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# MARGINALITY AND OPPORTUNITY IN THE PERIPHERY: THE EMERGENCE OF GORONTALO PROVINCE IN NORTH SULAWESI\*

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## **The Birth of a Province**

On January 23, 2000, about thirty thousand ethnic Gorontalo from all over the Indonesian archipelago gathered at the local stadium in Gorontalo City. They were there to celebrate "Hari Patriotik, 23 Januari 1942." Patriot Day commemorates local hero Nani Wartabone and the anticolonial rebellion he led that ousted the Dutch from the region. On that fateful day in January, Wartabone famously declared Gorontalo "free from colonialism."<sup>1</sup>

As a practical matter, Gorontalo would endure Japan's brutal wartime occupation as well as Dutch attempts to return to the archipelago after World War II. But the Gorontalo are fiercely proud of Wartabone's words, often noting that they were the first in Indonesia to declare independence, well ahead of Sukarno's declaration in August of 1945.<sup>2</sup> The story of January 1942 is therefore one woven into the larger

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<sup>1</sup> Alim Niode and Husein Mohi, *Abad Besar Gorontalo* (Gorontalo: Presnas Publishing, 2003), p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> This fact was recounted to me in numerous conversations with informants in Gorontalo. This discourse was also evident in the local media; for example, see newspaper accounts such as "Gorontalo Jumat 1942 Terulang," *Harian Gorontalo*, October 21, 2000.

tapestry of Indonesia's nationalist struggle. The annual event is performed complete with the raising of the *merah putih* (Indonesia's "red-white" national flag), singing of the Indonesia Raya, and speeches by government dignitaries.

But the ceremony in 2000 had a slightly different tone. The crowd was larger than in other years, a buzz filled the air, and many of the attendees wore traditional Gorontalo dress. When the official ceremony ended, a new group of speakers took the stage. These were leaders of P4GTR<sup>3</sup> and PRESNAS,<sup>4</sup> two leading organizations advocating the creation of a new Gorontalo province.

Addressing the large crowd at the stadium, H. Natzir Mooduto, a key organizer of the new-province movement, recalled Wartabone's famous words and continued, "Fifty-eight years later to the day, on this Sunday 23 January 2000, we, all the people of Gorontalo, whether inside or outside the region, declare the formation of Gorontalo Province!"<sup>5</sup> A few moments later, Nelson Pomalingo, another leading figure, underscored Mooduto's words: "With the blessing of Allah all powerful, on this day, the 23rd of January 2000 that is honored by the January 23 Patriotic Movement, we officially declare the separation of Gorontalo Tomini Raya!"<sup>6</sup>

If one resisted the excitement and emotion, this might have appeared a slightly awkward moment. New provinces cannot simply be declared into existence. They require extensive bureaucratic scrutiny at multiple levels of government, capped by legislation passed in Jakarta. Though a lobbying process was already underway to establish Gorontalo Province, such a bold pronouncement entailed considerable risk. But like Wartabone's declaration in 1942, the statement of provincial independence proved prescient, if premature. Less than a year later, Gorontalo did succeed in its aspirations.<sup>7</sup> A new province called Gorontalo, mostly Muslim and ethnically Gorontalo, split away from North Sulawesi Province, which had a Christian majority and was multiethnic.

Why were the Gorontalo so anxious to form their own province? And how did they achieve their objective so quickly? I argue that, historically, state formation and centralization divided—rather than unified—different groups in North Sulawesi, creating a situation I call "marginality in the periphery." By this I mean that, while North Sulawesi region as a whole has historically been a peripheral area in the national context, stark differences in power relations evolved *within* the province such that some groups dominated and others felt marginalized.

With the foundations for this argument in place, I will also argue that the timing and success of the new-province movement can be attributed to Indonesia's political

<sup>3</sup> Panitia Persiapan Pembentukan Provinsi Gorontalo Tomini Raya, or Committee to Prepare for the Separation of Gorontalo Tomini Raya Province.

<sup>4</sup> Presidium Nasional Pembentukan Provinsi Gorontalo, or National Presidium for the Formation of Gorontalo Province.

<sup>5</sup> Hardil Nurdin, *Sang Dekarator* (Gorontalo: Presnas Press, 2000), p. 77.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>7</sup> Law Number 38 was passed on December 4, 2000; the official declaration of provincehood occurred on February 16, 2001. See Hasanuddin, Buhanudin Domili, and Sri Suharjo, *Otonomi Daerah dan Pengaruhnya Terhadap Pemekaran Wilayah Serta Menguatnya Kesadaran Etnis Di Provinsi Gorontalo* (Manado, Indonesia: Kementerian Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata, Balai Kajian Sejarah dan Nilai Tradisional Manado, 2004).

transition. A weakened state and institutional changes affected the situation at a key juncture, when a variety of actors at the local, regional, and national level developed an interest in seeing through the creation of a Gorontalo province. Together, the historical and more contemporary narratives explain why a new-province movement in Gorontalo emerged and why its advocates were successful.

Gorontalo's experience is not unique. Since 1999, six other regions have also split off from their mother provinces to become independent; these include West Papua, North Maluku, Banten, Bangka-Belitung, the Riau Islands, and West Sulawesi.<sup>8</sup> Many other regions are in the process of trying to institute new provinces. Furthermore, many other new administrative units at the district, subdistrict, and village levels are being established at the same time.<sup>9</sup> While this article does not attempt to explain all new-province formation in Indonesia, it does argue against two strands of thinking regarding the phenomenon.

First, the process is not simply being undertaken in the interests of administrative efficiency, as many policymakers and public officials at both the national and local levels claim.<sup>10</sup> Bureaucrats and local executives often state that their own newly created district or province was necessary in order to bring local government closer to the people, and the people closer to the government. While efficiency may have been enhanced in some cases, these claims also tend to obscure politics and confer legitimacy on a process that is otherwise dubious.<sup>11</sup> The phenomenon of new-province formation needs to be seen as a profoundly political process, undertaken by actors with clear political and economic interests at the local, regional, and national levels. This article seeks to identify those interests and the process by which they changed or emerged in Gorontalo.

Nor should this trend toward new-province formation be understood as a general movement seeking regional autonomy in the conventional sense. Much of the scholarship concerning regionalism and territoriality in Indonesia has typically emphasized the ways in which regions press for autonomy from the *national* state, in places such as East Timor, West Papua, and Aceh.<sup>12</sup> This approach tends to obscure the

<sup>8</sup> See Ehito Kimura, "Provincial Proliferation: Vertical Coalitions and the Politics of Territoriality in Post-Authoritarian Indonesia" (PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI, 2006) to see the corresponding mother province for each of these new entities, the law, and the year each newly established province was made official.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example Fitria Fitriani, Bert Hofman, and Kai Kaiser, "Unity in Diversity? The Creation of New Local Governments in a Decentralizing Indonesia," *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies* 41,1 (2005): 57-79.

<sup>10</sup> For example, at the national level, interviews with Ferry Mursyidan Baldan, chairman Commission II of the Parliament of the Republic of Indonesia, Jakarta, June 3, 2005; and Suparman, head of Technical Commission on Regional Autonomy, Association of Indonesian Regency Government, Jakarta, May 25, 2005. At the local level, interviews with Edwin Silangen, Interim District Chief, North Minahasa, Manado, March 29, 2005; A. G. Kawatu, interim *bupati*, North Minahasa, April 1, 2005; Abit Takalingan, Provincial Parliament member, Northern Sulawesi, Manado, April 2, 2005. Interviews with government officials in North Sulawesi and Gorontalo in 2005.

<sup>11</sup> See James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: "Development," Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Octavianus Mote and Danilyn Rutherford, "From Irian Jaya to Papua: The Limits of Primordialism in Indonesia's Troubled East," *Indonesia* 72 (October 2001): 115-139; Douglas Kammen, "The Trouble With Normal: The Indonesian Military, Paramilitaries, and the Final Solution to East Timor," in *Violence and the State in Suharto's Indonesia*, ed. Benedict Anderson (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Southeast Asia

diverse and complex political interactions that occur within those regions among social groups and political elites. And separatism in Indonesia, though critical in the context of state resilience, is arguably an exceptional phenomenon primarily limited to the three cases noted above. Regional proliferation is a far more common and widespread trend than is separatism in Indonesia.

Furthermore, this article argues that examining the proliferation of provinces tells us important things about regional politics, particularly about the alliances and cooperation that take place *within* and *between* regions and centers, in a way that focusing on separatism does not. The literature on separatism is rooted in the assumption that conflict occurs between two unitary actors—center and periphery—engaged in a zero-sum game.<sup>13</sup> The experience in North Sulawesi illustrates that regionalist aspirations in the so-called “periphery” can actually be “positive-sum.” The gain of one side (advocates for a new province) may not necessarily mean a loss for the other (the central government). Instead, center *and* periphery can be seen to be composed of a variety of groups, such that each time a new province is formed, the result may be mutually beneficial to groups at both the center and the region.

