Minahasans among the soldiers and functionaries placed there) and is now an identity marker for a nation in its gestation process. Indeed, the preceding story has not only been about economics and power, but also about religion – or, *in extenso*, that extraordinarily elusive concept, culture.

<sup>31</sup> Contacts between natives of Timor and of northern Australia had not been very frequent.

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