Strengthening the Local in National Reform: A Cultural Approach to Political Change.

Elizabeth Morrell*

New Indonesian decentralisation policies have generated strong localisation movements which recall regional history. During the Soeharto years history was invoked as part of an homogenising nationalism. With recent changes in the city of Makassar that process is being reversed to strengthen local participation in redefined national structures.

‘Makassar, si anak hilang telah kembali’ (Makassar, the prodigal child has returned), rejoiced a newspaper headline expressing the affectionate response of residents in the eastern Indonesian city when the name reverted from Ujung Pandang to its former title, Makassar. The city is the capital of South Sulawesi Province, and the renaming change occurred when Sulawesi-born B.J. Habibie, in his final days as interim Indonesian President, gave his assent to a petition from the regional parliament requesting the change of name. This petition was initiated by the new mayor of Makassar, as part of his programme for revitalising the city. The name was formally reinstated on 13 October 1999, one day before Habibie presented his accountability speech to the national Indonesian parliament. Cognisant of increasing dissatisfaction with his tenure as President, perhaps Habibie was hoping to influence a more favourable outcome in the forthcoming presidential election, or perhaps the name change was a sentimental departing gift to the region which had resolutely supported him in the national election. Whatever the reason, for years many local citizens had been urging the change, although the eventual granting of that request came as a surprise, and was greeted with widespread acclaim throughout the city.

Reinstatement of the name became the focus of a New Year and New Millennium event which valorised the history of Makassar, recalling its past fame as a cosmopolitan centre of international trade. In this article I examine issues surrounding these festivities, and in particular the way in which history was incorporated into public culture and utilised in the process of asserting identity and revitalising local civil society. The celebrations were attended by a large and enthusiastic audience, and were still being avidly discussed three weeks later when I arrived in the city to continue a research programme. The event and its animated reception originated in the intense

* Elizabeth Morrell is Lecturer in Indonesian Language and Culture at the University of New England, Armidale, Australia. Her e-mail address is emorrell@metz.une.edu.au

1 ‘Makassar, si anak hilang telah kembali’, Pedoman Rakyat, 2 January 2000.
3 Although I was not able to attend the New Millennium celebrations, the objectives, activities and atmosphere were conveyed through video, newspaper reports, and discussions with curators, performers and other participants, as well as audience members.
promotion of local identities which has occurred with political change and increased regional autonomy after the fall of the centralist Soeharto government. In Makassar, President Soeharto's departure from office engendered the renewal of hopes for increased local power and prosperity. The day following his resignation in May 1998, headlines in the Makassar print media welcomed the change of leadership by asserting that 'DPRD Sulsel Harus Perjuangkan Otonomi Daerah' (The South Sulawesi Parliament must struggle for regional autonomy).\(^4\) In the province, the achievement of increased economic, political and social equity through autonomy has become synonymous with the concept of reform.

This foregrounding of local needs and aspirations is a grassroots measure to address the imbalance between forces which Arjun Appadurai has termed the 'majoritarianisms' and 'microidentities' within the nation-state.\(^5\) In the Indonesian context, many localisation activities arising from this imbalance are intended to reinforce civil society by increasing participation in all aspects of reform. They are also an assertion of regional presence to reduce national government control over local resources and income. Yet, political movements are expressing dissatisfaction not only with the unequal distribution of resources from the national level, but also with internal inequities occurring within provinces and regencies. In South Sulawesi, assertion of local rights is being manifested in calls to redistribute local government boundaries, and in some cases to create new provinces as break-away movements from the existing structure. During the first months of 2001, local political movements were urging the formation of three new provinces, to create a total of four within the present boundaries of South Sulawesi. Calls for separation originated from some of the wealthiest regencies, following discontent with uneven development in the province.\(^6\) A further motivation for prioritising regional issues is the new voice allowed to Indonesia’s pluralism, and the distancing of post-Soeharto society from the homogenised nationalism which was encouraged during that period.

Localisation is also being asserted to counter economic and cultural globalisation, although that external aspect is being overshadowed by the internal problems which demand urgent attention. Indonesian concerns about vulnerability in the international sphere must be viewed in the context of efforts to overcome social unrest, restructure political institutions and reassess nationalism. In this, Indonesia’s response to globalisation follows the ‘disjuncture and difference’ noted by Appadurai in which varied impacts of, and reactions to, globalisation are generated by particular local circumstances according to the ‘historical, linguistic, and political situatedness of different sorts of actors’. Indonesia’s weak position in the global domain increases the complexity of its current situation. Yet, the disjuncture is stimulated less by the impact of international transactions, and is more the result of intranational influences. Residents and community leaders remain aware of the need to strengthen Indonesia’s position in the global economy and culture, yet realise this cannot be achieved without a stable society. The longer Indonesia remains unstable, the greater its vulnerability in the international sphere.

