CONTENTIOUS POLITICS IN A REMOTE AREA OF THE MOLLUCAN ARCHIPELAGO

POLITIK KONTENSIUS DI DAERAH TERPENCIL DI KEPULAUAN MALUKU

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ABSTRAK

Pertanyaan utama disertasi ini adalah Bagaimana *contentious politics* berkembang di Maluku Barat Daya sebagai daerah terpencil di Indonesia sejak Reformasi? Kajian ini menghasilkan potret suatu proses politik yang mendorong terjadinya pemekaran wilayah di kawasan paling selatan Kepulauan Maluku. Hasil penelitian mengarah pada kesimpulan bahwa, meskipun Reformasi dan Otonomi Daerah mungkin menjadi penyebab langsung dari dinamika politik yang terus-menerus dan dinamis di Kabupaten Maluku Barat Daya dan wilayah paling selatan di Maluku, namun menggunakan kerangka teori *contentious politics* ini dapat memberikan penjelasan yang lebih baik atas dinamika proses politik yang terjadi. Melalui disertasi ini, saya telah mengembangkan pemahaman antropologis tentang kapasitas dan praktik yang dilakukan masyarakat lokal dalam menanggapi peluang eksternal yang ditawarkan oleh lembaga nasional dan kapasitas mereka untuk menciptakan peluang untuk melakukan perubahan sosial-politik. Metode dan alat penelitian yang saya gunakan untuk mengumpulkan data adalah *participant observation*, wawancara, dan pengumpulan data sekunder melalui penelusuran literatur, arsip, berita di surat kabar dan informasi yang tersebar di media sosial. Saya melakukan kerja lapangan di Indonesia selama total dua belas bulan dari akhir Februari 2018 hingga Februari 2019. Pemaparan temuan penelitian mengenai berlangsungnya *contentious politics* di kawasan paling selatan dari Provinsi Maluku yang telah berlangsung lebih dari tujuh puluh tahun ini saya sajikan secara kronologis dalam lima bab. Saya menggunakan istilah 'pemekaran' untuk menggambarkan setiap proses politik yang berjalan dalam kerangka *contentious politics* yang terjadi antara tahun 1950 hingga 1999, 1999 hingga 2008, dan 2008 hingga 2018.

Kata Kunci: *contentious politics*, pemekaran wilayah, Maluku Barat Daya, kawasan terpencil, Kepulauan Maluku

ABSTRACT

The central question of this dissertation is How has contentious politics developed in Maluku Barat Daya as a remote area in Indonesia since Reformasi? This study has resulted in a portrait of the political processes driving the successive splitting of local governments in the southernmost region of the Moluccan Archipelago. It leads to the conclusion that, although Reformasi and Otonomi Daerah might have been the direct cause of the current dynamic, continuous contentious politics in Kabupaten Maluku Barat Daya/MBD (Southwest Maluku Regency) and the southernmost region of the Maluku offer a better explanation of the dynamic political process. I have developed an anthropological understanding of the capacities and practices summoned up by local people in their responses to the external opportunities offered by the national institutional setting and of their capacity to create the opportunity to make socio-political changes themselves. The research methods and tools that I used to collect data are participant observation, interviews and secondary data collection in literature searches, archives, news in newspapers and information spread on social media. I did fieldwork in Indonesia for twelve months in total from the end of February 2018 to February 2019. In this dissertation, I have presented my research findings in a chronological order of the occurrences of contentious politics in the southernmost region of Maluku for over seventy years. I have adopted the term pemekaran to delineate each political process of the eruptions of contentious politics which occurred between 1950 to 1999, 1999 to 2008, and 2008 to 2018.

Keywords: contentious politics, pemekaran wilayah, Maluku Barat Daya, remote area, Moluccan, archipelago

INTRODUCTION

The changes in Indonesia's political administration from centralized to decentralized government administration have heightened the tension over power between the central government and regional governments. These dynamics of contention have attracted plenty of attention from scholars studying what is happening. Various studies have been conducted: about state and communal violence, about decentralization and the practice of good governance, the role of the middle class and the use of identity in local politics factors behind the consolidation of centre-periphery relations in Indonesia; the development of regional government since 1970s that have focused on the central – regional political and economic relations in Indonesia post-2001; the contested and dynamic relations between *adat* (customary law), religious law (that is, Islamic law), state law and authority. All of these studies deal with how the relationship between institutionalized politics as part of the Indonesian political system and the everyday politics of ordinary people shapes and reshapes over time.