The following section highlights North Sulawesi’s diversity, noting how the province has been compartmentalized according to religion, ethnicity, and territory. The article then shows how attempts to incorporate North Sulawesi into the state formed the basis for an imbalance of power among different groups, and it examines Indonesia’s political crisis of 1998 and the way democratization and decentralization reforms triggered the movement to create new provinces. Finally, it addresses how the interests of political elites converged with those of various societal groups, facilitating the establishment of Gorontalo province.

### Compartmentalized Diversity in North Sulawesi

Located on the northern tip of Sulawesi Island, North Sulawesi Province is remote, geographically closer to Manila than to Jakarta. It is also a highly diverse region with a population consisting of half a dozen ethnic groups split evenly between Christians and Muslims. Before the province was divided, in 2000, its population hovered at around three million, divided roughly into six major ethnic groups: the Minahasa, Gorontalo, Bolaang-Mongondow, Sangir, Talaud, and Javanese (see Table 1).<sup>14</sup>

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Program Publications, 2001); Geoffrey Robinson, “*Rawan* is as *Rawan* Does: The Origins of Disorder in New Order Aceh,” in *Violence and the State in Suharto’s Indonesia*; and Mark Berger and Edward Aspinall, “The Break-up of Indonesia? Nationalisms after Decolonisation and the Limits of the Nation-state in Post-Cold War Southeast Asia,” *Third World Quarterly* 22,6 (December 2001): 1003-1024.

<sup>13</sup> The classic literature on center-periphery relations here includes Edward Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macro Sociology* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1975); and Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536–1966* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1975).

<sup>14</sup> It is important to note that these identities are malleable and often complicated by subethnic identities as well. For example, there are several languages in Minahasa that correlate to some eight different subethnic groups. See, for example, Reimar Schefold, ed., *Minahasa Past and Present: Tradition and Transition in an Outer Island Region of Indonesia* (Leiden: Research School CNWS, 1995). See also, H. B. Palar and L. A. Anes, *Minahasa: Sejarah dan Derap Langkahnya Menuju Kemerdekaan Indonesia* (Manado, Indonesia: PT Tarsius, 1994). These authors argue that these “subethnic” groups consolidated over the years in order to counter

**Table 1. Ethnic Groups in North Sulawesi Province in 2000**

Name	Population	Percent
Gorontalo	897,235	33 %
Minahasa	824,700	29 %
Sangir	396,810	14 %
Bolaang-Mongondow	224,749	8 %
Talaud	79,838	3 %
Javanese	64,619	2 %
Other	314,735	11%
Total	2,802,686	100%

Source: BPS 2000<sup>15</sup>

Administratively, the province consisted of four districts, or *kabupaten*—Minahasa, Gorontalo, Sangir-Talaud, and Bolaang-Mongondow—and encompassed three cities—Gorontalo, Manado, and Bitung.<sup>16</sup> Gorontalo, located in the southwestern portion of the province, occupied the largest land area. Bolaang-Mongondow lay to its northeast. Minahasa district occupied the northern tip of Sulawesi. And Sangir and Talaud, two island groups classified as one district, were neighboring islands located north of the mainland and due south of the Philippines.

**Table 2. *Kabupatens* and *Kotas* in North Sulawesi**

Name	Square Kilometers	Percent of Area
Gorontalo	12,150.65	44 %
Bolaang-Mongondow	8,358.04	31 %
Minahasa	4,188.94	15 %
Sangir Talaud	2,263.95	8.25 %
Gorontalo City	64.8	0.25 %
Manado City	157.25	0.5 %
Bitung City	304.00	1 %
Total	27,487.63	100 %

Source: BPS 2000<sup>17</sup>

In 2000, about half of the region's population was Christian, with most residing in the northern area of Minahasa, and Sangir-Talaud. This was the result of an effective proselytizing campaign conducted by Dutch missionaries in the nineteenth century. To the south and west, the Gorontalo ethnic group and a majority of the Bolaang-Mongondow remained staunchly Muslim. Islam had made its way to Gorontalo and Bolaang-Mongondow in the sixteenth century thanks to the influence of the neighboring Ternate Sultanate, and later, in the early seventeenth century, it had radiated from the south with the rise of the Kingdom of Gowa. The Christianizing

domination from a neighboring kingdom, the Bolaang-Mongondow.

<sup>15</sup> Compiled from Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS), *Penduduk Sulawesi Utara, Hasil Sensus Penduduk Tahun 2000*, Seri: L2.2.23 (Jakarta: Badan Pusat Statistik, 2000).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

influence of the Dutch missionaries did not reach down to Gorontalo, in part because the Dutch did not have a strong presence in the area.

**Table 3. Religion in North Sulawesi Province**

Name	Number	Percent
Islam	1,396,513	50 %
Protestant	1,285,588	46 %
Catholic	93,678	3 %
Hindu	11,606	0.5 %
Buddhist	3,981	0.1 %
Other	12,258	0.4 %
Total	2,803,624	100 %

Source: BPS 2000<sup>18</sup>

These demographic patterns do not only highlight the diversity in the region. They also illustrate the way in which ethnic identity and territory correspond closely with one another. This correspondence—or compartmentalization—provided an important precondition that facilitated the breakup of North Sulawesi province. Compartmentalization should be understood as more than just the clustering or concentration of different groups in close proximity to one another. It refers to the particular way in which different groups are brought together under the same overarching territorial institutions (in this case, the province) by the state.

Most ethnic groups in the region formed a majority population in their own districts; only in urban areas, such as the provincial capital of Manado, was this not true. Thus, each of the sizable ethnic groups arguably had its own “homeland.” Circa 2000, the Gorontalo could be characterized as an ethnic group with most of its members living in the district of the same name, where most people adhered to Islam. This kind of correspondence between ethnicity, religion, and territory made it easy, when the time came, for advocates to highlight the differences among groups in the region and claim the right to “upgrade” the territory, from, say, a district to a province.<sup>19</sup>

To be sure, compartmentalization alone cannot fully explain why certain provinces split apart. Many provinces throughout Indonesia have multiple ethnic or religious groups occupying a single administrative region, and most have remained intact. The process by which territorial administration in North Sulawesi has historically been carried out is also critical to understanding group relations in the region and explaining the impetus toward the formation of a separate Gorontalo province.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Upgrading inside existing boundaries would be easier than creating a new province with new administrative boundaries. In North Sulawesi, other initiatives for the formation of new provinces and new districts were also often justified along ethnic or sub-ethnic lines in ways that overlapped with territory. For example, in the wake of Gorontalo’s success, there has been an emerging movement for a Bolaang-Mongondow province emerging from people living in that district. At the district level, too, Minahasa was divided into three different districts: Minahasa, North Minahasa, and South Minahasa, again along sub-ethnic lines

## The Historical Foundations of Privilege and Marginality

In North Sulawesi, the historical process of state building created economic and political imbalances between different groups in the region. Specifically, state practices historically privileged the ethnic Minahasa at the expense of the ethnic Gorontalo. The movement for a new Gorontalo province emerged from this feeling of marginalization experienced by the Gorontalo within the original province. In this sense, while North Sulawesi itself is often included as part of Indonesia's Outer Island "periphery," this article highlights the power dynamics of privilege and marginality within that periphery.<sup>20</sup>

Four key periods of state formation in North Sulawesi are particularly instructive in highlighting the development of these intra-regional relations: the colonial period, the nationalist period, the era of regional rebellion, and the New Order era. Each shows how attempts by the state (both colonial and Indonesian) to consolidate power and incorporate the region into a larger territorial entity served to create a fragile and internally fragmented province.

### *Colonial Interventions and Legacies*

Though group identities in North Sulawesi predate colonialism, European intervention in the region influenced group relations in three fundamental ways. First, colonialism introduced the practice of territorial administration into the region. Second, Dutch missionaries actively transformed regional identity by converting large numbers of people to Christianity. And third, the colonial administration actively privileged one group, the Minahasa, above others in the region.

One distinctive characteristic of precolonial Indonesia was its relative abundance of land and shortage of labor.<sup>21</sup> A high land-to-labor ratio meant that the precolonial kingdoms on Java and elsewhere tended to be more interested in people than in territory. Labor, particularly in the context of agricultural cultivation, was critical to the growth and survival of these kingdoms. Wars were thus less often about securing territory than about capturing populations who could be brought back to the home city of the victors and put to work.

Political affinities in North Sulawesi prior to the Europeans' arrival also tended to be aterritorial.<sup>22</sup> Locals aligned themselves with sovereigns or rajas rather than identifying themselves with a piece of land. For example, different members of a single village might have been loyal to different rulers despite living next door to one another. But the Dutch arrived in the region in the seventeenth century intent on securing territory in order to harvest rice for troops in the Moluccas.<sup>23</sup> This plan proved a threat to the Bolaang-Amurang-Manado raja based to the south and west of the

<sup>20</sup> Anna Tsing formulates this notion more eloquently as "out-of-the-way," albeit in a different context in her aptly titled book. See Anna Tsing, *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen: Marginality in an Out-of-the-Way Place* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

<sup>21</sup> M. C. Ricklefs, *A History of Modern Indonesia Since c. 1300* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993).