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4 'DPRD Sulsel Harus Perjuangkan Otonomi Daerah, Pedoman Rakyat', 22 May 1998.
6 New regional autonomy legislation has been implemented at regency level, and demands for separation were coming from eleven of South Sulawesi’s twenty-four regencies in March 2001. The total population of those regencies is 3,572,000, or approximately half the present population of the province. One demand came from the western regencies of Polewali-Mamasa, Mamuju and Majene, with the intention to form the province of West Sulawesi. Another emerged in the northernmost regencies of Luwu’ and North Luwu’, intending to form the province of Luwu’ Raya (Greater Luwu’). Another call came from the eastern and southeastern regencies of Bone’, Soppeng, Wajo’, Sinjai, Bulukumba and Selayar, for the formation of East Sulawesi province.
7 Appadurai, Modernity at Large, p. 33.
Disenchantment with the national government’s ability to overcome civil unrest and to achieve reform has generated a local cultural approach to address these issues. This is led by intellectuals, non-government organisations and cultural commentators and practitioners, often with the support of local government officials. The cultural approach aims to be a more effective means of strengthening and stabilising post-Soeharto Indonesia than previous political, military and economic efforts which either failed or achieved only limited success. It intends to strengthen society by renewing self-confidence at the local level, reasserting regional identities and engendering respect for mutual rights. Promoters of this approach believe that, because much social unrest is highly localised, and as individuals have greater control over local factors than over national economic or political policies, personal actions can achieve greater success than formal bureaucratic programmes. Furthermore, dependence upon the national government to solve ethnic violence and other civil disorder could result in a return to the heavily centralised State of the New Order.

Rebuilding local cultures is a means of overcoming the weakening of the daerah (regional communities), which occurred during the Soeharto years, when members of those communities had little control over their own affairs, and were permitted only limited political participation. Some observers fear that without institutional strengthening at the local level, feudalist governing systems will re-emerge, and that severe inequities will remain in Indonesia’s new political system. In particular, decentralisation policies implemented from 1 January 2001 may result in abuses of power in local domains, or contestation between governing bureaucrats and other community leaders, inadequately prepared by New Order authoritarianism to assume the responsibilities of self-determination.8

In South Sulawesi, resentment of Java-centrist nationalism is widespread and longstanding. With the granting of independence from the Dutch, dissatisfaction manifested itself in the Darul Islam rebellion of 1950–65. This conflict, led by Kahar Muzakkar, was described in Barbara Harvey’s analysis as in part ‘a protest against national policies which were seen as detrimental to the interests of the region’. With independence, many South Sulawesi citizens were passed over for military and administrative positions within the province, leading Harvey to conclude that the rebellion was caused by feelings of rejection from the central government, and ‘of seeing one’s fate determined by outsiders’.9 More than thirty years later, the appointment of Habibie as Soeharto’s successor had raised hopes that greater attention would be paid to the region, and that past inequities would be addressed. However, delight at Habibie’s appointment in May 1998 turned to disillusion one year later when it became apparent his presidency would be short-lived. Disappointment and frustration generated street protests by 15,000 students, and talk of separatism when Abdurrahman Wahid was elected with Megawati Soekarnoputri as deputy in October 1999.10 Separatist calls were repeated in April 2000 when South Sulawesi business figure and politician Yusuf Kalla was dropped

10 Ibid., p. 435.
11 Calls for separatism were made by demonstrators using the slogan ‘Sulawesi Merdeka’ (Free, or Independent, Sulawesi). Most observers dismissed the protests as disappointment at Habibie’s rejection, many considering them to be engineered by the Golkar Party. However, others have expressed concern this could represent a precursor to further national divisions, especially with increasing demands for the introduction of Syariat Islam (Islamic law) which are emerging in the province. See Pro-Kontra Sulawesi Merdeka: Aksi Murni, Provokasi atau Gerakan Sakit Hati? [For and against the Independent Sulawesi Movement: Sincerity, provocation, or resentment?], ed. Sukriansyah S Latief (Makassar: Lembaga Studi Informasi dan Media Massa, 2000).
from his position as Minister of Trade and Industry by President Abdurrahman Wahid.