Studies on decentralization do not concentrate exclusively on the results of the decentralization agenda. The possibility to execute government affairs free from the tutelage of the provinces and central government and the prospect of controlling the budget of Otonomi Daerah have also incentivized local actors to become involved in local government administration. On a theoretical level, McAdam (1982) has coined the concept of political opportunity structure for this incentive that encourages a collection of political actors to obtain more power by creating new political territory. In fact, many studies about the effects of decentralization policy show that the Regional Autonomy Law has provided local elites with opportunities to promote and consolidate power by influencing their constituencies on the local level. Two studies, one by Gerry van Klinken (2007) and one by Marcus Mietzner (2014), show that decentralization has unleashed intense competitive dynamics on the lower levels of the state. It is possible that decentralization has enriched the dynamics of local democracy because local actors are able to participate in sub-provincial governance

So far, all of these studies have been conducted in areas in a large island where an objective such as an economic benefit is easy to identify. These studies beg the question what happens in remote complex areas like those composed of small islands? Can the same or a different objective be identified? Scant attention has been paid to analysing the dynamics of institutional politics and the popular politics in a specified remote area in distant island regions. The need to understand these dynamics is obvious because *pemekaran wilayah* (the splitting of administrative regions) is still a reality in Indonesia, even on small islands remote from the central island of Java. The intertwined processes of decentralization, democratization and *pemekaran* form the background to my study. The process of *pemekaran wilayah* can be observed in many places in Indonesia, but I shall focus on *pemekaran* in Maluku Barat Daya (MBD).

My aim in this dissertation is to observe and record the current political struggle to split MBD and to understand how the previous movements achieved their goals and how these movements exercise power. How does power work for actors and how do they exercise power? The current MBD is the result of the struggle of a political movement driven by elite groups and their supporters who had been part of previous political struggles, either directly or indirectly. In this thesis I have described them as movements of civilians and politicians who put claims on the design of governmental territories. I found connection with the concept of *contentious politics*, that is helpful in studying of among others movements and mobilization directed to political claims. With this in mind, the major question of this thesis is: How has contentious politics developed in Maluku Barat Daya?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The question why political and social movements are born, grow and often fail has attracted the attention of many scholars. Explanations can be grouped into various broad theories: deprivation,

resource mobilization, political opportunity, collective identity and framing theories and the dynamic of contention perspectives (Opp 2009; Hoffbaeur and Ramos 2010). McAdam, McCarthy and Zald (1996) come with a slightly different classification of existing theories explaining social movements, emphasizing the importance of political opportunities, mobilization structures and framing processes. In the late twentieth century, McAdam, McCarthy and Zald (1996: 2) commented on the diversity of perspectives espoused by scholars of social movements, so that it is possible to speak only of an emerging consensus still criss-crossed by different, oftentimes antagonistic perspectives (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996: 2). Besides dissension about theoretical perspectives, there are differences in approach. According to McAdam, McCarthy and Zald (1996: 3), "American scholars such as McAdam (1982), Constain (1992) and Tarrow (1989) prefer to make case studies of single movements or protest cycles, while European scholars such as Kriesi *et al.* (1992), Joppke (1991) and Ferree (1987) are inclined to make cross-national comparisons of similar movements in a number of different national contexts."

Jacquelien van Stekelenburg and Bert Klandermans (2009) have recently tried to bring the various approaches to social movements together in one overview (Table 1), in which the theoretical approaches mentioned above are to be found.

Resource mobilization through social networks and political opportunities are two structural approaches that can be applied to my case study. Relying on the definition of McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001), I have chosen to designate the 'outbreak' of *pemekaran wilayah* in MBD a form of contentious politics. Interpreting the espousal of *pemekaran wilayah* as contentious politics has directed my focus towards the identification of actors in *pemekaran* movements, their claims, the objectives of these claims and the responses to claim making. I have explored the mechanisms and processes involved in the creation and transformation of the proponents of the movements, the process of mobilization and the political moves that proponents make in an effort to achieve their goals. This underlines that, by taking contentious politics as a central concept, I am able to combine theories focusing on resource mobilization, political process

Table 1. Theories on participation in and the emergence of social movements

	Classical approaches	Contemporary approaches		
	Mass society Collective behaviour	Resource mobilization	Political Process approaches	Social constructivist approach
Why people protest	Grievances, discontent, anomie, class conflict	Resources, opportunities, social networks efficacy	Political opportunities (cognitive Liberation)	Social construction of reality: (meaning)construction, identity, emotions, motivation
Who protest	Alienated, frustrated, disintegrated, manipulated, marginalized	Well-organized, social networks, professional, resourceful, embeddedness	Coalition between challengers/political elites, embeddedness	Countercultural groups, identity group, embeddedness
Forms of protest	Spontaneous, irrational, expressive violence (panics, fashions, mobs, crime)	Rational, planned, instrumental, (institutional politics, lobbying, interest groups)	Rational, instrumental, policy-oriented (elite contention, lobbying, indigenous minority disruption, for instance, strikes)	Ideological, expressive, identity oriented (cultural and religious organizations, self-help groups, alternative lifestyles)

Source: van Stekelenburg and Klandermans, 2009

approaches and a social constructivist approach of political conflicts.