<sup>22</sup> See David Henley, *Nationalism and Regionalism in a Colonial Context: Minahasa in the Dutch East Indies* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1996), p. 29.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

region, and he launched periodic attacks against the Dutch. The Dutch then fortified their territory in the north and established clear boundaries, which they stipulated in treaties and enforced with troops.<sup>24</sup>

Initially, the Dutch East Indies Company had dealt with Gorontalo indirectly from their post in Ternate. Once they had established clear boundaries, however, the Dutch entered the Gorontalo region in the early 1700s and set up a trading post.<sup>25</sup> In the 1730s, the governor-general of Maluku concluded an agreement with the king of Gorontalo to build a residence for the representative of the Dutch East Indies Company in Gorontalo.<sup>26</sup> But the company's hold on the area remained tenuous at best, forcing it to withdraw its forces periodically.

Nearly a century later, in 1824, the Dutch East Indies Company separated Gorontalo from the residency of Ternate and appended it to the residency of Manado.<sup>27</sup> Thus, for the first time, the Minahasa and the Gorontalo populations were governed by the same administrative structure. The Manado residency was composed of two large sections: the Minahasa region, including Manado and various small kingdoms in the west and south, and the kingdoms of Gorontalo, Limboto, and others in Teluk Tomini.<sup>28</sup> The islands of Sangir and Talaud, in the waters to the north of the region, were added a short time later.<sup>29</sup>

By the late nineteenth century, the Dutch had territorially consolidated North Sulawesi into four regions: Minahasa; the areas to the north and west of Minahasa; the areas along the Southern Coast of Teluk Tomini; and the islands of Sangihe Talaud.<sup>30</sup> The Dutch residency was headquartered in Manado, while assistants to the residents were stationed in Gorontalo and the other administrative regions.<sup>31</sup> This structure of administration would form the basis for the modern North Sulawesi Province.

Beyond introducing the practice of territoriality and territorial administration, the Dutch also brought Christianity to the region on a large scale. In the 1820s, two Dutch missionaries from the Calvinist organization, the Netherlands Missionary Society (*Nederlandse Zending Genootschap*, or NZG) conducted a mass campaign to convert the local residents to Christianity.<sup>32</sup> Conversion in the region accomplished two things. First, it created additional cultural markers to distinguish groups in the area. Because most of the missionary work took place among the Minahasa, where the Dutch had established a strong presence, Christianity would be concentrated in the north. By the 1880s, over 75 percent of Minahasans were converted to Christianity, leading some contemporaries to reflect that the experience was "unequaled in the history of

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>25</sup> Niode and Mohi, *Abad Besar Gorontalo*, p. 33.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Hasanuddin, *Gorontalo Tantangan dan Kebijakan Sosial, Politik & Ekonomi Kolonial Belanda* (Gorontalo: Balai Kajian Sejarah dan Nilai Tradisional Manado, 2004), p. 63.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid..

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>32</sup> Henley, *Nationalism and Regionalism in a Colonial Context*, p. 6.



Christian missions.”<sup>33</sup> Meanwhile, most other groups in the region, including the Gorontalo, were not converted.

Second, Christianity among the Minahasa served to exacerbate inequality among different groups in the region. In addition to proselytizing, Christian missionaries also sought to educate the “indigenous masses.” While most schools were initially concentrated in the immediate area where Dutch missionaries worked, their influence slowly spread to the broader Minahasa region. Only a small number of these schools were exclusively religious institutions, but the Dutch invested heavily in general education throughout the area and often recruited the help of missionary teachers for secular schools. By the turn of the twentieth century, residents in the Minahasa area had become one of the most educated Native groups in all the Dutch East Indies. In the 1930 census, Minahasa had the highest literacy rate in the entire archipelago.<sup>34</sup> Of 539 government-run schools in the Dutch East Indies, 74 were found in Minahasa.<sup>35</sup> This combination of education and Christianity proffered high status to Minahasans in the colonial order,<sup>36</sup> where they were given priority in the KNIL (Koninklijk Nederlandsch-Indisch Leger, Royal Netherlands-Indies Army), the bureaucracy, and other government positions.<sup>37</sup>

Even prior to the mass Christian conversion in this territory, the overwhelming presence of the Dutch in the Minahasa region often led indigenous elites to ally with the colonial regime in order to improve their own social standing. For example, in military recruitment, Minahasans made up a disproportionately large part of the colonial army. From 1825 to 1830, the Dutch faced a strong rebellion on Java led by Prince Diponegoro. To counter Diponegoro’s forces, the Dutch recruited from their various strongholds such as Bali, Ternate, and Makassar. In Manado, the Dutch were able to recruit 1,400 soldiers out of a population of roughly 80,000.<sup>38</sup>

Colonialism thus laid the foundations for future relationships among ethnic groups in North Sulawesi. Colonial treaties demarcated the region territorially and dictated who would be included in it. Dutch practices also shaped identity, particularly among the Minahasa in the north through religious conversion. And finally, colonialism distributed power unevenly in the region in such a way that the Minahasa gained a disproportionate share of social, political, and economic benefits under the colonial system.

<sup>33</sup> Gerry van Klinken, *Minorities, Modernity, and the Emerging Nation Christians in Indonesia, a Biographical Approach* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2003), p. 86.

<sup>34</sup> See Helmut Buchholt, “The Impact of the Christian Mission on Processes of Social Differentiation,” in *Continuity, Change, and Aspirations: Social and Cultural Life in Minahasa, Indonesia*, ed. Helmut Buchholt and Ulrich Mai (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1994).

<sup>35</sup> Richard Leirissa, “Dynamics of the History of Minahasa,” in *Minahasa Past and Present*.

<sup>36</sup> See *ibid.* It would also give other Christian-educated groups like the Ambonese similar benefits.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> In contrast, only 150 soldiers from Gorontalo were recruited and participated in the Java war. See Mieke Schouten, *Leadership and Social Mobility in a Southeast Asian Society: Minahasa, 1677–1983* (Leiden: KITLV, 1998).

### *Divergent Nationalisms*

If colonialism sowed the seeds of emerging differences and inequality in North Sulawesi, nationalism might have been expected to ease them. A common enemy often forces groups to set aside their differences. However, the nationalist experiences of the Minahasa and Gorontalo diverged during this period, in part due to their respective colonial relationships with the Dutch. The Minahasa viewed nationalism through the lens of their special colonial status, making their support of the budding Indonesian independence movement more complex and conditional than it was in Gorontalo.

In the early twentieth century, at least three different models of Minahasa's political future stood side by side. One model advocated for Minahasan integration into the Dutch Republic as its twelfth province (*Twaalfde Provincie*).<sup>39</sup> Others, such as supporters of the *Perserikatan Minahasa*, pushed for more autonomy and, ultimately, national independence.<sup>40</sup> But by the 1920s, considerable communication between the Minahasa and other groups in the Dutch East Indies led to a growing sentiment for the third model: pan-archipelagic, Indonesian nationalism. Leaders such as Sam Ratulangie thus attempted to straddle Indonesian and Minahasan nationalist interests.<sup>41</sup> Intent on preserving Minahasan *volk* identity, with the long-term goal of establishing an independent nation-state, Ratulangie ultimately compromised by agreeing to a federal model for the Indonesian state that would give states a great deal of autonomy.<sup>42</sup> All of these experiences served to make Minahasans conscious and self-aware of their own identity during the nationalist period. Notably, each model sought to highlight and institutionally preserve Minahasan identity and privilege in one form or another.

In contrast, the ethnic Gorontalo faced fewer internal dilemmas when responding to the archipelago's nationalist experience. Leaders, including Nani Wartabone, had studied on Java, attending schools such as MULO (Meer Uitgebreide Lagere Onderwijs, or Extended Elementary Education) in Surabaya, and mixing with other future nationalist leaders from Java. In 1923, Wartabone pushed to establish Jong Gorontalo, a branch of a national youth organization, and in 1928, he also established the local office for the Partai Nasional Indonesia (PNI, Indonesian Nationalist Party).<sup>43</sup> When PNI disbanded in 1931, it was replaced by Partai Indonesia (Partindo), and a new branch was established in the region with many of the same PNI leaders and organizers in place.<sup>44</sup>

PNI and Partindo were secular nationalist organizations, but Islam also played a key role in the nationalist movement in Gorontalo. By this time, Sarekat Islam, an Islamic political party, had reached Gorontalo, having been introduced into the region by the 1923 visit from H. Umar Said Cokroaminoto, leader of the organization. Cokroaminoto and others saw Islam as a way of opposing Dutch colonialism and

<sup>39</sup> Henley, *Nationalism and Regionalism in a Colonial Context*, p. 154.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Leirissa, "Dynamics of the History of Minahasa," p. 101.