Public culture in South Sulawesi has long drawn upon the past, selectively appropriating elements of tradition and history relevant to the needs of modern society. Throughout Indonesia recontextualised tradition forms the basis of cultural invention for the assertion of power and influence.12 Others have demonstrated how this occurs through the manipulation of ritual and belief in the Sa’dan Toraja region of the South Sulawesi highlands, where income introduced through tourism and out-migration is changing former power structures.13 Elsewhere, in the northwestern highlands of the peninsula, benign re-enactments of headhunting rituals have political referents to the upland–lowland power relationship, and also to the continuity of local belief systems.14 This selective appropriation occurs in the manner Anthony Giddens describes as 'conscious recontextualisation', which differs from the continuity of assimilated tradition found in pre-modern societies.15 In recontextualisation, the application of modern knowledge to the utilisation of tradition generates an informed, conscious process of acceptance and rejection of specific elements of the past. Selectivity is clearly partisan, as Jocelyn Linnekin has observed, noting that 'all cultural representations ... are contingent and embedded in a particular social and political context'.16 In Makassar, as the city seeks to participate in new opportunities promised by political reform, the reinvention of history essentialises the city's reputation as a powerful yet cosmopolitan, tolerant and entrepreneurial centre.

### Re-presenting Makassar

The name Makassar first occurs as a geographical term in the Javanese Desawarnana (Nagarakertagama) of 1365, but early usage is vague. From around the mid-fifteenth century it signified the joint polity of the powerful coastal kingdom of Goa and its adjacent partner Tallo.17 In the late sixteenth century, and for most of the seventeenth century, Goa had extensive influence throughout the eastern archipelago, and controlled the important entrepot and trading centre, which was subsequently overaken by the Dutch in the 1660s. Today the name identifies the former powerful kingdom, the ethnic group found in the southern coastal areas of the South Sulawesi peninsula, and the modern city. The name was changed to Ujung Pandang in 1971 when the city perimeter was extended from 25 square kilometres to 175 square kilometres, incorporating

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17 H. D. Mangemba, "Makassar" dan "Makassar" (Makassar sebagai Kota dan Kerajaan) [Makassar as city and kingdom], *Pedoman Rakyat*, 9 Nov 1994 (Citation provided by Anonymous reviewer, ISEAS). In recorded history, and in scholarship of the region, various spellings have been employed following different rationales. The name has appeared as 'Makasar', 'Macassar' and 'Mangkasara'. The formal re-adoption of 'Makassar' should clarify the issue of modern usage. Similarly, the former kingdom of Goa is also described as 'Gowa', and that spelling is used for the modern regency of that name. Variation also occurs in the depiction of the glottal stops which are characteristic to languages found in the peninsula. Locally, in practical usage these are often ignored, although they appear in this article in the form of apostrophes.
communities of the largest ethnic group in South Sulawesi, the Bugis. The name change was intended to appease any resentment felt by Bugis residents living within the redefined city boundaries.

Historically, Ujung Pandang (Pandanus Point) was the name of one of a series of forts protecting the Makassar coastline, and the environs of that fort became the trading, administrative and European residential centre after the arrival of the Dutch. With Indonesian independence from Dutch colonialism following World War II, the area surrounding the former fort continued as the centre of administration and commerce. The name, then, was embedded in local history and meaning. Nevertheless, many residents (including those of non-Makassar ethnicity) were dissatisfied with the name Ujung Pandang. From the time the original change was made, the intellectual and arts communities, private enterprise and the tourism industry, urged a return to the name Makassar. In July 1976, a petition with that objective was jointly organised by leading Bugis and Makassar intellectuals who presented it to the local parliament. Their case was strengthened in 1995, when a seminar arranged by the then mayor recommended a return to ‘Makassar’. Debate continued until August 1999, when the regional parliament and governor agreed to the change and it was ratified at the national level.

Some opposition to reverting to ‘Makassar’ came from those who felt it articulated a desire to live in the past rather than addressing the future. As one young intellectual - an archaeologist and museum curator - said to me, ‘Sejarah itu proses, harus efisiensi bukan refleksi’ (history is a process, we need efficiency not reflection). Some Bugis residents were concerned that the name would prioritise Makassar ethnicity and weaken Bugis authority in the peninsula. Resentment of that authority and dominance is often expressed by Makassarese who point out that most successful and best-known business entrepreneurs are Bugis, and that the province has never had a governor of Makassar ethnicity. Eventually, however, despite these rivalries, the name was recognised as a symbol of historic influence, fame, and wealth, which transcended ethnic contestation. For most, the modern title of Makassar has become conceptual rather than territorial. In fact, the city had long accommodated Bugis as well as Makassarese. Although the powerful Bugis kingdom of Boné assisted the Dutch to take control of Makassar in 1669, a community of Bugis traders existed in the port city during the seventeenth century, displaying strong loyalties to the kingdom of Makassar. From the twentieth century the two ethnic groups have often been generically referred to as Bugis-Makassar. Many local residents, when asked their ethnicity, use the term campuran (mixed) indicating that inter-marriage has often dissipated differentiation, especially in the city and its northern boundaries.