Furthermore, I have used the concepts collective action and political opportunity structure (Tarrow 1996; Goodwin and Jasper 1999; McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001; Giugni 2009; Tilly and Tarrow 2015) in my attempt to understand what has happened in *Provinsi* Maluku, especially in Maluku Barat Daya. Although borrowing insights from the three approaches to ethnicity, I have found the constructivist approach the most useful to my study. It combines primordial and instrumental approaches in which ethnic identity is always a result of interaction between individual and the external world. The constructivist approach will become apparent in the way people talk about political alliances. I also use the concept of 'imagined community' of Benedict Anderson (2006) to explain the fluidity of these political groups. The concept of 'imagined community' applies a constructivist or instrumentalist perspective on group identity to groups that constitute (new) political entities; Anderson elaborated the concept for nation-states, but I see no objection to using the term for residents of islands or island clusters as well. I therefore view the proponents of the movements in MBD contentious politics as an imagined political community. The group formed by the movement is an imagined community because they barely know their fellow-members, presumably never meet or even hear from one another, yet the image of their communion lives in the minds of each. Importantly they consider themselves orang MBD (people from MBD). When people imagine the movement as community, this imagined community helps to mobilize them by its reference to their 'community membership'

I use concept of diasporic belonging proposed by Nina Glick Schiller (2002) to understand the process of identification of the political community involved in MBD contentious politics. As an imagined political community the political actors might share a common identification about their place of origin in the southern islands of Maluku through social relationships like '*fam*' or '*mataruma*' (referring to family name or surname and used after a first name or a birth name in the Moluccan community) and '*pela*' (a system of social relations idiosyncratic to Moluccan society, in the form of agreements made between one village and another), even though some of them might have not even permanently reside in MBD or have never even visited this remote area. Glick Schiller (2002) calls this sense of identification a diasporic belonging, in which people identify or envision themselves as a group that shares a common history or common interest in order to arrive at a similar identification and develop a sense of belonging to each other. Furthermore, when people act on these identities, they might organize common cultural or social projects that promote the interests of the members of the diasporic population wherever they have settled (Glick Schiller 2002).

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

The research methods and tools that I used to collect data are participant observation, interviews and secondary data collection in literature searches, archives, news in newspapers and information spread on social media. I did fieldwork in Indonesia for twelve months in total from the end of February 2018 to February 2019. While building on the relationship I maintain with each informant, I have been able to observe how the dynamics of relationships between political actors in MBD have continued to change, keeping pace with the constellation of political parties on the local level and the socio-cultural dynamics that occurred on Kisar. After my fieldwork, I have kept in contact with various informants so as to be able to update the situation at MBD.

THE MOLUCCAN ARCHIPELAGO AND THE MALUKU BARAT DAYA ISLANDS

The territorial administration of Maluku has changed throughout times. Between 1945 - 1949, it consisted of two *swapraja* (sub-regions), Maluku Utara (North Maluku) and Maluku Selatan (South Maluku). In 1958, the Moluccan Archipelago became one province -then called Daerah Swatantra Tingkat 1 Maluku. After the

Reformasi in 1998, the Moluccan Archipelago once more became two provinces: the *Provinsi* of Maluku Utara with its capital in Sofifi and the *Provinsi* of Maluku with its capital in Kota Ambon.

The *kabupaten* Maluku Barat Daya, the eleven-year-old regency is categorized as a **3T** region, **Terluar** (Outermost)*,* **Terdepan** (Foremost) and **Tertinggal** (Left behind). The MBD Regency is Outermost and Foremost because it lies on the borders of Indonesia and shares a border with East Timor (Timor Leste) in the west and Australia in the south, and, it is Undeveloped because the community and its territory are relatively less developed compared to other regions on a national scale. Let us make a quick survey of the main changes.

Before Reformasi, the *kabupaten MBD* was part of the region or *kabupaten* Maluku Tenggara. Maluku Tenggara was formally established as one region in the province of Maluku in 1958. The *kabupaten* Maluku Tenggara itself was an administrative area constituted of clusters of islands situated between two provinces: Nusa Tenggara Timur/NTT (East Nusa Tenggara) and Papua. Before 1999, Maluku Tenggara consisted of clusters of islands ranging from the Kei Islands, the Aru Islands, the Tanimbar Islands and the Selatan Daya or Barat Daya Islands. Maluku Tenggara is made up of different cluster of islands or minor archipelagos that each has its own ethnic groups, languages and economic and historical character. In the Kei Islands, for example, the customary way of life or tradition and the social hierarchy are inextricably intertwined.

Around 160 kilometres to the east of the Kei Islands lie the Aru Islands. To the west, around 260 kilometres away, lie the Tanimbar Islands, farther west around 700 kilometres away lie the Selatan Daya Islands. The vast area of Maluku Tenggara added to the complexity of transportation problems in this region. Not surprisingly, the label *Orang Tenggara Jauh* (the Far South-eastern People) has been pinned on the MBD islanders. The Far Southeast is a stereotype beginning to form on the analogy of the shipping route departing from Ambon, the centre of Maluku Province, and travelling towards the south-eastern region of Maluku. Of all the island clusters in Maluku Tenggara, only a few islands in the Selatan Daya such as Kisar, Wetar and Damer lie within the Inner Banda Arc, the rest of the Selatan Daya islands such as Leti, Moa, Lakor to Babar are situated in the Outer Banda Arch.