<sup>42</sup> Henley, *Nationalism and Regionalism in a Colonial Context*, p. 132.

<sup>43</sup> Hasanuddin, *Gorontalo Tantangan dan Kebijakan Sosial, Politik & Ekonomi Kolonial Belanda*, p. 158.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 159.

forming the basis for national pride. In 1928, Sarekat Islam officially opened a branch office in Gorontalo.<sup>45</sup>

For these reasons, the Gorontalo did not harbor pro-Dutch sentiments nor have clear aspirations for independent statehood in the way the Minahasa did. Their experiences embedded them firmly in the nationalist struggle and strengthened their desire to throw out the Dutch occupiers. Note the explicitly nationalist message in this statement made by Nani Wartabone on Patriot Day in 1942:

Pada hari ini tanggal 23 Januari 1942, kita, bangsa Indonesia yang berada di sini, sudah merdeka, bebas lepas dari penjajahan bangsa mana pun juga. Bendera kita Merah Putih. Lagu kebangsaan adalah Indonesia Raya.<sup>46</sup>

Only World War II and the experience of Japan's brutal occupation began to bring the Minahasa and Gorontalo into the same Indonesian nationalist fold. The Dutch had made some effort to suppress notions of Indonesian nationalism, but when Japanese troops invaded, they forced their way into houses with bayonets and demanded to know whether occupants were "Dutch or Indonesian?," to which the only safe response was, "Indonesian."<sup>47</sup> This meant that, for the first time, a pan-archipelagic nationalism would be embedded in North Sulawesi, with the Minahasans and the Gorontalo expressing similar aspirations and nationalist goals.

### *A Lonely Rebellion*

The Japanese occupation ended in 1945, after which the Dutch attempted to retain power over Indonesia. Those attempts ultimately failed, and in 1949 the Dutch granted Indonesia sovereignty. The different groups in North Sulawesi jointly opposed Dutch attempts to regain a foothold in the former colony. In order to fight the returning Dutch forces in Northern Sulawesi, reinforcements were sent from other regions, including Makassar.<sup>48</sup> But by the end of the 1950s, the rise of regional rebellions put the Minahasa on a different trajectory from its local neighbors yet again. Whatever affinity the Minahasa and Gorontalo felt in their shared opposition to the Japanese and the Dutch in the 1940s was largely shattered in the post-independence era.

From 1958 to 1961, North Sulawesi waged war against the central government in what became known as Permesta (Perjuangan Semesta, or "General Struggle"). The rebellion began as a reaction against the perceived over-centralization of the Indonesian state, and particularly its "Java-centric" focus, imposed at the expense of the archipelago's "Outer Islands." Leaders cited the economic imbalance and, in particular, Jakarta's restrictions on the export of natural resources. The military officers in the region had a substantial stake in commodities such as coconut (copra, the dried kernel of the coconut) and wanted to export it abroad at the international market price.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>46</sup> Alim Niode and Husein Mohi, *Abad Besar Gorontalo*, p. 38. "On this day, January 23, 1942, we, the people of Indonesia, living here, are independent, free from colonialism by any nation whatsoever. Our flag is the Red and White. Our national anthem is *Indonesia Raya*."

<sup>47</sup> Henley, *Nationalism and Regionalism in a Colonial Context*, p. 150.

<sup>48</sup> Alim Niode, *Gorontalo: Perubahan Nilai-Nilai Budaya, Pranata Sosial dan Ideologi Lokal* (Gorontalo: Yayasan Pohalaa and Media Pustaka, 2002), p. 68.

But Jakarta maintained a monopoly on the commodity and required Indonesia's "Outer Islands" to sell their commodities to Java at slightly above half the international price, thereby infuriating regional producers.<sup>49</sup>

Initially, Permesta was based out of Makassar in southern Sulawesi and consisted of a relatively broad coalition of dissatisfied Outer Island officers.<sup>50</sup> But in independent consultations, officers in the south decided to negotiate with the central government and quickly reached a settlement.<sup>51</sup> The officers from North Sulawesi, largely Minahasan, were not satisfied with the terms of negotiation and opted to fight.

The Minahasa in North Sulawesi proved to be the most determined combatants in the Permesta rebellion, in large part because they had the most at stake. Since they were Christian, and economically better off, they also made up a disproportionate percentage of the military. But those very characteristics also made them the object of resentment regionally, and thus the Minahasa received little support from their neighbors after government retaliation began. Permesta thus became a Minahasan problem.<sup>52</sup> Though initially successful in confronting the central government's military force, Permesta quickly collapsed once the central government captured Manado through aerial bombardment and the dispatch of army troops.

Even a cursory study of Permesta brings the experiences of the Gorontalo and the Minahasans into sharp relief. Narratives in Gorontalo emphasize how the people of Gorontalo opposed Permesta. The nationalist Nani Wartabone took part in resisting this rebel movement, declaring that "we did not recognize PRRI/Permesta as a part of the Unitary State of the Indonesian Republic." Wartabone joined with battalion 512 and a detachment of battalion 715 Hasanuddin and led a sweep of Gorontalo to clear the region from the threat of Permesta, a feat accomplished by 1958.<sup>53</sup>

Permesta proved a defining moment in the history of the region. It not only affected relations between the Minahasa and the central government, it also served to further distance the Minahasa from the other groups in North Sulawesi. Looking back, we find that many of the Minahasan interpretations insist that the rebellion was primarily about reforming a system of governance skewed towards Java. But the narratives of other groups, like the Gorontalo, tend to identify the Minahasa and their rebellion—rather than Jakarta—as the most notable threats during this period.

<sup>49</sup> Barbara S. Harvey, *Permesta: Half a Rebellion* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1977), p. 3.

<sup>50</sup> Permesta was part of a larger uprising that should be understood in the context of Outer Island resentment of Java's perceived economic and political dominance. Permesta joined up with another rebellion on Sumatra island called PRRI (Pemerintah Revolusioner Republik Indonesia, or the Revolutionary Government of the Indonesian Republic). Their alliance was dubbed PRRI-Permesta. Though the two movements were separately motivated, they saw benefits in cooperation.

<sup>51</sup> In 1960, through Presidential Regulation no. 5 of that year, Sulawesi was divided into two provinces, and later that year assigned the status of an autonomous region. See J. D. Legge, *Central Authority and Regional Autonomy in Indonesia: A Study in Local Administration, 1950–1960* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1961), p. 68. The formation of a new province may have been one of the key negotiating points and a way for the central government to divide the insurgents and conquer the rebellion.

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, reports of resentment against residents of Bolaang-Mondondow in Harvey, *Permesta: Half a Rebellion*, p. 120.

<sup>53</sup> Niode, *Gorontalo: Perubahan Nilai-Nilai Budaya, Pranata Sosial dan Ideologi Lokal*, p. 68.

### *New Order Rehabilitation*

After the failure of the rebellion, the main leaders were captured and flown to Jakarta, where they were jailed. However, the fall of Sukarno and the ascendancy of Suharto and the New Order improved the rebel leaders' fortunes markedly. After taking office, Suharto pardoned many of the key figures of Permesta and then brought them into his patronage network. Many found development and consulting jobs, including Ventje Sumual, a Minahasan Christian and the leader of the Permesta movement. Sumual established a company called P. T. Konsultasi and worked on lucrative development projects doled out by the Suharto regime.<sup>54</sup>

At one level, Suharto may have let Sumual and other leaders of Permesta off the hook for personal reasons. He and key Permesta leaders were apparently old friends who had fought side by side against the Dutch during the Indonesian revolution. At the same time, Permesta's anti-communist and anti-Sukarno ideology were closely in line with the New Order's own logic and thus may well have formed the basis for the rehabilitation of this cohort. The New Order had emerged in the context of an alleged coup and counter coup that had led to anti-communist massacres in 1965. Those events had left a smaller imprint on North Sulawesi, in part because the Christian population in Manado was largely hostile to communism as an ideology, and because the experience of Permesta had also wiped out much of the leftist influences in the region. By the 1980s and early 1990s, some were attempting to reinterpret Permesta as an anti-communist rebellion rather than an anti-government or anti-Indonesian rebellion.<sup>55</sup>

This partial rehabilitation of a rebel force that had challenged the central government exacerbated tensions between different ethnic groups within the administrative boundaries of North Sulawesi. It appeared that the Minahasans had been forgiven and regained their political dominance under the New Order. Back in Manado, ethnic Minahasans retained the governorship over the long term, while Javanese generals rotated in and out of the governor's office in other provinces (see Table 4).<sup>56</sup> Minahasans also tended to dominate the bureaucracy and military disproportionately. Within the military, access to development funds (*keuangan pembangunan*) meant officers generally enjoyed informal privileges and often held personal financial stakes in infrastructure development projects.<sup>57</sup> Thus military patronage and corruption were perceived to have a Minahasan bias.