A reversion to the name ‘Makassar’ was sought for two principal reasons. One was cultural and local, a recognition of the importance of symbols. The other was pragmatic and outward-looking, 18

18 The province of South Sulawesi has a population of approximately 7 million people. Although statistics relating to ethnicity were not maintained during the Soeharto period, local informal estimates hold that approximately 50 per cent are Bugis, 25 per cent Makassarese, 10 per cent each Toraja and Mandar, with some Indonesian-born Chinese and migrants from other islands.


seeking economic advantages from tourism, trade and international investment. Culturally, many felt that the name Makassar signified a deep-rooted sense of community and heritage, which was lost with the bureaucratically imposed title Ujung Pandang. Social problems in the rapidly modernising city were in part attributed to the lack of a unifying symbol. Modern Makassar is home to over 1 million residents; many of these are unemployeed or under-employed, and for them daily life is little more than survival. Local intellectuals and social observers argued that increasing urbanisation and its reliance on technology were depriving the city of communal linkages. The shared experience of history embedded in the name Makassar would, it was believed, help to overcome social alienation and conflict.

Evocations of historic Makassar recalled international fame which the name Ujung Pandang did not achieve. As one supporter of the name change stated:

When I am overseas, I ask 'where is Bali', and many people raise their hands. When I ask if they know Indonesia, the number of raised hands begins to fall. When I ask if they know Ujung Pandang, not even one hand remains raised. Yet if I ask about Makassar, the response is the same as for Bali.

The modern role of the city as the gateway to Eastern Indonesia through a domestic and international airport and recently redeveloped marine harbour facilities, is seen as a direct line of descent from the city’s former international and regional presence. Today’s leaders are hoping to continue and expand upon that role as a centre for commerce and trade, and as a sphere of influence in the modern archipelago and wider world. Amongst those urging the change from Ujung Pandang were members of Saudaga Bugis-Makassar (Bugis-Makassar Entrepreneurs), a commercially oriented organisation which promotes pribumi (indigenous) business and professional achievement in the region. Apart from its role as the capital of South Sulawesi, Makassar is the largest city in the government-designated Kawasan Indonesia Timur (Eastern Indonesian Region). The new harbour facilities were developed to capitalise on that position. However, the port has been operating below full capacity, as many eastern Indonesian exporters and importers continue to utilise facilities in Surabaya and elsewhere. The Province has been reliant upon government subsidies for economic and social infrastructure development. Locally generated revenue (Pendapatan Asli Daerah) is low, and in 1999 constituted only approximately 10 per cent of Province revenue, with the remainder received as subsidies from the central government. Despite strong agricultural production, and income from mining and tourism, South Sulawesi has few exports. The Province must strengthen its economy if it is to prosper under policies of decentralisation which require high levels of local income to support development. Reinstating the name Makassar, then, recalls past achievements in the hope of reproducing former success and ensuring future prosperity.

Makassar and cosmopolitanism

Despite a majority Islamic population in the modern city, Makassar claims a cosmopolitan history, arising from its early prominence as a trading port. The location has always been strategic for trade linking the archipelago and the external world as well as the eastern and western regions of

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21 Mochtar Hasymi, ‘Kapan Kembali ke Makassar’ [When will we return to Makassar?], Harian Fajar, 13 Apr. 1995.
24 ‘Separatisme “Gertak Sambal” Kegiatan Yang Berbahaya’ [Empty threats of separatism are a dangerous activity], Kompas Online, 20 Dec. 2000.
Indonesia. It is Makassar’s maritime endeavours, rather than its equally successful agricultural activities, that have shaped its cultural identity. Following the fall of Malacca in 1511, a large community of Malays moved to Makassar, increasing the maritime trade, and this migration continued as the European presence expanded in the Malay region. Indigenous and Malay sailors from Makassar were the most prominent traders in the archipelago, and operated within a system of free trade until the imposition of a Dutch monopoly. Sandalwood and spices from the Maluku and southeastern islands were exchanged for material objects (including textiles, weapons and ceramics) carried by international and inter-regional shipping. Makassar was also the principal centre for trade in trepang (sea slugs), caught in waters off northern Australia and eventually sold in China.

