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THE QUEST FOR A TERRITORY OF THEIR OWN:

Elite Mobilization and the Making of a New Province in Sumatra, Indonesia

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Developmentalists around the world regard decentralization, in terms of the empowerment of local governments vis-a-vis the central state, one of the requirements for democracy and good governance. In the aftermath of the 1997 financial crisis, Indonesia, as many other developing countries, was compelled by international lending agencies to give more autonomy to its regions. Fundamental within this policy was the introduction of direct-elections for heads of local governments and a greater opportunity for “grass-roots” participation to determine local policies aiming at prioritising local needs.

Nevertheless, the lack of local government professionalism and the limited role of civil society in the regions have created a vacuum in local policy-making. Benefitting from this situation are the local and central elites, who compete to gain political power in the regions. Under the banner of “grass-roots” demands, elites used the existing ethno-religious cleavages to mobilize followers to gain governmental positions in the local direct-election as well as to demand new administration territories¹ to fulfil their political interest.

This paper aims to elaborate the power struggle of elites to demand a new territory, Tapanuli Province, (*Propinsi Tapanuli* or Protap), which will be carved out of the existing province of North Sumatra. To elucidate elite mobilization in this case, the paper will answer the following questions: First, how does the history of elite mobilization, during post-colonial and Soeharto eras, influence the Protap case? Last but not least, how does the connection between the elites and the central state, among the elites themselves and between elites and non-elites, influence this process?

1. THE TARUTUNG RALLY

On 12 February 2007, the little town of Tarutung in the district of North Tapanuli in North Sumatra witnessed an important gathering, in which some thirty-thousands people attended the ceremony of the “pledging of determination” to continue with the plan to establish the controversial Tapanuli Province which will be carved out of the existing province of North Sumatra in Sumatra island, Indonesia. Sardened together underneath the usual afternoon heat in the modest town square, people compliantly

¹ The carving out of new territories out of existing ones are known as *pemekaran*, which in Bahasa Indonesia means “blossoming” of regions, which bears a positive connotation for the process.

listened to the speech made by the Head of the Second Commission of the national parliament (DPR-RI), E.E. Mangindaan, who is also an ex-governor of North Sulawesi Province. North Sulawesi itself is generally considered as having the same features as the planned Protap; both provinces have a large population of Christians and generally accepted ethnic markers, the Minahasan for North Sulawesi and the Batak-Toba for North Sumatra.²

The speech was followed by other orations by ten representatives from the districts supporting the Protap. The ceremony which lasted around six hours commenced with the prayer led by the Bishop of Batak-Toba's ethnic church the HKBP³ and was concluded by an Islamic prayer by the Head of the muslim *ulemas*, head priests, organization of North Tapanuli. The usage of Islamic prayer might be to portray that the area of Southern Tapanuli where the muslim districts of North Sumatra are situated, had decided to support the Protap, which was not really the case. It may also be done because *de facto* the district of Northern Tapanuli, in which the pledging took place, is part of North Sumatra province and the province's official ceremonies always incorporated Islamic prayers. The representatives of districts who were present themselves opened their speeches with ethnic or religious salutations, in which two of them, - from Tapanuli Tengah district and Sibolga municipality-, with a muslim greeting.

With the usual repetition of the rhetoric of "people's welfare" in each speech during the pledging, the meeting also involved Toba traditional gestures of bequeathing the sceptre of Tunggal Panaluan, a symbol of the power in Batak traditional pagan belief, to Mangindaan, and several "ulos", the traditional clothes which symbolizes respect and hope, for the other members of DPR from various political parties who attended the ceremony. At the end of the ceremony, the paper containing the pledge of "the people of Tapanuli" was conferred by G.M. Chandra Pangabean, the Head of the Protap Committee, who is also a member of the provincial parliament (DPRD) of North Sumatra, to Mangindaan. The latter

² Indonesia has thirty-three provinces and has the largest muslim population in the world (86% of 235 million inhabitants). North Sulawesi and North Sumatra are among the few provinces largely considered as having a significant Christian population. Others included Maluku and West Nusa-Tenggara.

³ HKBP, *Huria Kristen Batak Protestant* (The Congregation of Protestant Christian Batak) is the ethnic church of Batak-Toba. Established by the German mission *Rheinischmission* in 1860, HKBP is at present the largest ethnic church in Indonesia and Southeast Asia.

responded that if the “people so willing, then what was left to do is to pray to God, because everything is in God’s hands now”.⁴



The “Pledging of Determination” of Propinsi Tapanuli, Tarutung, 12 February 2007

The meeting marked a culmination of the demand of Protap which commenced in 2002 along with the concurrent plan of the establishment of East Sumatra province which did not follow through albeit a strong support from the leaders of Malay culture of North Sumatra.⁵ The abandonment of the plan for East Sumatra province was particularly due to the fact that the areas planned to be incorporated in the said new province were ethnically and religiously heterogenous, which rendered it problematic for East Sumatran elites to mobilize based on specific affiliations. For example, Malay-muslim communities inhabited the districts of

⁴ The ceremony was attended by mainly wealthy Christian elites from North Sumatra and Jakarta. Aside from G.M. Chandra Panggabean who is a member of the provincial parliament of North Sumatra (DPRD) and the first son of a media and hotel tycoon, there were other members of national and provincial parliament from the Indonesian Democratic Party for Struggle (PDIP) which is a major national party, as well as the only Christian party in Indonesia, the Welfare And Peace Party (PDS).