Politically, to be sure, some power-sharing arrangements did exist. The vice governor, or the head of the provincial legislature, was usually from Bolaang-Mongondow or Gorontalo or Sangir—that is, not Minahasan. In addition, there were attempts on the part of the provincial government to mitigate the ethnic tensions. During the New Order, government leaders promoted the idea of "BOHUSAMI," an acronym referring to the four different groups in the province at that time: Bolaang-Mongondow, Gorontalo (Hulontalo),<sup>58</sup> Sangir/Talaud, and Minahasa.<sup>59</sup> This was an

<sup>54</sup> B.E. Matindas and Bert Supit, *Ventje Sumual, Menatap Hanya Kedepan* (Jakarta: Bina Insani, 1998), p. 369.

<sup>55</sup> R. Z. Leirissa, *PRRI, Permesta: Strategi Membangun Indonesia Tanpa Komunis* (Jakarta: Pustaka Utama Grafiti, 1991).

<sup>56</sup> One informant suggested that the Minahasa may have been enabled to hold onto the governorship because the military at the time was heavily Christian.

<sup>57</sup> Schouten, *Leadership and Social Mobility in a Southeast Asian Society*, p. 221.

<sup>58</sup> An indigenous pronunciation.

attempt to create a “trans-ethnic” regional identity, one of the priorities of the New Order government.<sup>60</sup> But these kinds of efforts tended to ring hollow, particularly when one saw that Manado’s political structure granted so much power to the Minahasa.

By the 1990s, many non-Minahasa were venting their frustrations. Politically, many Gorontalo resented the fact that, although they had the largest population and the largest land area, Minahasans occupied most of the key positions in government. At Jalan Roda, a local watering hole for politicians in Manado, discontented patrons were often heard to gripe that “no matter how good the gubernatorial candidates from other ethnic groups might be, they can never compete with the Minahasa.”<sup>61</sup>

**Table 4: Governors of North Sulawesi, 1961–2005**

Name of Governor	Years in Office	Ethnicity
A. A. Baramuli SH	1961–1962	Sangir/Makassar
F. J. Tumbelaka	1962–1965	Minahasa
Sunandar Prijosoedarmo (interim)	1966	Java
Abdullah Amu (interim)	1966–1967	not recorded
H. V. Worang	1967–1978	Minahasa
Willy Lasut	1978–1979	Minahasa
Erman Harirustaman	1979–1980	not recorded
G. H. Mantik	1980–1985	Minahasa
C. J. Rantung	1985–1995	Minahasa
E. E. Mangindaan	1995–2000	Minahasa
A. J. Sondakh	2000–2005	Minahasa
H. Sarundayang	2005	Minahasa

Source: Hasil Karya<sup>62</sup>

And because the Minahasa historically have been economically much better off relative to the Gorontalo, the Gorontalo tended to blame neglect by North Sulawesi’s provincial government for their own underdevelopment. Gorontalo informants complained that development funds dispersed to Gorontalo often did not reach their area because the money was redirected by the provincial government to development projects in Minahasa. One respondent said of the situation, “Gorontalo is an area that is always treated as a step-child [*anak tiri*].”<sup>63</sup>

<sup>59</sup> See David Henley, Maria J. C. Schouten, and Alex Ulaen, “Preserving the Peace in Post-new Order Minahasa in Renegotiating Boundaries,” in *Local Politics in Post-Suharto Indonesia*, ed. Henk S. Nordholt and Gerry van Klinken (Leiden: KITLV, 2007), p. 323.

<sup>60</sup> Michael Jacobsen, “Nation-making and the Politicisation of Ethnicity in Post-Suharto Indonesia,” City University of Hong Kong, Southeast Asia Research Center, Working Paper Series No. 26 (May 2002), p. 8.

<sup>61</sup> See Kementerian Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata, *Sejarah Proses Desentralisasi di Propinsi Sulawesi Utara* (Manado: Kementerian Kebudayaan dan Pariwisata, Balai Kajian Sejarah dan Nilai Tradisional, 2003).

<sup>62</sup> Provincial Government Report, “Hasil Karya: Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah Propinsi Sulawesi Utara Periode 1999–2004 Era Reformasi dan Otonomi Daerah” (Manado, 2004).

<sup>63</sup> “Gorontalo itu, daerah yang selalu dianaktirikan.” Interview, Saiful Ngiu, staff, Ministry of Sport, Jakarta, December 15, 2004. Saiful Ngiu is a native of Gorontalo. See also, “32 Tahun Gorontalo ‘Anak Tiri,’” *Harian Gorontalo*, October 20, 2000.

**Table 5: Social Development Indicators I in North Sulawesi**

Name	Primary School Completion Rate	High School Completion Rate
Minahasa	75.2	19.8
Gorontalo	57.3	8.8

Source: Gavin and Sondakh<sup>64</sup>**Table 6: Social Development Indicators II in North Sulawesi**

Name	% > 50 meter <sup>2</sup> floor space	with private toilet	% owning stoves	% owning TVs
Minahasa	31.4	62.1	60.8	33.9
Gorontalo	25.2	26.6	37.4	15.0

Source: Gavin and Sondakh<sup>65</sup>*Marginality in the Periphery*

The drive to separate Gorontalo from North Sulawesi was thus motivated, in part, by a feeling of marginalization, engendered by the perception that the province was dominated by the Minahasa.<sup>66</sup> The advantages enjoyed by the Minahasa were particularly irksome to the Gorontalo, who saw themselves as having been loyal to the Indonesian nation during a time when the Minahasan relationship with the Indonesian nation was troubled. To be sure, even the Minahasans' own position in the Indonesian state was largely peripheral during the New Order era, as this ethnic group never fully regained the status it had enjoyed under the Dutch. But in North Sulawesi province, they controlled the economic and political institutions. The campaign to form a new province was an attempt by the Gorontalo to break away from a Minahasa-dominated province. This historical context shows how resentment between different groups in North Sulawesi was created, persisted, and, in fact, intensified during the course of Indonesian state-building and well into the New Order.

**Transition and Opportunity for Gorontalo**

The historical process of state centralization in North Sulawesi fed the growing frustration of the Gorontalo. But that frustration lay latent until triggered by Indonesia's political turmoil in the late 1990s. Political transition accelerated the call for a new Gorontalo province for two reasons. First, the national crisis weakened the central government's capacity to govern. Increasing disaffection with the New Order and the weakness of the central state during the economic crisis led to bolder initiatives

<sup>64</sup> Compiled from Lucky Sondakh and Gavin Jones, "An Economic Survey of Northern Sulawesi: Turning Weaknesses into Strengths under Regional Autonomy," *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies* 39,3 (December 2003): 273–302.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Even the Ministry of Culture and Tourism recognizes this when it notes in a publication that "Throughout the colonial era, the Minahasans had a special position under the Dutch and had the highest education and were the most advanced. But in more modern times, reflecting on the slogan of BOHUSAMI, political elites from other communities started to ask when it was going to be their turn." See *ibid.*

by regional actors. At the same time, the institutional changes that emerged in the wake of the political transition also provided incentives for political elites. The following sections examine both of these processes and how they served to facilitate alliances among groups with a shared interest in seeing the establishment of a new Gorontalo province.

### *Gorontalo as a Social Cause*

The timing of new-province movements in Indonesia can be understood in the context of an opportune political environment.<sup>67</sup> The collapse of the New Order proved to be a critical juncture that unleashed new kinds of political and economic demands.<sup>68</sup> Thus, Gorontalo's initiative can be understood in the framework of other regional movements that emerged during the late 1990s. These included the separatist movements in East Timor, West Papua, and Aceh, mentioned earlier, but also reform movements in resource-rich areas such as Riau and Kalimantan, where residents demanded more autonomy and insisted that a greater share of the revenues earned through sales of regional commodities must remain in those regions.

As early as 1996, students in Gorontalo district had begun forming discussion groups that met regularly to address themes such as democracy, "national success," balancing national power (limitation of powers), civil society, and economic development.<sup>69</sup> In the political turmoil of 1997 and 1998, these discussion groups morphed into sites of political organization and activism. The *reformasi* movement grew and spread throughout the archipelago in part because many of the students studying in Jakarta returned to their home towns (*pulang kampung*), joined the local movements there, and took to the streets. In Gorontalo, the emerging student movement adopted the slogan "*Dulowo Limo Lo Pohalala*," or "Two from Five that are Brothers," referring to the different subethnic groups that together form the larger Gorontalo ethnic family.<sup>70</sup>

Initially, student demonstrations and demands in Gorontalo mirrored the broader student movement nationwide. They raised issues such as inflation, the distribution of foodstuffs, and economic security. In 1998, local newspapers also began running stories on the corrupt practices of the Gorontalo district chief, Imam Nooriman. Nooriman was Javanese, a military officer, and a member of the dominant party, Golkar. The news stories prompted student organizations to redirect their frustrations from the national to local government. The students staged ongoing demonstrations in front of the local government house for the next six months, calling on the regent to resign. In response, Nooriman summoned the military and police to break up the

<sup>67</sup> In the social-movements literature, this is referred to as the "political opportunity" approach to understanding movements. See Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contentious: Cambridge Studies in Contentious Politics* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>68</sup> Jacques Bertrand, *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict in Indonesia* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>69</sup> Niode, *Gorontalo: Perubahan Nilai-Nilai Budaya, Pranata Sosial dan Ideologi Lokal*, p. 71.