The free trade attracted Indian, Chinese, English, Danish and Portuguese merchants who established warehouses and lived in the settlement. A map of the city, secretly drawn by the Netherlands East Indies Company in 1638, clearly identifies warehouses of those foreign merchants. Population estimates indicate that, by the mid-seventeenth century, the port city may have been ‘one of the six biggest cities in Southeast Asia’ with approximately 100,000 residents, growing from 25,000 in the first decade of that century. The external orientation was not limited to trade, and pluralism benefited from cultural exchange. During the eighteenth century there was ‘considerable economic and social interaction, on an equal footing, between local chiefs and merchants, Chinese, mestizos and Europeans’. Makassar rulers demonstrated interest in the ideas and beliefs introduced to them by foreign traders and explorers. For example, one ruler possessed an extensive library of European texts, spoke fluent Portuguese, and manifested a strong interest in mathematics. During the seventeenth century two Makassar princes were educated in Paris at the College of Jesuits. Although the kingdom’s rulers converted to Islam in the first decade of the seventeenth century, Makassar was ‘an exceptionally tolerant haven for all religions’, and in 1630 approximately 500 Portuguese residents were freely practising Christianity.

Today the city continues to host many different ethnic groups, including migrants from other Eastern Indonesian islands, attracted to Makassar by employment, business and educational opportunities. Nevertheless, cosmopolitanism sits uneasily, and racial violence is not uncommon. Conflict between ethnic groups of the Muslim lowlands and the Christian (and still partly animist) community.

29 Heather Sutherland, ‘Mestizos as Middlemen?’, p. 251.
highlands often emerges in the city and other areas of the province. Recently, violent incidents have occurred as a direct response to the unrest in the adjacent Maluku Islands, to which many South Sulawesi Muslims had migrated. Although in Makassar violence on the scale of anti-Chinese riots which shocked residents in September 1997 has not recurred, there has been an increase in smaller-scale racial and religious conflict and discrimination. Elsewhere on the island, including rural South Sulawesi, deaths, severe injury and property damage have occurred at times of ethnic violence.

**Commemorating Makassar**

The ‘glory days’ of the port city and kingdom were invoked during a three-day ceremony in the city to celebrate the new millennium and the renaming of Makassar. A spectacular New Year’s Eve performance was held, and this was preceded by two days of seminars in which adat (customary law) leaders from small Indonesian communities conferred with each other and, for a short time, with President Abdurrahman Wahid. Production coordinator of the event was the director of a non-government umbrella organisation, Forum Informasi Komunikasi (Forum for Information and Communication), which oversees approximately forty small NGOs working in community development, poverty alleviation and environmental projects in the province. Artistic coordinator was a young theatre director, Arman Dewarti, who is known for radical social critique and innovative style in his productions. Both originate from South Sulawesi, live in Makassar, and have a strong belief in the importance of culture as a means of social strengthening. Four months prior to the millennium event the two were amongst organisers and participants in a Makassar arts festival. For that event, Arman Dewarti wrote and directed a performance which protested against military and civil violence, examining the causes and growth of violence in society, including that against women. Both young men have often publicly protested the restrictions placed on cultural development through the New Order’s network of Dewan Kesenian (Arts Councils), which resulted in a homogenised cultural production sanctioned by the state.

For most of the Soeharto period, modern cultural production in South Sulawesi did not develop the social criticism, or the concept of artist as activist, which emerged in urban centres of Java and have been discussed by many commentators. In recent years, however, a younger generation of cultural practitioners has introduced political issues, sometimes through humour and satire, to question injustice and unequal power relationships, and to engender awareness of the rights and responsibilities of citizens and governments. This has increased with political change, as Indonesia searches for new directions. Caught up in events which may overpower them, especially ethnic and religious conflict, artists in many media have adopted an educative role.

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33 Incidents in Makassar during 1998-99 included ‘sweeping’ raids by young men claiming to be Muslim students retaliating against anti-Muslim violence in Maluku. They inspected the identification cards of public mini-bus passengers, forcing non-Muslims to leave the vehicle. Access for Christian students to the major state university campus was similarly denied. ‘Razia Mahasiswa di Sulsel’ [Student raids in South Sulawesi], *Kompas Online*, 20 Mar. 1998. Outside Makassar, during the same period, ethnic and religious conflict occurred in the northern coastal Luwu’ region, and in the city of Poso in neighbouring Central Sulawesi. These incidents resulted in injuries, loss of life and widespread property damage.