⁵ North Sumatra is a province in the island of Sumatra, Indonesia. With the territory of 71,860 km², the province has a population of 11.85 million people according to the census in 2002. It shares its northern border with the province of Aceh, and it’s southern with the provinces of Western Sumatra and Riau. The main ethnic groups are Batak, which is 42% of the total population, Javanese, Malay, Nias and Minangkabau. There are six sub-ethnic groups of Batak, namely Toba, Karo, Simalungun, Pakpak, Dairi, Angkola, Mandailing. The Toba is the largest sub-ethnic group of the Batak.

Langkat, Binjai, Deli-Serdang, Tebing Tinggi, Asahan, Labuan Batu as well as the generally more mixed communities such as Simalungun and Pematang Siantar, whereas the Karo district has a majority of Christian inhabitants. Unlike the discourse of East Sumatra, the plan of Protap, which is more homologous with Toba-Batak Christian as its majority, went on a quite steady progress and systematic mobilization.

2. NAVIGATING POSSIBILITIES: THE *PEMEKARAN*, DECENTRALIZATION AND ROLE OF ELITES

As in other regions in the archipelago, the carving out of new administrative boundaries, or *pemekaran*, is considered as an inevitable, and sometimes unproblematized, consequence of the larger project of decentralization which is regulated in the Government Regulation no. 129/2000 which provides a leeway to create new regions based on, among other rhetoric, “the improvement of social services” and the “improvement of harmony in the relation of the centre and the regions”⁶.

The decentralisation project in Indonesia commenced along with the demands of international agencies which consider the authoritarian style of governance as the underlying factor causing the ineffectiveness in redistribution policies which culminated in the financial crisis in 1997. Decentralization is perceived to support the progress towards democratization of the country, because it is assumed to address the demands of the grass-roots, lessen the central grip of the resources in the regions and to make local governments directly accountable to its people. To pacify the consequential demands from some regions, the government decided to allow self-management for regions and bring the central government closer to the beneficiaries in the regions. Nevertheless, such change creates a space in which local-elites engage in competition and mobilize followers based on a variety of identities and interests. *Pemekaran* becomes an arena in which elite competition may be observed.

In addition to providing greater autonomy in district government formulation, and district and village-level budgetary, the law on *pemekaran* which derived from the more general laws on Decentralization in 1999 allows the carving out of new regions.

⁶ “The Improvement of Service for the Society” and “The Improvement of Harmonious Relations between the Central and Local Governments”, in Government Regulation No.129/2000 on the Condition of the Establishment and the Criteria of “Pemekaran”, the Abolishment and the Amalgamation of Regions chapter II.

The term *pemekaran*, -which literally means “blossoming”-, itself bears a positive connotation of the process. It is based on the notion that the “larger” pre-existing region can no longer provide effective redistribution of resources therefore a new and smaller region has to “blossom” to address the need of the inhabitants.

Albeit the conflicting vernacular of the process, -that the carving out of a territory actually makes it smaller in size, thus, not exactly “blossomed”-, it is noteworthy that the enthusiastic campaigns for *pemekaran* which immediately commenced in many regions of the archipelago upon the enactment of the laws in 1999 and 2000 have shown different results. At present, there are around 180 new districts carved out the old districts and seven new provinces. Some of the new provinces are the prosperous Province of Bangka-Belitung which was carved out of the Province of Riau in Sumatra and Province of North Maluku which was carved out upon the resolution of the communal and religious conflict in the previously larger Province of Maluku. Similar to the latter, religion as the base of the making of new administrative boundaries also played a role in the making of the new predominantly Muslim Province of Gorontalo, which was carved out the generally Christian Province of North Sulawesi.

This paper addresses the role of ethno-religious identities in Indonesian local politics. In my work, I treat ethnicity as a *constructed reality*, in which its existence depends on what is inculcated, -by the majority or the minority, whichever holds the power to do so-, to fulfil a specific purpose in a given situation, place and period of time.⁷ In periods of socio-economic or political stress and crisis, ethnicity is subject to easy manoeuvre by opinion leaders and state builders (Ahmed 1996: 22), which means that part(s) of the society might be induced to identify themselves within the framework of ethnic identity and be mobilised against each other for economic or political purposes.