<sup>70</sup> Interview with Jamal Mooduto, former student activist, Bappeda, Gorontalo, July 26, 2005.



demonstrations with force.<sup>71</sup> Over thirty students were hospitalized as a result of the ensuing clash.

In ordinary times, such incidents may have ended with that firm act of repression, but now the violence marked a turning point in the student movement. The event sparked outrage from the students and the broader community, and a wide range of civil-society groups issued a demand to then-provincial governor E. E. Magindaan, calling for Nooriman to be sacked. The governor met with the students of Gorontalo and promised to resolve the issue. He reshuffled the military bureaucracy in the region by firing Ali Fatam, chief of the local military depot, and replaced him with an officer from Manado. But despite the demands of the Gorontalo, reinforced by a new provincial law against corruption, Governor Magindaan did not follow through on his promise to hold Nooriman accountable.

This situation aroused widespread resentment against the governor and in essence shifted the target of student grievances from the local district to the provincial level and to the governor.<sup>72</sup> The students demanded that either the governor act decisively, or face the prospect of a Gorontalo region that would split from North Sulawesi. So frustrated were some students that they marched to the Radio Republik Indonesia station and declared on-air that if their demands were not respected, they would call for Gorontalo to become its own *negeri* (state), which could have been interpreted as a demand for independence either from North Sulawesi or from Indonesia.<sup>73</sup> During renewed demonstrations in January 1999, students began calling for the establishment of a new province of Gorontalo.

In February, students organized a large meeting (Musyawarah Besar, or MUBES) in Gorontalo city. MUBES meetings usually occur annually and are opportunities for group members to air grievances and address important issues. At this MUBES, student organizers officially declared their support for a new province of Gorontalo.<sup>74</sup> This decision proved critical, as it brought together a broad array of student groups under the same umbrella, groups motivated to pursue the creation of a new province.<sup>75</sup> In addition to the secular Gorontalo student groups, the Islamic student association in Gorontalo also supported the cause. Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam (HMI) and its local branch office in the area took the initiative to organize an open dialogue, or *dialog terbuka*, to promote the idea of establishing a new province.<sup>76</sup>

It is worth noting that, in the wake of Muslim and Christian violence in Ambon and the Maluku, the North Sulawesi region has often been held up, rightfully, as one

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Later, Nooriman, the *bupati*, stepped down voluntarily.

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Jamal Mooduto, former student activist, Bappeda, Gorontalo, July 26, 2005.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Djamaluddin Panna, former secretary, PRESNAS, Gorontalo, July 26, 2005.

<sup>75</sup> Groups included Kerukunan Keluarga Indonesia Gorontalo (KKIG), Forum Solidaritas Intelektual Muda Indonesia Gorontalo (FSI-MIG), Himpunan Pelajar Mahasiswa Indonesia Gorontalo (HPMIG), Forum Komunikasi Mahasiswa Indonesia Tino Gorontalo (FK-MITG), Himpunan Pelajar Mahasiswa Indonesia Bualemo Gorontalo (HPMIBG), Ikatan Sarjana Gorontalo (ISG), and Forum Komunikasi Mahasiswa Gorontalo (FKMG). Intim, "Gorontalo Pisah dari Sulut," *Intim* 62 (December 1999).

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Masri Usman, former leader of HMI Gorontalo, Gorontalo, July 28, 2005.

place that did not experience religious or other identity-related acts of violence.<sup>77</sup> While this is true, the prominent role of Islamic organizations shows that tensions latent within the province did emerge, but manifested themselves in a different kind of way: as a demand for provincial separatism. While anti-Christian rhetoric was never used publicly to justify the demands for a new, predominantly Muslim, province, religious differences clearly played an important role privately in people's desires to have a separate province.<sup>78</sup>

On December 7, 1999, the first official organization with the specific goal of promoting the establishment of a new Gorontalo province was formed. Headed by H. Natsir Mooduto, the organization was dubbed Panitia Persiapan Pembentukan Provinsi Gorontalo Tomini Raya, the Committee to Prepare for the Formation of Gorontalo Tomini Raya Province (or P4GTR for short). With the formation of P4GTR, the role of the students was folded into the wider movement for a new province. The movement supporting the creation of a new province spread to include a broad array of groups from Gorontalo society.

Those involved performed a wide array of tasks, including mobilization, education, lobbying, and negotiation. Perhaps most importantly, these groups framed the debate in a way that identified the Gorontalo as a marginalized group seeking separation from a dominant power. The head of HPMIG, Ethon Parman, noted that the Gorontalo region should be entitled to half of the regional budget since it occupies half of North Sulawesi.<sup>79</sup> "That should be 15 billion rupiah out of the 29 billion for North Sulawesi province. What we [Gorontalo] receive is only two billion. Obviously, this is unequal."<sup>80</sup> Aleks Oli'l, head of the forum in Makassar, noted that Manado takes advantage of Gorontalo's resources without then taking care of the people in the society. "Manado is like a new imperialist in relation to Gorontalo," he stated.<sup>81</sup> Still others noted that "For dozens of years, Gorontalo has been cow's milk for the people of Manado."<sup>82</sup>

The social mobilization that built support for creating a new Gorontalo province was a critical part of the political process. Social forces took advantage of the economic and political crisis in Jakarta and advocated for region-specific goals. In particular, the demonstrations that emerged shifted the frustrations that had been concerned with general national issues to specific localized ones. Furthermore, the violence and the subsequent intransigence of local and regional leaders triggered the concrete demand for a new province. But the "political opportunity" argument only takes us so far. It

<sup>77</sup> See, for example, David Henley, Maria J. C. Schouten, and Alex Ulaen "Preserving the Peace in Post-New Order Minahasa," *Renegotiating Boundaries: Local Politics in Post-Suharto Indonesia*, p. 323.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with Husein Mohi, journalist, Gorontalo, July 29, 2005.

<sup>79</sup> APBD, or the Anggaran Pendapatan dan Belanja Daerah, Regional Budget.

<sup>80</sup> "Puluhan Mahasiswa Ingin Propinsi Gorontalo," *Kompas*, December 7, 1999. Note that the budget for a Gorontalo province was reported to be as high as 13 billion rupiah. See "APBD Gorontalo Bisa 13 Milyar," *Harian Gorontalo*, October 13, 2000.

<sup>81</sup> "Manado seperti imperilisme baru terhadap Gorontalo," quoted in "Gorontalo Pisah dari Sulut," *Intim* 62 (December 1999).

<sup>82</sup> "... selama berpuluh-puluh tahun menjadi sapi perahan bagi masyarakat Manado," quoted in "Gorontalo Pisah dari Sulut," *Intim* 62 (December 1999).

can help explain the emergence of the movement, but in the case of Gorontalo political elites also played a critical role in supporting the initiative for a new province.

### *Decentralization and Local Elites*

While societal groups took the lead in pressing for this initiative, local elites also had an interest in the creation of a new province, and thus they often worked alongside civil-society organizations to lobby the central government. Local elite interest can be understood particularly in the context of decentralization initiatives undertaken by the government as part of its political reforms. Two laws, Law 22 of 1999 on Regional Administration ("Law 22") and Law 25 of 1999 on Inter-Government Financial Balance ("Law 25"), devolved almost all substantive power, except in a few key areas (foreign affairs, international trade, monetary policy, national security, and legal systems) to the regency, a subprovincial level known in Indonesian as the *kabupaten*.<sup>83</sup>

The justification for decentralization was largely based on two principles: efficiency and equality. In terms of efficiency, decentralization was expected to promote governance that was "closer to the ground" and thus inherently more responsive to local demands, particularly in social sectors such as health and education.<sup>84</sup> It was thought that decentralized local governments would have better information and be able to act more quickly than the central government. From an economic perspective as well, decentralization was said to promote competition among different units because firms and individuals would be able to choose where to reside based on the performance of a particular municipality. This competition would induce better performance.<sup>85</sup>

Because it would shift power from the center to the periphery, decentralization was also seen as a way to quell calls for separatism and/or revolution.<sup>86</sup> Giving power and autonomy to local leaders would mean that the regions would be free from the intrusive political machinations of the "Javanese center." At the same time, decentralization promised fiscal benefits to the periphery: localities would be able to retain more of the revenues generated in their own areas rather than sending them to the central government. Thus the sense of justice, the sense that greater equality had been established between the center and peripheral areas (as opposed to equality among the different peripheral units), was an important consideration for those who shaped the decentralization policy.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>83</sup> These laws were implemented in 2001 and were subsequently revised in 2004.