Accordingly, the two coordinators decided the performance should address the challenges facing the nation as it implements change. In particular, the focus should be upon overcoming civil unrest, and preparing the local community for the (then) proposed decentralisation policies. The event was designed to demonstrate respect for cultural difference, and the ability to achieve a tolerant multicultural society. As the event occurred during the Islamic fasting month, at the Christian New Year and New Millennium, and also shortly before the Chinese New Year, the religious plurality of the region was acknowledged. Within this framework, the subtexts were many. These included the assertion of indigenous rights and regional strength, the former and possible future power of Makassar as a leading influence in the eastern Indonesian region, and the authority of Islam. The event was also an assertion that eastern Indonesian cultural heritage and practice should not be subordinate to the dominant Hindu–Javanese ‘peaks of culture’ which had been prioritised as an ideal in earlier Indonesian cultural politics. The celebrations had both internal and external orientations. The city’s mayor welcomed the project to ‘meet the new era of regional autonomy, the era of globalisation, the era of the Asean Free Trade Association, and the new century’. The event was widely promoted as *Dari Makassar Sambut Millennium* (From Makassar welcome the millennium), and resolutely reflected upon the religious identity and maritime heritage of Makassar. Although a large part of that heritage was embedded in the colonial experience, the artistic director explained in interviews that this history was intentionally selective to focus upon the extensive indigenous, and wider Asian, role in Makassar’s fame and wealth, disregarding almost 300 years of Dutch colonial presence. Modern Western cultural influences were also deliberately excluded, although tourism was an element in the establishment of the festival, which was viewed by that industry as an attraction for foreign and domestic visitors.

The ceremony was a performance extravaganza focusing upon religious art, notably that of Islam. Whereas the date marked the Christian millennium, the performance followed predominantly Muslim practices, and was given the title of *Wirid*, or ‘honouring the name of God’. This was a conscious symbol of the strength of Islam in Makassar and the surrounding peninsula. Yet, it was also publicised as signifying an Islamic society prepared to welcome the new millennium through adherence to non-violent Koranic principles. Although the director has embraced political protest in his theatre performances, for this event he adopted a conservative approach. Aware that his multireligious and multiethnic audience was mostly Islamic, he avoided the possibility of alienation through a confrontational presentation. The performance was described as a discourse between art, religion and society, intended to demonstrate that religious belief should improve social relations rather than become a justification for anti-social activity.

Prior to the entertainment, during prayers before 15,000 worshippers at the large new city mosque, President Wahid reminded those present of the opposition to violence recorded in the Koran. Referring to discord among different streams of Indonesian Islam, he also addressed the need for tolerance within the religion. The president quoted Indonesian scholar Taufik Abdullah’s thesis that four Islamic models developed in the archipelago. These emerged as the religion was absorbed into different pre-existing belief systems in Aceh, Minangkabau, Java and Makassar.

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37 Some 88.5 per cent of the South Sulawesi population is Islamic, with approximately 10 per cent Christian and the remainder Animist or Buddhist. Principal Islamic indigenous groups are the Bugis, Makassar, and Mandar. The highland Toraja are mainly Christian, and other Christians are either of Chinese origin or migrants from eastern and southeastern Indonesian islands. Kantor Statistik Sulawesi Selatan, *Sidawesi Selatan Dalam Angka* (South Sulawesi in Figures) (Ujung Pandang, 1999).
speech widely reported in the local media, Abdurrahman Wahid stressed to his congregation that the emergence and strengthening of these different Islamic models demonstrate an earlier Indonesian ability to accommodate varied regional circumstances and practices which should be emulated to prevent conflict.

Thus, although Islamic elements dominated, the principal, and publicly stated, aim of the performance was the restoration of religious and ethnic tolerance. The coordinators deliberately demonstrated multiculturalism to countermand former government policy which subordinated cultural difference in the interests of national unity and integration. Recognising that these policies had failed to achieve unity, the event encouraged the representation of pluralism, although within a Muslim framework. The problem then emerged of how to entertain the population at a celebratory event whilst retaining the restraint demanded during the fasting month. Non-Muslims were urged by the mayor to refrain from the usual New Year revelry to show respect for the religious devotion of Ramadan. Indonesian New Year celebrations, accompanied by increasingly provocative entertainment, have transgressed Islamic morality for some years. In 1996, for example, South Sulawesi residents were reminded that the Christian New Year was not Islamic, and that restraint must be shown when observing the event.