The development of towns in *Kabupaten* Maluku Tenggara has differed widely from one to another. Compared to other urban sites in the same region, Tual is arguably the most developed, mainly because the area has become a regency capital since Maluku Tenggara separated from the then Maluku Selatan in the late 1950s. Another more developed town is Dobo, located on the Aru Islands. Aru has acquired a measure of world fame because of Wallace' expedition in the 1850s. The next-ranking town is Saumlaki, that is located in the Tanimbar cluster. Saumlaki is known as a missionary town. The next most important town is Wonreli, the district town located on Kisar. Wonreli first developed as a settlement after an

Map 1. Kabupaten Maluku Tenggara before Reformasi

agreement had been reached between the Meher leader from Matarumah Halono-Hihileli and the Dutch East India Company (VOC) around 1665. As part of the deal, several Meher tribes who lived in the hilly region of Kisar agreed to build a new settlement in the lowland area. This has now become Wonreli Village. In addition to these four towns, each island in Maluku Tenggara has developed its centres of local government and economic activity in the years since the establishment of Maluku Tenggara as an independent *kabupaten*. The smaller district towns are Serwaru on Leti Island, Tepa on Babar, Ilwaki on Wetar and Larat on Larat - North Tanimbar. After 1999 Reformasi, more towns have been established, among them Langgur on Kei Kecil and Tiakur on Moa.

The social hierarchy in Southeast Moluccan society is relatively rigid and grounded on its upholding of particular customary laws in various cluster of islands. This social categorization based on hierarchy is known by a host of different terms because of the diversity of languages and the idiosyncratic form of each community among the islands. Generally, in all four island clusters, the social hierarchy is divided into three strata.

Settled in the eastern part of Maluku Tenggara, the Keiese acknowledge the division of their society into three strata, consisting of the *mel-mel,* the *ren-ren* and the *iri-iri.* The *melmel* are the highest rank and considered to be the nobility. This assertion is affirmed by Hooe (2012) who explains that individuals who claim historical rights to the leadership positions in the *adat* domains of the Kei Islands are all *mel-mel* (a class of high-ranking individuals, the nobles or nobility, or *bangsawan* in Indonesian). In contrast to the social hierarchy of the Kei Islands, in the Selatan Daya islands in the western part of Maluku Tenggara, I have observed, the high-ranking individuals and claims leadership positions are called the *marna*. The *ren-ren* is the middle rank, while the *iri-iri* is the lowest rank. In the Tanimbar Islands, the social hierarchy consists of three ranks: *mel/mele/melar* (a first rank, the nobility), *tomwatar* (a second rank, the commoner), and *kawar* (the third rank or group are usually called *budak* (slaves)16. In

Selatan Daya, a rigid social stratification system divides the local society intro three strata. The hierarchy is as follows: (1) the *marna* or the nobles are the first strata; (2) the *wuhur* are the second strata which supports the *marna* clan. The *wuhur* manage the Marna's property and (3) the *a'na* are the third strata and they also support the *marna* clan by providing the manual labour. Two villages on Kisar in Selatan Daya – the West and East Oirata Villages - apply different names/ terms to this social stratification: the *marna* (the first strata), the bur (second strata) and *stam* (the third strata). The variation in social stratification on Kisar can perhaps be attributed to the different languages spoken by the Kisarese, whereas the West and East Oirata people both speak the *Oirata* language. The people living in the other seven villages on Kisar speak *Meher.*

The *Provinsi* Maluku is home to around sixty languages (*Kantor Badan Bahasa Provinsi Maluku*/The Language Office of Maluku, 2019: https://kantorbahasamaluku.kemdikbud. go.id/2019/12/menjayakan-bahasa-daerah/ . The lingua franca of the Moluccans is Melayu Ambon, a dialect of Bahasa Indonesia spoken in Eastern Indonesia. Of the sixty languages in *provinsi* Maluku, twenty-three are spoken in the MBD islands. On some islands multiple languages have been identified. On Wetar and Babar five languages are spoken, while the small island of Kisar has two. Most of the MBD languages fall into the category of Central-Malayo Polynesian (ethnologue.com). Only one is a Papuan language, the Oirata language spoken by people in two villages on Kisar. The original local languages are mportant as part of the local identity, as we have seen in the case of Kisar. The lingua franca of the Southwest Moluccans is either Melayu Ambon or Melayu Kupang. I think the reason is that many Southwest Moluccans travel often and widely in the province of East Nusa Tenggara.