⁷ Jean-Francois Bayart acknowledges ethnicity as a process of culture and identity, rather than a given structure, and that it is inseparable from the political process structuring the state. See Jean-Francois Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly* (London: Longman, 1993), p.56. Similarly, religion, while supposing rigidity in its structure, is also subject to interpretation and manipulation for power purposes in many plural societies. Indonesia has had a long history of the shaping and mobilizing of ethnic identities during the colonial and Soeharto eras. In today’s Indonesia, the ethno-religious cleavages are prone to political manoeuvre of elites, both in the cases of ethnic mobilization to demand territories such as the Protap as well as during local elections. See Deasy Simandjuntak, *Who Shall Be Radja?*, PhD thesis, forthcoming.

The use of ethnicity and religious cleavages in the local politics began in the Soeharto era, in which despite the state's emphasis on Indonesian national integration, ethnicity and religion was used as marker criteria⁸ for provincial identities. For example, ethnic Dayak was seen as the marker criterion for provinces in Kalimantan. Soeharto's state policy in Kalimantan subsequently neglected the existence of other ethnic groups, such as Madurese and ethnic Chinese. This imagination of unified ethnicity in each province later generated the arrogance of the elites of the Dayak as the major/marker ethnic-group vis-à-vis other groups. An example for religion as marker criteria is the usage of the term "Malay", -which was an ethnic term-, to mean "Muslim". In North Sumatra, "Malay" refers to "Muslim, non-Batak" as opposed to "Christian Batak". Thus Indonesians would generally distinguish the "Malay provinces", such as West Sumatra, Riau and Jambi, from "Christian provinces", such as North Sulawesi, East Nusa-Tenggara, and -to some extent-, North Sumatra and Maluku. This categorization was, of course, an oversimplification of the vast ethnic and religious varieties in the said regions. Subsequently, ethnic cleavage was prone to instigation in some provinces, such as Central Kalimantan and Maluku.

This use of ethnicity, -termed as "cultures"- and to some extent, religion, as marker criterion for administrative boundaries was partly due to the fear of class identity (Kipp 1993). The state continuously suffers trauma of the communist uprising in 1960s, thus, in an effort to curtail the birth of class identity, the state actively promotes the "unity in diversity", emphasizing the ethnic groups belonging to the said administrative regions may exist in harmony. For the sake of assuring stability which was needed for the industrialization process, ethnicity was reduced into performative acts and displayed rituals while other manifestations were considered as a threat for unity.

Consequently, the decentralization era stimulated a growing conflation of ethnicity, -or, ethnic group identities- and religion in Indonesia, especially in the drawing of new provincial boundaries. However, elite campaigns for new provinces were not always successful. Whereas Barthian emphasis on the importance of ethnic boundaries, -instead of its content-, on the notion of ethnic territoriality may still be

⁸ While some ethnicities were used as marker criteria for territories, some others were cornered into certain social sectors, such as Chinese whose activities were limited in business sector. This proved to be a boomerang for the state's plan to curb class-identity. See Deasy Simandjuntak, "Foreign Orientals": The Question of Ethnicity of Chinese-Indonesians in the creation of Indonesian Nationalism", (MA Thesis, Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2003), p.47

relevant in the carving out of new provinces based on ethnic identities, some cases in Indonesia proved that the failure to draw these boundaries may owe to the internal dispute on what constitutes the territory itself. One of the examples was the unsuccessful campaign for the Province of Luwu which was to be carved from the existing Province of South Sulawesi. The elites could not agree whether to create a territory based on the terms of “Great Luwu” which would include the Christian populated Tana Toraja into the new province, or the more restricted “Luwu Land” which would keep the Muslim predominance. The latter denoted the attempts of some Muslim elite to contrast with the Christian Toraja identity (Roth 2007: 121-147). The accentuation of the difference between Toraja and the rest of the Luwu peoples was based on the fear among the Luwu elite of the more educated and modernized Toraja who may seize the key positions in the new province. This tone may be, to some extent, shared by the Protap elite, who aimed to create a new bureaucratic structure which would accommodate Batak-Toba exclusively, as oppose to the largely Malay government in the provincial level of North Sumatra.

The term “elites” in this paper refers to people who already hold a certain standing in the society, through their wealth, involvement in government or political parties.⁹ Local people applied the term “elite” to a variety of top people: from businessmen to church laymen, from bureaucrats to military men. Unlike in Jakarta or even in the United States, the term “elite” in Batak areas in North Sumatra does not bear a negative connotation, or suggesting snobbishness or undemocratic attitudes.