Islam was thus given precedence, and the performance became an arena for principally Islamic devotion and music – although in a very dynamic and entertaining form, and also incorporating multicultural elements. Organisers described the event as not just a celebration for Muslims, yet, despite the inclusion of other religious and cultural elements and the objective of promoting harmonious ethnic and religious interaction, the event was principally an Islamic presentation. This, of course, reflects the predominance of Islam in the city and region. Non-Muslim spectators told me later that, although they enjoyed the event as entertainment, it was another reminder of their minority status and vulnerability in the current atmosphere of religious unrest. Nevertheless, it would be reductive and a denial of the complexity of cultural production to suggest only hegemonic interests. The discourse of religious and ethnic tolerance negotiated in this performance certainly prioritised Islamic sensibilities, yet could not have done otherwise in a predominantly Muslim region and to a predominantly Muslim audience. To demand tolerance from the majority required recognition of that majority.

The religious performance was underscored by recollections of Makassar’s historic development as a centre with a complex cultural mix. In recognition of the city’s maritime history, the production took place on the waters of Makassar harbour. Adjacent public roads were closed, and the audience thronged the streets and buildings facing the harbour. The ceremony began with a public *buka puasa*, or breaking the fast, at sunset. Following this, Islamic, Catholic, Protestant, Hindu and Buddhist officials, representing the major religions found in Indonesia, offered public prayers for the approaching new millennium. The prayers commenced with Buddhist devotions, acknowledging Buddhism as the first of the world religions to influence the previous indigenous belief systems of the Makassar region. The opening entertainment was the *Barong Sai*, or Chinese Dragon Dance, banned by the Soeharto government. Public performances of *Barong Sai* have become a prominent manifestation of post-Soeharto freedoms, and the first public performance in Makassar had taken place the previous September as an arts festival attraction. Commencing the entertainment with this formerly forbidden act was therefore highly symbolic of political and attitudinal change in the public arena. It was also an attempt to increase racial tolerance, and to assuage guilt felt since the violent anti-Chinese riots of September 1997. During these riots, a

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40 ‘Tradisi Tahun Baru Bukan Milik Islam’ [New Year traditions are not Islamic], *Harian Fajar*, 29 Dec. 1996.
Chinese temple, part of which is believed to have been 300 years old, was destroyed. The ruins are yet to be repaired, and stand as a reminder of the violence. Celebrating Chinese tradition, then, in an event sponsored by the regional government was a public assertion that ethnic difference must be respected, not reviled.

More than 300 musicians, actors, dancers and other performers took part in the New Year presentation. Arabic and Indian influences upon the early cultural identity of Makassar were acknowledged through music and dance. The principal entertainment for the evening was a performance of religious music and movement, dominated by percussion sounds and Islamic chanting, including the *Barzanji* chant, recounting the life of Mohamed. Music from ethnic groups found in the South Sulawesi peninsula was performed by an orchestra of modern and traditional instruments, mixing modern local musical composition with customary ritual music.

**Ethnic minorities in the new Indonesia**

Tradition was also invoked and recontextualised during the seminar which preceded the New Year performance. This aimed to strengthen the *adat* communities—ethnic, political, religious and social groups which exist throughout the archipelago, often as isolated mountain groups, or small farming and fishing communities. It also aimed to build cooperation and reduce contestation between regions and ethnic groups throughout Sulawesi and Eastern Indonesia. It was attended by approximately 100 religious and cultural leaders from these and other regions including the Sumatran provinces of Aceh and Riau, in which conflict has been occurring. Non-government organisations arranged the seminar to develop dialogue amongst community leaders in public discussion formerly denied to them by repressive Soeharto-era policies. This discourse illustrated the ‘bottom-up’ approach to community development and institutional strengthening which is gaining acceptance to encourage an effective civil society. With the prioritisation of large-scale development in New Order economic growth, including the entry of agribusiness and other global market mechanisms, many of these groups lost local authority and community assets. Inequities in land use, seizure of natural resources and the accompanying environmental damage, engendered social, economic and political problems which are often now manifested as ethnic violence and civil disorder. Strengthening the regions through increased political and economic autonomy, it is hoped, will appease different interest groups, thus stabilising the nation.

The cultural revitalisation promoted during this seminar relied heavily on historicism, and in particular the reassertion of ethnohistoric ‘traditional values’. Not all agreed with that emphasis, and some doubts were raised about the willingness of modern society to adopt or return to value systems which it has abandoned. Although customary values may remain an ideal, in reality many are merely symbolic. Some commentators pointed out that, to be successful, a cultural approach must be attractive to modern society, and that care must be taken not to merely hide behind a veneer of history. An over-reliance on tradition, as occurred during the New Order years, could indicate weakness in modern culture.