MALUKU BARAT DAYA:

A Geographical, Sociocultural And Political Overview

On the most basic level, the MBD regency is undeniably very far away from the centre of power in Jakarta, compounded by the fact that distances within the regency or from the regency to the capital of the province, Kota Ambon, are huge. Travelling distances are not only a matter of kilometres, but also of the frequency of flights and boat trips and the unreliability of transportation. Depending on the question of whether the west or the east monsoon is prevailing, certain parts of the archipelago are difficult to reach and sometimes boats do not show up for days or weeks on end.

This remoteness could be partly overcome by the development of a better communications and transportation infrastructure and also by the construction of schools, clinics et cetera. The administrative hierarchy of government is affected by the remoteness and vice-versa. In the logic of the Indonesian state, the MBD regency should be part of the province of Maluku, with Kota Ambon as center. Unfortunately, the physical distance to Kupang, capital of the province of Nusa Tenggara Timur, is much shorter than it is to Kota Ambon. The idea of remoteness has become integrated into the identity of the MBD regency. People in Kota Ambon, for instance, speak of them as people *tenggara jauh*, the people from the 'far away southeast'. The remoteness of the island is also more than just a part of the narrative of the MBD regency; it has also allowed a splitting of the regency identity into more localized identities. Their lack of contact on the regency level means that people can easily maintain a more localized identity, be this of an island or a village.

People who want to escape the remoteness and relative isolation of the area have moved out. As a consequence of this process, a sizeable diaspora of people from MBD has sprung up in Kupang, Ambon and Jakarta. Interestingly, this has not necessarily led to a greater cohesiveness; local identities are still being reinforced in the diaspora in Kota Ambon. For instance, there are different student organizations for students from one particular island. However, when the distance from the homeland is increased, in Jakarta, local loyalties play less of a role and all Southwest Moluccans in Jakarta feel they have a shared MBD identity. It is interesting to note that the main pockets of the Southwest Moluccan diaspora are to be found in the areas in which power can also be found, like Jakarta and Ambon, or the area that was the traditional centre for the Southwest Moluccans: Kupang. This situation resembles the trajectories for mobilization that Anderson describes in his 'imagined communities'. The harsh reality is that if Southwest Moluccans want to climb the societal ladder, they have to pursue certain educational and employment trajectories. The first step is to Ambon and the second is to Jakarta. The diaspora communities in both places, and indeed in Kupang, are doorways to power for the people in Southeast Maluku.

THE FIRST *PEMEKARANS IN THE SOUTHEAST MALUKU, 1950 TO 1999*

The contentious politics in the southern region of Maluku has unrolled since the Indonesian national revolution succeeded. The southern islands had already expressed a desire to be separated from the more northerly islands almost immediately after the Proclamation of Independence and before the Dutch retreat after the transfer of sovereignty in 1949. In 1947, the people of the southern islands already nurtured an ambition to have control over the southern islands themselves. The Ambon-based RMS insurrection stimulated this ambition.

The call to become a separate administrative unit was granted by the first governor of Maluku, Latuharhary, at no less a time than during the campaign to suppress the RMS in a conference on board KM Kasimbar. In this period, the movements calling for changes in administrative entities were very much the playground of the political elites. The battles were fought in the official political arena and the old political elite were the contenders. It would be fair to say the ordinary people were not involved.

This changed at the beginning of the 1960s. This was a time in which it was problematic to launch political movements in Maluku as it was an operational military area and at which

the military were gaining a greater foothold on the national and political level. The Western Southeast Maluku politicians were not deterred by such considerations. They moved along two lines. The first was to seize the national celebration of 17 August as a stage on which to promote ideas of *pemekaran* and the second was to mobilize scholars from the region in Ambon. Both movements had an impact on what was to come. The 17 August event in 1962 served to make the broader public aware of the political issues at stake and the mobilization of southeast scholars by Pooroe brought people who had not been involved in politics earlier because they had not been members of the traditional political elite into the fold.

In the successive movements to split the region into smaller areas, identity politics have changed over time, in a way that resembled peeling the layers off an onion. The first movement was that of the Southern Islands directed against the island cluster around Ambon. They did not stop there. As soon as the 'common enemy' Ambon was beaten, new conflicts arose. Fresh sets of identity politics were defined along new lines, based on considerations of political gain. Capital cities mattered because their presence could create extra jobs but functions also mattered because heads of regions could control the funds.

MALUKU TENGGARA BARAT BETWEEN 1999 TO 2008:

The splitting of Selatan Daya/Maluku Barat Daya

After Maluku Tenggara Barat split off from *Kabupaten* Maluku Tenggara to become an autonomous administrative unit, the regency government tried to create a cultural unity or at the very least encourage cooperation by introducing the motto *kidabela kalwedo*. *Kidabela* was supposed to represent the eastern part with Tanimbar as the main island, while *Kalwedo* represented the western islands. This cultural concept was devised to bring the different people in the new *kabupaten* Maluku Tenggara Barat together to create and forge a new identity. However, there was an inherent problem, the

large difference between the two respective cultural concepts.