Those organizing the campaign and mobilization for Protap are wealthy, educated Batak-Toba men, connected with the local and central governments. The designation of elites in Batak-Toba society adheres to Batak-Toba customary law (*adat*) which is influenced by its traditional notion of social capital which includes three “achievements”: the *hamoraon* (wealth and one’s willingness to share one’s

⁹ Vilfredo Pareto’s distinctions among a low stratum of elites, non-elites, and a high stratum of elites divided into governing and non-governing actors is relevant to my work. The term “elite” is not to be confused with “political class,” which refers to the small group of privileged people whose formal position enables them to participate in the workings of government, parliament, and top administration. “Elite” encompasses the broadest idea of leadership. See Vilfredo Pareto, *A Treatise on General Sociology* (New York, NY: Dover, 1963), pp. 1423–24, quoted in Tom Bottomore, *Elites and Society* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), p. 2.

wealth), *hagabeon* (success, traditionally attributed to having many male heirs, yet also translated into having a high position in the government, military or politics in general) and *hasangapon* (glory, or the capacity to generate respect, charisma). The individuals widely accepted as having the three “achievements” may be considered *raja* or “chiefs” of their clans. They may, or may not, be inaugurated officially for this title. This traditional designation, combined with an adequate reputation for power, connotes an individual membership in the elite circles in the making of the new province of Tapanuli.¹⁰ It is important to note that elite-ness does not depend on having a “positive” reputation, but only upon having one. This important aspect of elite-ness marks the “value-free” Batak-Toba prominent personage, as compared to, for example, the more egalitarian neighbouring sub-ethnic group of Batak-Karo whose concept of elite-ness in the local politics is more influenced by “virtues” and religious morality.¹¹ It is also important to mention that although common people adhere to the three “achievements” as the prerequisites of elite-ness, the “elite” itself is fluid in its membership. This makes elite-ness an achievable status. Common people aspire to be elites by fulfilling the three “achievements”, which explains the predisposition of Batak-Toba men to acquire more wealth, to give their offspring higher education and to struggle for high governmental positions.

Local elites’ predisposition for power is not a new phenomenon. During the colonization, the Dutch used local aristocracies to control the common people. Nevertheless, during the authoritarian regime, local elites activities were subdued

¹⁰Political scientists are aware of Putnam’s three strategies in locating elites. The first strategy is the “positional” analysis which assumes that those individuals in high positions in governmental institutions are most likely to be politically powerful. The second is “reputational” analysis. This strategy relies on informal reputations for power: in order to get to the elites, a researcher should enquire the individuals who are observing the political process. The last one is “decisional” or event analysis, which is based on the assumption that political power is defined in terms of influence over government activities, hence we should be able to detect the elites by studying specific decisions that are reached. See Robert D. Putnam, *The Comparative Studies of Political Elites* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1976), pp.8-12. In the Protap campaign, the “reputational” strategy was relevant, because the reputation of power of important individuals was influential in mobilizing their followers. Subsequently, the fact that the position of a few elites involved in Protap in the government was not influential in the Protap campaign itself (the main leadership of Protap Committee were businessmen, a few were decision-makers in the local government and parliament) renders the first and third strategies less relevant in locating elites in the Protap campaign.

¹¹ This was particularly evident during the Direct-election of District Head (*Pilkada*) in 2005, in which the Batak-Karo ethnic-church played an influential role in shaping a “virtuous” preference for the newly elected local leadership in the Karo district. See Deasy Simandjuntak, “Milk-Coffee at 10 AM: Encountering the State through Pilkada in North Sumatra”, in Joshua Barker and Gerry Van Klinken, eds, *The State of Authority in Indonesia* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program Publication, forthcoming).

under Soeharto's systematic state-centralization. When the regime fell, and decentralization was enacted, local elites' activities re-escalated. Elites' usage of ethno-religious identities in times of political crisis or opportunity is, according to Gerry van Klinken, mostly evident in the case of "communal contender".¹² The elites aim at gaining benefits for themselves and their followers mainly by securing positions in public service because whoever controls the civil service controls a significant source of wealth. It is for this purpose, that they create followers by building networks of religion and/or "ethnic groups" based on presumed common place of origins. Today's demand for greater autonomy in some regions is rooted in the definition of ethnicity as connected to territory, a piece of land, from which the identification of insiders and outsiders developed into recognition of local attributes, rights over lands and other resources. These constructions become politically potent when they are used as legitimating ideologies for the control of contested resources and territories. Elites mobilization of ethnic and religious sentiments often resulted in communal conflicts, an example of which would be the ethnic violence in Kalimantan in 2001. Gerry van Klinken's record on the subject shows that the mobilization based on ethnic affiliations combined with the discrepancy of welfare between ethnic groups and the politics between central and local elites were the reason of the conflicts in the Province of Central Kalimantan (Van Klinken 2002: 67-105).¹³

In many cases in Indonesia, elite power struggle is classified into two categories; as an attempt of "old players" maintain their grip in (local) politics, both those connected to ancient aristocracies who succeeded into conservative bureaucrats in the Soeharto regime, or new political entrepreneurs who tried to exploit new opportunities using the local elections or the demand for new ethno-religious territories (Schulte Nordholt 2003: 577-578). The first one refers to prominent

¹² One of Tedd Gurr's five categories of ethnic conflict. Tedd R. Gurr, *Minorities at Risk: A Global View of Ethnopolitical Conflicts*, Washington DC: US Institute of Peace Press, 1993, as quoted in Gerry van Klinken, *op cit.*, pp.75-80.