<sup>84</sup> See Gustav Ranis and Frances Stewart, "Decentralization in Indonesia," Technical report (Yale University, Economic Growth Center, 1995). These authors were early advocates for decentralization based on these grounds.

<sup>85</sup> The economic logic underlying this perspective is found in Charles Tiebout, "A Pure Theory of Local Expenditures," *Journal of Political Economy* 64 (1956): 416-424.

<sup>86</sup> See, for example, the discussion by Gabriele Ferrazzi, "Using the 'F' Word: Federalism in Indonesia's Decentralization Discourse," *Publius* 30,2 (Spring 2000): 63-85.

<sup>87</sup> It is notable that, for the most part, the reforms granting increased autonomy to the periphery in Indonesia focused on administration at the district level rather than the provincial level. This was because of the military's strong objections to provincial autonomy, which it feared would accelerate, rather than abate, centrifugal forces. Thus, current decentralization law is a compromise of sorts, shaped by pressures

But the decentralization of power can also have perverse effects. The transformation may provide new opportunities in patronage and rent-seeking, for example. Michael Malley has suggested that decentralization of power also decentralizes and may spread corruption in some places.<sup>88</sup> New provinces, then, by extension, can also provide new political and economic bailiwicks for opportunistic elites. In particular, provinces require start-up infrastructure, including a new governor's house, a new legislative house, new bureaucratic offices, and the like, all of which provide opportunity for rent-seeking activities. Thus, new provinces also seem to generate construction boomlets in the region, filling the pockets of those who control contract bids.<sup>89</sup>

In Gorontalo, two kinds of local elites were active in supporting the movement for a new province. The first were prominent figures in society who had political aspirations related to the new province. These "out-of-power" or "aspiring" elites included prominent educators, religious figures, and business leaders. They lent the movement credibility as efforts to lobby and forge alliances became more important. These elites were also able to use the newly created civil-society organizations as vehicles to promote their own political agendas.<sup>90</sup>

For example, despite the creation of P4GTR as the primary advocacy vehicle for the formation of a new province, other groups such as PRESNAS and KP3GTR also emerged.<sup>91</sup> The official rationale for having several groups outlined a division of labor: P4GTR's activities would be "local," PRESNAS would be "medium size," and KP3GTR would lobby in Jakarta. But there was no compelling reason why one organization could not operate at different levels. In fact, the situation was determined by a leadership conflict among the different organizations because the leaders of each party aspired to become governor of a new Gorontalo province.<sup>92</sup>

Local elites who already held positions of power, such as local district heads and members of the district level legislature, also supported the formation of a new province. Many of their considerations were electoral. The movement was already popular, and to oppose such a movement could have consequences later. At the same time, creation of a new province would also funnel more development funds to the region, funds that had previously gone to Manado. This would mean increased development projects, projects of the kind that typically benefited local elites who could profit from fixed bidding and other practices.<sup>93</sup> The prospect of these benefits led the district heads of Sualemo, Gorontalo, and Gorontalo City to show their support at

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for increased autonomy and increased freedoms, yet also marked by caution regarding the implications of these centrifugal forces for national unity.

<sup>88</sup> See Michael Malley, "New Rules, Old Structures, and the Limits of Decentralization," in *Local Power and Politics in Indonesia: Decentralisation and Democratisation*, ed. Edward Aspinall, Greg Fealy, et al. (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2003).

<sup>89</sup> Fitriani et al., "Unity in Diversity?," p. 63.

<sup>90</sup> Interview with Husein Mohi, journalist, Gorontalo, July 29, 2005.

<sup>91</sup> Komite Pusat Pembentukan Provinsi Gorontalo Tomini Raya or The Central Committee for the Formation of Gorontalo Tomini Raya Province.

<sup>92</sup> Interview, Nelson Pomalingo, and Roem Kohno, heads of PRESNAS, and KP3GTR respectively. Both had clear gubernatorial ambitions. Natsir Mooduto, head of P4GTR had recently passed away.

<sup>93</sup> Interview with Rusli Monoarfa, student leader for Gorontalo Province, Manado, July 9, 2005.

the Patriot Day rally on January 23, 2000. The mayor of Gorontalo City, Medi Botutihe, also supported the movement, claiming that he sympathized with the aspirations of the local people.<sup>94</sup> Botutihe was another local leader who tried to run for governor of the new province, but he failed to garner broad support.<sup>95</sup>

To be sure, some elites were more willing to participate than others. In contrast to their counterparts in Gorontalo district, the ethnic Gorontalo elites in the provincial legislature did not initially support splitting the province.<sup>96</sup> One might expect that such leaders would be interested in establishing a new political unit where they could exert more power and influence without other groups, like the Minahasa, interfering in their affairs. However, elites in their position tended to be risk-averse and conservative. The Gorontalo legislators in Manado already had secure positions, and it was not in their interest to contest a new election where the outcome would be uncertain. Thus, of eight ethnic Gorontalo in Manado, all initially opposed the provincial split.<sup>97</sup>

The initial reluctance of the provincial elite formed the basis for a coalition opposed to the creation of the new province. In addition, ethnic migrants who had relocated to the provincial capital in Manado as part of a regional diaspora also expressed reservations about a new province. Gorontalo migrants who lived and worked in Manado were concerned that they would now be unwelcome in the city based on their race and ethnicity;<sup>98</sup> they feared being told to "go home to your new province."<sup>99</sup> The same was true of ethnic minority groups in the proposed new province of Gorontalo. Bureaucrats and other public officials from outside the region who served in Gorontalo were concerned about facing potential discrimination.

Recognizing the obstacle posed by provincial opposition, pro-Gorontalo forces brokered a deal. They agreed that if the legislators supported the recommendation for a new province, they would be given seats in the new Gorontalo legislature without having to campaign for them in the first election cycle.<sup>100</sup> Out of the eight leaders who had originally been opposed to splitting the province, seven of them now agreed and supported the initiative, while one remained in his seat in Manado. Once the provincial leaders were bought off, the remaining opposition receded. There was little coordination or any impetus to mobilization among remaining groups inclined to oppose the split. Thus, in February, the provincial legislature formally approved the division of North Sulawesi province into two parts.<sup>101</sup>

Throughout this process, the support of elites was critical at both the local and provincial levels, as government regulations dictated that before any such initiative would be considered at the national level, it must have the support of the local society

<sup>94</sup> "Boutihe Tak Takut Dukung 'gtr,'" *Manado Post*, December 29, 1999.

<sup>95</sup> "Lemah Lobi, Botutihe Sulit Jadi Gubernur Gorontalo," *Harian Gorontalo*, September 28, 2000.

<sup>96</sup> Interview with Husein Mohi, journalist, Gorontalo, July 29, 2005. Confirmed also by Ismail Moo, businessman, supporter of Gorontalo Province, Manado, July 8, 2005.

<sup>97</sup> Interview with Paris Yusuf, member DPRD Gorontalo, Gorontalo, July 25, 2005.

<sup>98</sup> Rainer Emyot Ointoe, local activist from Gorontalo, Manado, April 3, 2005. See also Rainer Emyot Ointoe, "Tomini Raya dan Diaspora Orang Gorontalo," *Manado Post*, February 7, 2000.

<sup>99</sup> Rainer Emyot Ointoe, local activist from Gorontalo, Manado, April 3, 2005.

<sup>100</sup> Interview with Husein Mohi, journalist, Gorontalo, July 29, 2005.

<sup>101</sup> "DPRD Sulut Setuju Dibentuk Provinsi," *Suara Pembaruan*, February 13, 2000.

and the local government. The provincial legislatures and the district chiefs and governors functioned as checkpoints on the path to Jakarta.

### *Political Party Reform and National Elites*

Civil-society organizations and political elites in the periphery had clear reasons for promoting the establishment of a new province. But what of elites at the national level? Why would political elites in the center support a regionalist initiative? On the one hand, the politics of personality and patronage played an important role here. Gorontalo had strong allies in Jakarta who rallied to the cause. At the same time, the transformation of the party system also shaped the interests of the various political parties, motivating them to advocate for a new province.

The best known advocate in Jakarta for Gorontalo provincehood was President Habibie. Though he had been raised in South Sulawesi, Habibie's family roots are in Gorontalo, and he strongly supported the provincial cause based on personal affinity to the region.<sup>102</sup> He both gave financial support and lobbied on behalf of Gorontalo with key leaders in the legislature. General Wiranto, army chief-of-staff under the Suharto regime and 2004 presidential candidate for Golkar, was also a strong advocate, in part because his wife was a native of Gorontalo.<sup>103</sup> Powerful businessmen such as Rachmat Gobel, a native of Gorontalo and head of Panasonic Indonesia, also strongly supported the new province.