Nevertheless, those same commentators indicated the need to retain cultural values which continue to have relevance, and which can be adapted to increasing modernisation. In Makassar, for example, these include the often-quoted dynamism and resourcefulness. Historical descriptions

41 Asmin Amin, ‘Mencipta Komunitas Budaya Yang Kritis’ [Creating a critical culture in the community], in *Sekitar Nilai-Nilai Demokras pada Empat Etnis di Sulawesi Selatan* [Concerning the democratic values of four ethnic groups in South Sulawesi], ed. Muhary Wahyu Nurla and P.R Amir (Jakarta: FIK-ORNOP Sulawesi Selatan and YAPPIKA, 2000), pp. xii–xvi.

42 ‘Hak dan Kewenangan Adat Akan Dikembalikan’ [Customary rights and authority will be returned], *Harian Fajar*, 31 Dec. 1999.
such as Raffles’ 1817 statement that the South Sulawesi population is ‘maritime and commercial … animated by a spirit of adventure, and accustomed to distant and hazardous enterprises’ maintain strong resonances.43 The well-known regional sense of honour (siri) with its counterpart of communal loyalty (known as pessé in the Bugis language and pacce among the Makassar) continues to be promoted as a major component of identity, especially by older community leaders. Although in the past (and still at times today), siri often incited violence when honour had been offended and in turn defended, some feel it can be adapted to encompass an ideal of self-respect. The revisionist siri could then be utilised to overcome modern social problems, including corruption and lack of respect for others.44

History and traditional values formed the master narrative of official New Order Indonesian cultural production as a means of social control.45 Now, history is being utilised to disengage that control. No doubt some actors in the renaming of Makassar were also attempting to gain power in its various guises. Yet, this reinvented history and the accompanying celebratory events were also motivated by a more primordial popular support which included the desire to stabilise society. History became part of an endeavour to prevent the loss of ‘ontological moorings’ identified by Appadurai as occurring during periods of crisis, when recalling the past affirms cultural resilience.46 The ontological moorings of South Sulawesi historicism were selective in their reconstructions. For example, warfare, which was not uncommon between the many small kingdoms and other polities in the region, was ignored. As has been seen, Western influences were also deliberately excluded. Nevertheless, selectivity does not diminish the significance of history as symbol. For the purpose of developing regional self-confidence and strengthening modern society, recalling historical warfare and European dominance was considered irrelevant. The concept of multiculturalism advanced by the Makassar events demanded a particularist interpretation of history.

The cultural approach is an ambitious endeavour with multivalent objectives. These include stabilising social unrest and reasserting local culture in the face of homogenisation from both the national and global domains. In particular, it distinguishes regional culture from the era of New Order Java-centrism and integrationist policies. This reverses the process in which local ethnohistory is appropriated by nationalism. Whereas nationalism formerly dominated cultural politics, in post-Soeharto Indonesia the regions are now demanding a greater part of that political transaction. Control is being deflected away from the centre. Apart from the South Sulawesi seminar, in many other recent public discussions elsewhere in Indonesia, intellectuals and cultural leaders have called for an end to the inequity of nationalist appropriation, homogenisation and disregard for local cultures.47

Public education is an important element of building an equitable pluralist society in the new Indonesia, and to ensure that conflicts arising from cultural difference are solved ‘bukan dengan okol … melainkan dengan akal’ (not with violence but with intelligence).48 Cultural events and objects have become prominent in that educative process during Indonesia’s turbulent transition. The success of that process, however, remains uncertain. Redefined Indonesian nationalism continues

44 ‘Siri’ Na Pacce Bangun Pluralitas Etnis’ [Siri’ and Pacce build ethnic plurality], Pedoman Rakyat, 30 Dec. 1999.
46 Appadurai, Modernity at Large, pp. 178-9.
48 ‘Professor Dr Nurcholish Majid: Homogenisasi Ingkari Jati Diri Indonesia’ [Homogenisation denies the spirit of Indonesia], Kompas Online, 23 Mar. 2000.
to be fluid and indeterminate. It is still too early to evaluate the impact of strengthening local culture in any of the spheres addressed by the Makassar new millennium event. Such cultural strengthening may also increase, rather than decrease, contestation. Recollections of Makassar’s past glories may mask intentions to assert power over less well-developed areas of eastern Indonesia. Yet, if recent new province movements succeed, Makassar itself may become the capital city of an economically disadvantaged province. Moreover, a cultural approach clearly cannot alone overcome civil unrest. Although organisers of the New Year celebrations noted a reduction in ethnic conflict during the weeks following the Makassar performance, by late January local newspapers were again reporting outbreaks of discrimination and friction in the city and province.