Kidabela has a long history in Tanimbar and refers to tried and tested ways of creating bonds between villages in the area. *Kalwedo* seems to have had a much shorter history. In fact, it only made an appearance at the time the motto *kidabela-kalwedo* was created. Only afterwards was *kalwedo* used on particular occasions and for enterprises that were connected to the regency government or some people in that government. Like an unhappy marriage, the '*kidabela-kalwedo* approach' as an instrument to create stability or unity in the regency failed.

There were two issues that threatened the unity in the new *kabupaten*. The first was the choice of the new *kabupaten* capital and the second the election of the regency head and deputy-regency head, the *bupati* and *wakil bupati*. Both issues ended to the advantage of the eastern part of which Tanimbar is the centre. As the choice of the capital was beneficial to Tanimbar, the people from Selatan Daya expected that they would get a bonus in the regency head elections. They did not even go for what would have been the first prize, because their candidate couple was a combination of Tanimbar and Selatan Daya. The victory of the candidate couple who both came from Tanimbar created a real split and stimulated the people from Selatan Daya to strive for the status of an autonomous *kabupaten* for Selatan Daya. The loss of the elections was considered a slap in the face of Selatan Daya as we can see from the reaction of Selatan Daya diaspora. Even some who felt less strongly connected to Selatan Daya were incensed by this election result and began to become politically involved.

The desire for their own *kabupaten* was a return to an ambition expressed earlier by representatives of Kisar in 1998 when they had asked the provincial government for their own *kabupaten*. At that time, they were fobbed off with a vague promise that the provincial authorities were going to take another look five years after the establishment of the *kabupaten* Maluku Tenggara Barat, that would be just one year later in 1999. In this sense the provincial authorities can be said to have been

instrumental in encouraging the attempt to create a *kabupaten* that combined the Tanimbar islands and Selatan Daya.

The campaigning for a new *Kabupaten* Maluku Barat Daya was complicated in different ways and hindered by the existence of two parallel governmental structures: a traditional one and a state-based formal structure. Both structures had been in place since the New Order regime of Soeharto introduced the formal structure in the 1970s. After the fall of the New Order regime at the time of the Reformasi and especially after the civil war in Maluku at the beginning of this century, the traditional system was restored. This was called the return to the *negeri*, referring to the traditional name for a village; the word *desa* stood for the village in the formal governmental structure. The restoration took longer than necessary because of the labyrinthine bureaucracy.

When it was all said and done, it was not a full return to the traditional system, it was a return to a combination. The resultant dissatisfaction served to reveal some tensions and cracks in the traditional system. Firstly, we have seen that it was beneficial to traditional leaders who could claim positions based on lineage, to combine a traditional position with one in the formal structure. This was their best way of ensuring holding on to power for a longer period.

However, nothing is ever simple and it turned out that a mere return to the traditional pattern was also complicated because the society had changed. Traditional leaders found that they were facing severe competition from people from the traditionally lower classes who would not have had access to power in the traditional system. Many of these people had chosen an upwards trajectory by taking the path of higher education. And, in the new status quo, it was exactly this higher education that was an important asset to attaining positions in the formal structure. The island of Kisar is a good example of how the return to the traditional system was complicated because people from the lower classes had moved upwards socioeconomically by dint of their aspirations to make something more of their lives and, in doing so, had undermined the traditional hierarchy. With their achieved status many of

them had move away from their home islands and lived in Kupang or Dili.

The two large congresses that were held during the eight-year campaign for *Kabupaten* Maluku Barat Daya showed that as the campaign evolved, the political actors and the setting changed. The first congress in 2001 was held on Kisar, putting the Selatan Daya area right at the heart of the campaign. The political actors came from the islands but also from diaspora. Most prominent were the diaspora in the more traditional settlements, Kupang and Dili, where Selatan Daya has a long history of outmigration. Some of the political actors evidently also had a personal interest in a new *kabupaten*. The second congress in 2007 was held in Ambon, closer to the centre of the provincial power, and this time the diaspora emerged even more importantly as political actors. Not only those who lived in Ambon were now involved, but the diaspora network in Java was mobilized. In other words, the movement at the end of the campaign had shifted to the power centre, away from the Selatan Daya itself, and to the diaspora who were less connected to the traditional system.

CONTENTIOUS POLITICS BETWEEN 2008 TO 2018:

The movement to split Maluku Barat Daya

The collapse of the *Kidabela Kalwedo* coalition after the first Maluku Tenggara Barat *bupati* election in 2001, led to the breakdown of the political loyalties in Kabupaten Maluku Tenggara Barat that stretched from Selatan Daya in the west to the Tanimbar Archipelago in the east. Furthermore, the Selatan Daya political actors, who felt betrayed by and disappointed in the political processes in the Maluku Tenggara Barat local parliament in 2001, regrouped themselves and initiated a congress of people living in the three islands clusters Pulau-Pulau Terselatan, Leti Moa Lakor (Lemola) and Babar. This and subsequent congresses mobilized the loyalty of the smaller island clusters segment leading to the separation of the western part of Maluku Tenggara Barat in 2008.