¹³ The relatively prosperous cities in the neighbouring Province of East Kalimantan, with its stable middle-class and the well-connected elites became factors of the absent of conflict in the said province. On the hand, the relatively poorer Central Kalimantan with less civil society representation became a fertile ground for elites' instrumentalization of ethnic identities for power mobilization which resulted in the ethnic conflict between the Dayak groups and minority Madurese ethnic group¹³. The ethnic conflict of Kalimantan provides an example of elite mobilization of the existing identities, which would prove the instrumentalist view that ethnicity in itself is not a sufficient condition for ethnic conflict unless there are political actors who decide mobilize such cleavage.

individuals who became connected with Soeharto's ruling party Golkar and the military. These individuals, who mostly had Javanese, Muslim, background, -or could relate with these identities-, secured leadership positions in the local governments during the New Order, as part of Soeharto's centralization policy. The second one refers to new, rich, personalities, who manage to gain connection with political elites in Jakarta to support them in their power interest. These are the people who succeeded in getting leadership positions in districts and provinces through direct local elections. Most of the time, these categories overlap: that people deriving from the old regime now also designate new compatriots for their purpose. The overlapping of these categories is also evident in the Protap case, in which both old and new Batak local business elites were cooperating with central and local parliamentary as well as military elites in order to gain their power interests.

Jacqueline Vel recorded the importance of central-local elite connection in local politics in her work on West Sumba, for they arranged the organization, campaign materials, lobby at decision-making institutions in Jakarta as well as rally funding for this purpose (Vel 2007: 91-119). Among the elites campaigning for South Sumba was the famous academician and politician Manasse Mallo in Jakarta who admitted that he would not reject the possibility to become a new district-head or even the governor of the region should it develop into a province (Vel 2007: 109). The Protap case also shows that the central Toba elites in Jakarta played a crucial role because they became the ultimate source of funding of the campaign.

The methodology of the research included participatory observation, interviews and investigating media reports. These inquiries were done both in Jakarta, Medan and other district capitals in North Sumatra. Participant observation was done in church meetings and ethnic ceremonies/celebrations, while the media reports consulted were mostly provincial newspapers and ethnic-magazines. Interviews were done upon elites and common people. Putnam's second strategy on *reputational analysis* was useful in identifying these informal elites, or formal ones, especially those in the second and third layer of the political stratification. Subsequently respondents from these positions were inquired for names of others to whom they seek advice or they consider generally influential. For the formal elites especially, attention was given to members of local parliament (DPRD) and local bureaucrats. A combination of Putnam's first and third strategies on identifying the elites based on *positional* as well as *decisional analysis* served as good methodological tool for

formal elites. Consequently, the process also unfolded the nature of centre-local power relations based on ethno-religious lines.

3. POST-COLONIAL INDONESIA: LOYALTY TO THE CENTRAL STATE VS. ETHNO-RELIGIOUS AFFILIATIONS

Post-colonial Indonesian government almost immediately faced demands for regional autonomy. During this period, the outer-Java regions suffered from economic difficulties which were largely due to political instability and inappropriate economic policy measures. Power struggle between Sukarno, the military and political parties, especially the communist party characterized the situation of the state. Sukarno's style of governance which marked hesitance against democracy consequently brought forth exchange rate problems and the absence of foreign capital. All of these factors were damaging the economic development. In the region, Sukarno's policies on self-sufficiency and import substitution commenced the growing gap of economic level between Java and the outer islands which did not cease even throughout Soeharto's New Order.

In North Sumatra, demands for autonomy had largely initiated by those associated to the Eastern Sumatra areas. As early as 1947, upon the subduing of the social revolution, some Malay elites assisted by the colonial authority initiated the making of the State of East Sumatra (NST), which was generally aimed at challenging the Javanese nationalist new government in Java. The puppet state invited resentments from labor groups, farmers and other ethnic groups outside Malay and the gradual withdrawal of Dutch troops significantly weakened it and it dissolved in 1950.