While individual political elites in Jakarta may have had personal interests in creating a new province, national-level legislators had clear material incentives in advocating for a new province. It is an open secret that new provinces and new districts often require bribes paid to the national-level legislators who are ultimately the ones to write the law that establishes the fledgling administrative unit (a law that must then be signed by the president). Lobbyists' visits to legislators are then as much about distributing money as they are about presenting convincing arguments. In the case of Gorontalo, relevant legislators were apparently paid a sum of five million rupiah each in exchange for their support of the bill.<sup>104</sup>

But the monetary incentives paid to individual legislators were not the only factors influencing policy at the national level. Political parties as institutions played a critical role in new-province formation since approval for such an action requires legislative consent. Here it is useful to elaborate on some aspects of party reform. The tightly controlled process of party formation under the New Order was loosened up considerably under *reformasi*. Under the new rules, only fifty signatures from citizens twenty-one years of age or older, and registration with a court and the Ministry of

<sup>102</sup> In general, Habibie was seen as an advocate for "Outer Island" Indonesia after he replaced Suharto as president.

<sup>103</sup> Note that this took place when the army still held a block of seats in the national legislature. Some suggest that Wiranto may have even been the one to broach the subject in the legislature. Interview with Pitres Sombowadile, activist, February 4, 2005.

<sup>104</sup> An informant, who was present at the time the bribes were paid, emphasized that five million was quite a small sum, in part because Gorontalo was such an uncontentious case. He claimed that Gorontalo was the cheapest, fastest, smoothest of all the new-province initiatives and that others were more expensive or fraught with complications.

Justice, were required to form a new party.<sup>105</sup> As a result, dozens of new political parties emerged in 1999.

At the same time, stringent rules about which parties could contest national elections prevented the emergence of regional or ethnic-based political parties. The rules dictated that, in order to qualify to run in the 1999 national elections, parties were required to have offices established in at least one-third of Indonesia's provinces and at least half of all districts in those provinces.<sup>106</sup> These rules had an enormous influence on the composition of legislative bodies.

In addition, the election reform committee came up with a formula to balance representation between Java and the Outer Islands. Therefore, although 60 percent of Indonesia's population lived on Java, legislative seats were divided nearly evenly, with 234 (50.6 percent) for Java and 228 (49.4 percent) for the Outer Islands. Seats were distributed to cities with more than 450,000 people first. The remaining seats were allocated among the provinces based on population.<sup>107</sup> For example, in the densely populated province of East Java, a candidate needed 287,199 votes to win a seat on the legislature. A seat from Irian Jaya (West Papua), in contrast, would require only 63,547 votes.<sup>108</sup> Thus, in the 1999 elections, Megawati Sukarnoputeri's PDI-P (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia-Perjuangan, The Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle) won 34 percent of the votes and received 33 percent of the seats (153) because many of its votes were concentrated on Java. In contrast, Golkar won 22 percent of the votes but received 26 percent of the seats because many of its votes were from the Outer Islands.<sup>109</sup> Other parties faced more or less similar kinds of disparities, gaining or losing advantage depending on where their votes originated.

Given this context, new-province formation in Gorontalo and elsewhere may have been part of a longer term strategy to increase the number of seats in the legislature through the creation of new provinces. In 1999, electoral districts were organized along provincial lines, and thus the creation of a new province effectively meant that broad-based parties could gain more representation in the DPR-RI (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat-Republik Indonesia, People's Representative Assembly of the Republic of Indonesia or The House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia).<sup>110</sup> The largest parties, including PDI-P and Golkar, may have seen this as an opportunity to consolidate their dominant position in the national legislature and keep open the possibility of a cross-party alliance. At the same time, the requirement that parties maintain offices in at least a third of all provinces also gave larger parties an advantage, making it harder for small parties to compete.

<sup>105</sup> Dwight King, *Half-Hearted Reform: Electoral Institutions and the Struggle for Democracy in Indonesia* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), p. 51.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Leo Suryadinata, *Elections and Politics in Indonesia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2002), p. 89.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Stephen Sherlock, "The 2004 Indonesian Elections: How the System Works and What the Parties Stand For: A Report on Political Parties," technical report (Australian National University, 2004), p. 8.

<sup>110</sup> This point was suggested to me in various interviews, but I could not confirm through party officials or other participants that it had been an intentional strategy. Furthermore, by 2004, the laws governing electoral districts changed so that they were no longer based solely on provincial boundaries.

What is clear from the Gorontalo experience is that supporting a new province also gave central elites in Golkar a great deal of influence over the future of its provincial leadership. Prior to 2004, the governor was elected by the province's legislature. In Gorontalo, Golkar dominated the legislature and controlled the outcome of the gubernatorial election.<sup>111</sup> Because parties remained highly centralized, local legislators in Gorontalo were put under heavy pressure to elect Fadel Mohammed, a candidate chosen by the national Golkar party. Mohammed was Muslim, but not a *putra daerah*, or "son of the soil." Though he had spent some time in the region, his roots were in Ternate, and he lived and worked in Jakarta. But he had been a high-ranking and influential member of Golkar. Previously a businessman, Mohammed had risen through the ranks and established close ties with the Golkar leadership. His election dismayed the students and other local activists who insisted the ethnic Gorontalo take care of their own political future by electing one of their own. In this sense, national elites benefited from a new Gorontalo province mediated through political parties.

In sum, a strong national party seeking to maintain its legislative dominance had incentives to carve out provinces that would provide electoral gains at the national level. In addition, support from powerful patrons in Jakarta significantly aided in Gorontalo's cause. The role of central elites would also form a point of conflict among the local societal groups that had supported the creation of a new province for very different motives. However, this rift would emerge only *after* a new province was already created.

## Reflections and Conclusions

This article has tried to demonstrate the starkly political nature of new-province formation in Indonesia by examining the experience of Gorontalo. In Gorontalo, perceptions of historical marginalization led to popular resentment of Minahasan dominance. That dominance had emerged from the process by which the Dutch and Indonesian states sought to incorporate far-flung regions of the archipelago into an administratively coherent state. Gorontalo's opportunity to split away from North Sulawesi grew out of the political turmoil in the late 1990s and the subsequent institutional changes to Indonesia's political system. These provided the foundations for an alliance between social actors and elite actors spanning local, regional, and national levels.

Over a long span of time—through the colonial period, the nationalist era, the era of regional rebellion, and the New Order—the relationship between North Sulawesi and the state created tensions between the Minahasans and the Gorontalo. Both the colonial and Indonesian central state tended to privilege the Minahasa over the Gorontalo via the administrative structures of North Sulawesi province. These conditions left North Sulawesi compartmentalized ethnically and religiously.

<sup>111</sup> Gorontalo has historically been a stronghold for Golkar. At the provincial level, out of 25 members, 13 were from Golkar, 2 from PAN (Partai Amanat Nasional, National Mandate Party), 1 from PDI-P, 1 from Kebangkitan Bangsa, 1 from Partai Bulan Bintang, 4 from PPP (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan, the Unity Development Party), and 3 from TNI/Polri (Tentara Nasional Indonesia/Polisi Republik Indonesia) the armed forces and national police party). Niode, *Gorontalo: Perubahan Nilai-Nilai Budaya, Pranata Sosial dan Ideologi Lokal*, p. 72.



The timing of Gorontalo's provincial movement can be attributed, in part, to the Indonesian financial crisis of 1997, the collapse of Suharto's government, and subsequent political reforms in Indonesia. The students' demands for a new province emerged from localized events that occurred in the context of the national *reformasi* movement. Students vented their frustrations against North Sulawesi's governor for refusing to hold local leaders accountable for violence and corruption. As it happened, the interests of these social reformers overlapped with the interests of elites at the local, regional, and national levels to such a degree that, once initiated, the process moved quickly and smoothly.

A key implication of this study is that, in the context of center-region ties, the process of new-province formation is closely connected to national politics. The road to creating a new province is paved through Jakarta. Initially, national elite support for such regional objectives and ambitions may seem puzzling, but if examined in relation to political institutions, especially the larger political parties that might gain legislative seats and regional influence through such initiatives, the motives of national elites became much more clear. This is critical because the ultimate decision for or against a new province rests on their approval.

This insight also suggests that the relationship between center and regions in Indonesia is more complex than is typically portrayed. In Gorontalo, the movement to institute a new province was not about severing relations with the central state, but rather about creating new ties and new relationships previously not possible when the area was subsumed under North Sulawesi's larger provincial administrative structure. In this sense, a new Gorontalo province was less about a region seeking to isolate itself from the state and more about new and different kinds of access and relationships between center and region. In other words, there seems to be a centripetal element to new-province formation. It is clear that power does not flow in one direction, from the center outward, in Indonesia today. Relations between the nation's political center and its periphery are fragmented and multi-directional, a condition that political actors at all levels are learning to negotiate.