A new *kabupaten* called Maluku Barat Daya was established. However, as the years went by, loyalty to the new *kabupaten* eroded. The final collapse was triggered by the feelings of disappointment in and anger felt by the people of Pulau-Pulau Terselatan towards their *bupati*, who came from the Babar Islands. Subsequently, the angry and disappointed people in Pulau-Pulau Terselatan, Kisar in particular, organized various collective actions making critical protests about the *kabupaten* administration. These protests ranged from demonstrations and mass rallies to the sealing of public facilities and government offices by the traditional means of placing a *sasi*. A coalescence of all the resistance actions resulted in the decision to break away from the power of the existing *kabupaten*. By mobilizing people's loyalties to the identity of the Pulau-Pulau Terselatan islands cluster, this marked the commencement of the political movement whose goal was to form a new *kabupaten*. The movement has gone from strength to strength but, instead of naming the proposed *Kabupaten* Pulau-Pulau Terselatan, the proponents of the current *pemekaran* movement have introduced a new name, Kepulauan Terselatan. A new construction of geo-political loyalties is in the making. Since 2012, the *Aliansi Rakyat Kepulauan Terselatan* had been the key political actor in leading the fight for this new *kabupaten*. Nevertheless, at a certain moment it was not clear whether this *Aliansi* was still active since it had more or less lapsed into abeyance, waiting for the Indonesian government to lift the moratorium on *pemekaran wilayah.*

Then, during the election for a new governor in 2018, the trend towards the splintering of political loyalties was suddenly reversed and the whole of Maluku Darat Daya united to have their *Bupati*, Barnabas Orno elected. There were two reasons for this change in the dynamics. The first was that the underlying mechanism of splintering (*pemekaran*) would not have been a valid process in this case because the election pertained to the whole of the province. The second was that the people, especially on Kisar, saw this as a great opportunity to get rid of the *Bupati*. Therefore, before any political action could take place in the ever-smaller territorial units, the politicians suddenly zoomed out again to take in the bigger picture.

Two related processes can be pinpointed as the principal instigators in this: the changing role of social media and the people living in the diaspora. The social media have been growing steadily in importance, partly because they are developing globally anyway, but, in our case and just as importantly, the infrastructure required or the Internet has been improving all the time.

In the previous period, up to 2008, people from Maluku Tenggara Barat living in the diaspora had often taken the lead in the political process. They lived in Kota Kupang, Kota Ambon or Jakarta, close to the people who had the power to make political decisions that meant that they were in the best position to lobby. They also had far better Internet access that gave them a a clear advantage over the people living in the islands. They took the initiative in political actions and used the social media to mobilize support in the islands.

People in Maluku Barat Daya now have improved Internet connections and can establish their own networks with the help of social media. Of course, the recurrent problems of an unstable network and occasional electricity cuts did not disappear overnight but, on the whole, they they connections are now much better and people living in the area can take their own political initiatives. The situation is now reversed. No longer do the people in Maluku Barat Daya have to support politicians in the diaspora, now people there can mobilize the people in the diaspora to work for them. In a way we could say 'politics has come home'.

Although social media was a new phenomenon, the parallel leadership structure that continued to play a significant role was a very old one, albeit it had to tackle the situation in a new way. The ancient social stratification in Maluku Barat Daya was based on traditional, ascribed statuses. The *marna* form the first stratum of nobles, the *wuhur* is the second stratum, that supports the *marna* clan and manages *marna* property, and the *a'na* is the third rank, that also supports the *marna* but as their workers. The existence of these three hereditary ranks lies at

the base of the unequal distribution of property and, because land is becoming increasingly scarce, tensions are growing.

Nevertheless, the traditional stratification still inevitably has an impact on the administrative structure. Most of the traditional leaders of the *marna* have positions in the *kabupaten* bureaucracy. However, exactly because the traditional postions are unattainable to them, lower-class people have shown a marked tendency to value learning and are therefore better educated and are more suitable to become civil servants, opening the path for them to attain status in the new order of things. As it stands and people are well aware of this fact, access to the bureaucracy has become a tool for access to economic resources and economic mobility. From the perspective of ordinary people, politicians from a similar background are much more likely to make changes to the traditional structure, because they will have a better understanding of the conditions affecting the ordinary people's lives.

The majority of the group that was opposed to the traditional hierarchy consisted of people with a higher education but a lower rank in the traditional social stratification. Their intention was not to destroy the ancestral legacy completely but they were eager to erase the parallel administrative structure running within the bureaucracy. When their attempt to do away with it failed, they decided to try to split off the Pulau Terselatan in order to have a territory in which there was no traditional hierarchy, albeit one that was less extensive.