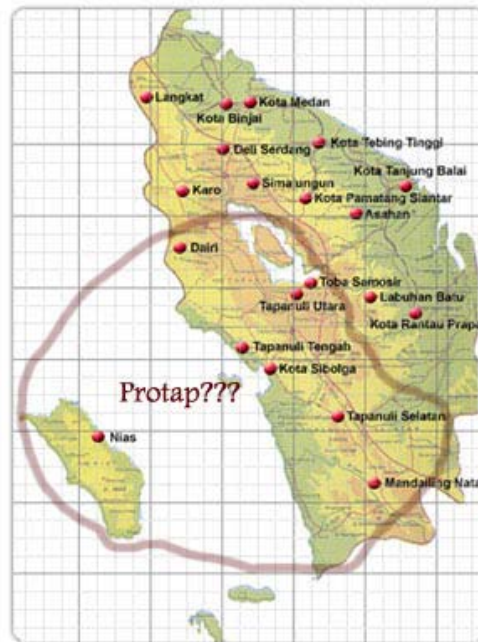
The 1950s witnessed that the central government had hardly any grip on regional conditions, especially regarding the military commanders who were competing to gain power in many regions. North Sumatra witnessed dissatisfied military groups under the leadership of the Colonel Maludin Simbolon, a Toba-Christian military officer which marked the initial response of the outer island towards Sukarno's policies. Albeit having connection with the Darul Islam rebels in West Java, South Sulawesi and Aceh, the Christian Simbolon and his compatriot the muslim Lt. Col. Hussein were not planning of fighting a holy war against Jakarta, instead, they were mobilizing on regional identities such as ethnicity and place of origin (Feith and Lev 1963: 32-46). Simbolon was the military commander of the

First Military Region under the Bukit Barisan Division of the National Military Command. At that time, the First Military Region consisted of troops and officers who were almost entirely from North Sumatra. From 1952 to 1955, Simbolon played a major role in opposition to Sukarno, and had been in competition with the famous Batak-Mandailing Muslim General A.H. Nasution, for the position of Chief of Staff of the Army. In 1956, because of Simbolon's regionalist predisposition, Nasution intended to replace him with a Mandailing Muslim. Fearing instability which might take place, Nasution summoned Simbolon to Jakarta to discuss his replacement with a Karo Christian man who had been the former commander of the Second Regiment of the Bukit Barisan. As predicted, Simbolon resented this policy and conducted a coup on 22 November 1956 (Smail 1968: 128-187).

In December 1956, the province of North Sumatra consisted of three residencies, Aceh, East Sumatra and Tapanuli. Whereas Aceh was more or less homogenous both in terms of ethnicity and religion, East Sumatra and Tapanuli portrayed a different reality. Northern Tapanuli consisted mostly of Toba Batak Christians, some of whom migrated to bigger towns in East Sumatra, whereas the southern part of Tapanuli was inhabited by Mandailing Batak, who were converted to Islam under the influence of West Sumatra. East Sumatra depicted an even more complicated social structure with Karo Christian inhabiting the regions near the lake, the muslim Malay on the coastal areas, Toba migrants in the bigger towns and Javanese labourers who were predominantly traditional muslim who had joined the militias during 1945-1949.

Some of aristocratic elites of the former NST supported The Organization to Demand for the Autonomy of East Sumatra (BAPOST), which was actively campaigning for the said cause since 1957. This organization was retaliated by the Anti-Separatist Movement (GAS) supported by North and South Tapanuli Bataks. Simalunguns in the Nationalist Party of Indonesia (PNI) and The Christian Party of Indonesia (PARKINDO) supported BAPOST. On the other hand, the province's central leadership of PARKINDO, who were largely Toba-Batak, supported GAS. This caused a disagreement in the party, yet did not escalate into a graver level. BAPOST had been involved in military politics in North Sumatra. Yet when its aim to gain autonomous status for Eastern Sumatra was not met, BAPOST dissolved a couple of years later. In the same year, there was a discussion on carving three provinces: one consisting of the South Tapanuli, Labuhan Batu and Asahan Districts,

-clearly in relations with the Batak-Muslim-; another to accommodate Middle Tapanuli, North Tapanuli, Nias and Simalungun which were inhabited by a Christian majority; and another incorporating Karo, Deli/Serdang, Langkat and Medan, that were geographically were in East Sumatra. This suggestion was brought forth by A.N.P. Situmorang, the Head of Section B of the then local parliament (DPRD) of North Sumatra.¹⁴



A speculative map of the Province Tapanuli (Protap). Taken from Poltak Simanjuntak Online (<http://poltak.simanjuntak.or.id/2008/09/26/propinsi-tapanuli-elitis-atau-populis/>), accessed 30 May 2009.

Regional politics in Indonesia had two opposing tendencies: the loyalty to a unified Indonesian identity which had emerged on the birth of the independence movement, and the reality of the diverse Indonesian regional identities throughout the vast archipelago. Many instances suggest that while the national identity was accepted, the adherence towards the communal groupings in Indonesia existed in parallel with the unified nationalist consciousness. Eriksen wrote that multiple loyalties, to the nation and to one's own local identities may exist and the fact that they exist in parallel may reduce the chance of conflict between the local and the

¹⁴ “And if such distribution takes place, these provinces will have an improved economy, due to the fact that each will be granted large plantations and harbors. Such distribution will change the Dutch tradition which we should no longer continue”. Quoted by Basyral Hamidi in <http://basyral-hamidi-harahap.com/blog/index.php?itemid=19>.

central (Eriksen 1993: 152-153). Nevertheless, if there was a dissatisfaction against one of the two loyalties, then one may override the other. William Liddle's work on ethnicity and political party affiliation in Indonesia shows that from the late 1950s until the beginning of 1960s ethnic loyalties existed side-by-side, -and sometimes in competition with-, the loyalties to the state, and that demands for self-autonomy was treated as a threat to the unified nationalism (Liddle 1970). He argues that the existence of the sub-national loyalties in Simalungun in North Sumatra did not pose an alternative to the membership in the Indonesian nation due to the superseding influence of the national party structures, -whose majority was based on major religions and political ideologies-, and the shared values with other groups in the region which overrule mere ethnic boundaries. Thus the sense of belonging to the nation co-existed separately with sub-national loyalties, although the latter was also expressed in forms similar to the former, such as (local) political parties and (ethnic) organizations.

The New Order regime which took over the central state in 1966, upon pacifying the alleged communist-coup, continued the policy of strengthening nationalism and the reliance on state administration. *Pancasila*, the Five Principles, which had been created by Soekarno, became a mystical source of such a national identity and loyalty to the central state, to which the latter became its guardian. In its endeavour to create stability, the language *Bahasa Indonesia* was promoted as the national language which connoted modernity (Foulcher 1990: 305-306), development and adherence to the benign central state, as oppose to local languages which increasingly suggested conservatism and poverty. The state also made the adoption of *Pancasila* as the ground norm for every political party, religious groups and social organizations no matter to which ideology they had previously adhered. The drive towards modernity and development also begot the dual roles of the armed forces which allowed and supported a greater military influence in the archipelago. Military commands were placed in the region, and the local administrative hosted around five representatives of the armed forced in each provincial and district level parliaments. Concerning the provincial and district governments, the central state reserved the right to appoint local leaders of its preference both in the provincial level, the governors and the district level, the *bupati*. According to Michael Malley, 20 out of 26 governors of Indonesian provinces in 1970 had a military background while 60 % of the district leaders were also summoned from the armed force (Malley 1999:76).

Meanwhile, in an effort to curb the diversities of ethnicity from taking a political undertone, the central state dissociated it from religion and promoted its expression in the form of cultures in its decorative aspects. The expression of ethnicity in any other form other than the ones promoted by the central state was labelled as triggering resentments based on “suku, ras, agama, antar-golongan – SARA” (ethnic groups, race, religion and groupings), and therefore was banned. The government completely controlled the kind of “ethnicity” that was “safe”. The experience with the communist-coup also made the government especially apprehensive with the notion of class in the society. Rita Smith Kipp wrote comprehensively on the effort of the New Order government to keep regional identities in check by dissociating ethnicity and religion and marginalizing class (Kipp, 1993), so that none of the above identities fully overlapped each other. Furthermore, religious identities were also simplified into five major religions, -Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism and Buddhism-; to one of which a citizen is obliged to adhere and officially mention on their citizen card. In Indonesian citizenship, there was no place for traditional animism or atheism, for example, because the former connotes backwardness and the latter’s connection to communism and therefore was dangerous for the Central State.

Thus the New Order government’s tight grip on the central/ local politics and the expression of diversity in Indonesia brought about dissatisfaction of the local towards the central authority. Nevertheless, due to the intensification of military influence all throughout the nation, the resentment did not generally develop into a full-fledged secession from the state, with the exception of Aceh and East Timor.

4. NORTH SUMATRA UNDER PRESSURE

The demand in the early 1960s mirrored the initial campaign for separate new provinces in North Sumatra, which began in 2002. The early campaign for the new provinces revolved around the debate on autonomous East Sumatra Province and Tapanuli Province.

In March 2002, members of Karo elites from various parts of North Sumatra demanded an autonomous province of East Sumatra. The leader, Budi Mulia Bangun, maintained that this was according to Law No.22/1999. Bangun, a member of the Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) faction in the province’s parliament, maintained

that the purpose of the new province is to ensure the people's welfare and equal regional development.¹⁵ He also recalled East Sumatra was a separate Residence in the colonial period, as also Tapanuli. In his efforts, Bangun was supported by Aria Mahendra Sinulingga, who was also Karo. According to their plan, the overall size of East Sumatra will be 31,515 km², consisting of 11 regencies of Langkat, Karo, Simalungun, Deli Serdang, asahan, Tanjung Balai, Labuhan Batu, Medan city, Binjai, Tebing Tinggi and Pematang Siantar. Around 8 million people presently reside in these regencies.