CONCLUSION

I now can return to my main question: *How has contentious politics developed in Maluku Barat Daya as a remote area in Indonesia since* Reformasi *and subsequently* Otonomi Daerah? How has it been the actual motor behind the recent dynamic but unremitting contentious politics in MBD and the Southern region of the Moluccan Archipelago?

It is important to note that, before *Reformasi*, there had already been cases of what we now call *pemekaran:* for instance, the splitting of Maluku Tenggara from Maluku Selatan. The reason for this *pemekaran avant la lettre* was politically motivated in two ways. Firstly, because the southernmost areas of Maluku did not want to be associated with the separatist RMS movement and, secondly, because the people from the southern islands felt looked down upon by the central Moluccans. Reformasi and especially Otonomi Daerah changed the political opportunities by opening up options for the splitting or, alternatively, merging of administrative entities. The opportunities seemed to be endless because there were no real limits or demands placed on new administrative entities by the central government. There is still is, for example, no demand specifying a minimum of square kilometres or of a number of inhabitants for new administrative entities. This lack of specification has led to splitting into smaller and smaller entities.

Pemekaran wilayah in Maluku Barat Daya has become the arena of a continual political contestation. Establishing a new *kabupaten* has emerged as a strategic tool which political actors can wield to try to increase their power on the regency level. They have done so by lobbying to have the capital of a new *kabupaten* established in their own territory. This was the essential proviso for a *bupati* to exert full control over the *kabupaten* territory. For instance, the *bupati* can ensure the development of an area in which the *kabupaten* offices will be built. Not only that, he can also make sure that his people taste the benefits of the *kabupaten* development.

Likewise, another important matter, having the *kabupaten* office in one's own neighbourhood, inextricably bound up with the process of constructing an imagined community/supporters of the political actors. An instance in this respect is *Bupati* Barnabas Orno who has alliances on Babar and Lemola (Leti-Moa-Lakor). When Orno ran the temporary *kabupaten* office on Kisar, he had to run the gauntlet of several mass protests. Many people believed that one of the reasons he wanted to transfer the government seat from Kisar to Tiakur on Moa was to be insulated from the mass protests. Once he could control the

kabupaten government from the new capital on Moa, he could expect more supporters than critics around his office.

As Aspinall and Berenschot (2019) has shown, control of power on the regency level is instrumental in winning the political contestation because clientelism-style bureaucracy is still the norm in the local government. At the beginning of his administration, the regional head creates a *kabupaten* bureaucratic apparatus which can support his position. Consequently, local government employees from the *bupati's* traditional networks are placed in important roles and are absorbed into the power structure. Other employees who are not part of the clique can become tools of the *bupati* but without expecting much in return. Therefore, their position becomes more vulnerable, for instance, during a political event such as an election in which the authorities need support from the ordinary people outside the circles of the office bureaucracy. The authorities could consider threatening to mutate or dismiss an employee if he and his family do not side with the authorities and their cronies in the regional head election or the election for local legislators.

Control over the budget allocated to an administrative entity on the level of a *kabupaten* has also been an important incentive in launching a *pemekaran* movement. Control over a budget comes with the post of *bupati*. Hence the position of the *bupati* and his deputy, the *wakil bupati*, could become parting points in an alliance of political actors from different islands. The same goes for the seat of the administrative power. Governmental offices create work, not only for civil servants but also for ancillary services such as food-sellers, hotels, taxi drivers and so forth. As we have seen, alliances in which parties have not been able to find a balance or actually split have been easy to break down. In most of the *pemekaran* movements, identity politics have played a role in mobilization. Sometimes this has been created or invented, as we have seen in the *Kidabela-Kalwedo* case but, when the *pemekaran* reaches the level of just one or a very limited number of islands the island identity became an important mobilizing factor.

The remoteness of the area has worked in stimulating the *pemekaran* in MBD in different ways. People have had to leave MBD if they wanted to improve and educate themselves but, so far, they have not lost their connection with the islands. This situation has stimulated the participation of diaspora or absentee political actors. These diaspora political actors have sometimes brought with them interests which have not really been of importance to the region itself. A good example is Susy Katipana who also had an interest in the support of refugees from East Timor. On other occasions the diaspora network has benefited the *pemekaran* movement. This was the case of Piet Norimarna who, through his Jakarta network, knew that he should appoint a specific location for the establishment of the administrative centre. In this case it turned out, it was not necessary that the location would be 'ready to use' but it did cause a conflict when the centre had to move from Wonreli on Kisar island to Tiakur on Moa.

The remoteness of the area does not limit the contentious politics in MBD and the southern part of Maluku in any way. Given the fact that there are no limitations in size or numbers, the splitting could go on almost endlessly. At present, there is a moratorium on *pemekaran*. But, the legal basis of the moratorium is blurred. Therefore, new splits or mergings of administrative entities are still options for political actors to think about. And, as we have seen, in MBD new *pemekaran* plans are continuously being made. These could result in a new split when the moratorium ends.

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