The declaration was rebutted by Toba elites, who demanded a separate Tapanuli province. About 3,000 people from four regencies in North Sumatra, namely North Tapanuli, Toba Samosir, Central Tapanuli and Sibolga, attended rally in the town of Tarutung in early April 2002, to show support for the Tapanuli province. A prominent campaigner who was also a regional parliamentarian, T.M Panggabean, a Toba, maintained that it was the wish of the residents of the regencies that the idea be brought to the legislative councils. Along with him, a House of Representatives member, Panda Nababan, also a Toba, promised to solicit the support of at least 50 House members from various factions in Jakarta for the planning of Tapanuli province.¹⁶

Meanwhile, the previous government of North Sumatra disagreed with the idea of the new provinces. The Governor T. Rizal Nurdin claimed that there was simply not enough financial resource to fund this project. He also suspected that that the new provinces was really aimed to benefit the elites.¹⁷ An economist from the North Sumatra University, Jhon Ritonga also shared this view. He believed that an East Sumatra province will not directly guarantee high positions for ethnic Karo and Malay in the local government. The fact that 45% of the population of the new province is Javanese would still give ethnic Javanese more chance to win the governor position on a direct election.¹⁸

A North Tapanuli Batak/Toba-backed newspaper *Sinar Indonesia Baru*, owned by a rich Toba businessman G.M. Panggabean, started to propagate a new

¹⁵ *Republika*, 8 March 2002.

¹⁶ *The Jakarta Post*, 10 April 2002.

¹⁷ *Koran Tempo*, 11 March 2002.

¹⁸ *Kompas*, 6 May 2002.

Tapanuli province, -which would mainly dominated by Toba-. As the proposal was brought to DPR in Jakarta, it was immediately backed by Toba members of PDIP in the central DPR, Panda Nababan and some other prominent Toba legislators, such as Prof. Tunggul Sirait, Anton Sihombing, Marthin Sirait and Tagor Lumbanraja. The blunt opposition of the Malay governor of North Sumatra Rizal Nurdin against the “pemekaran” idea seemed to pose an obstacle for Tapanuli to be discussed in the central parliament. His opposition is understandable because the new province would initially depend on the financial resources of North Sumatra.

In the region, opposition was voiced by the Secretary of *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (MUI), the highest muslim priest organization in North Sumatra, S.L. Simbolon who claimed that the making of Tapanuli province especially, would create the problems in the ethnic, religious, and cultural relations in the society. He accused that the whole discourse was a program of a particular ethnic group, meant Toba, to dominate the new province. Further, he stipulated that the reason behind the creation of the new province was because the elites in seven districts joining the Tapanuli province would like to win the governor seat of North Sumatra. His claim has a degree of truth: since the independence of Republic, only once Christian-Toba Batak was elected governor.

A later development showed that the planning for East Sumatra province has been abandoned altogether because it was not fully supported by Malay elites. Another reason would be due to the fact that East Sumatra proposal involved a more heterogenous population: Malay, Karo, Aceh, Chinese and Javanese communities, each with its own religion. A personal communication with a church layman in Brastagi, Karo district in 2005 revealed that Karo population were not as enthusiast in supporting the East Sumatra proposal, and were apprehensive about staying in the North Sumatra province should the Protap be enacted, because then Karo would be the only Christian group left in the province.¹⁹

The Protap pro-contra became the concern of the local parliament when it established a Special Committee for Province Tapanuli (*Pansus Protap*) with seventeen members including Mohammad Raden Syafii from the fraction of Islamic

¹⁹ Personal Communication with I.P, Karo GPIB church elder, Brastagi, Karo district, 25 September 2005.

Reformed Star Party (FPBR) and others from the fraction of another Islamic party, the Unity of Development party (FPPP) whose parties openly rejected the predominantly Christian elites-backed Protap. Other parties who shared similar negative predisposition concerning Protap are the Islamic party Welfare Justice Party (PKS) and moderate Islamic party the National Mandate Party (PAN). Raden Syafii, for example, had once stated that Protap would not bring welfare to the muslim communities in Tapanuli, and that the 15 percent population in Tapanuli who are muslim must reject the new province.

Yet contrary to the fate of East Sumatra proposal, the Protap proposal developed into a movement for autonomy, with the support of the more financially prepared Jakarta-based Batak elites. Polemics in mass media show a clear polarization between the Toba-Batak-Christian districts who generally support the Protap and the other districts in North Sumatra who are inhabited by muslim Batak, and Malay, who voice strong opposition.

Businessmen are the main force behind the support of Protap. The head of the preparatory committee of Protap is G.M. Chandra Panggabean, whose father is the hotel and media tycoon G.M. Panggabean, who owns the largest newspaper in North Sumatra, the *Harian Sinar Indonesia Baru*²⁰. The other Christian Toba elites in Jakarta who supported Protap includes the retired general Luhut Pandjaitan, Dr. Midian Sirait and Panda Nababan, retired General Sintong Panjaitan, retired Police Commisioner Togar Sianipar, Police Inspector General Thamrin Simanjuntak, Edison Manurung, Marthin Sirait, Marthin Hutabarat, retired General -and a present Judge in the Supreme Court- Timur Manurung, famous lawyers such as Otto Hasibuan dan Luhut Pangaribuan. Politicians in support of the Protap includes the national chairman of the Christian party PDS, Royandi Hutasoit.

In November 2006, there was a big meeting in Jakarta attended by all the elite supporters of the Protap, to gather fund for the campaign. At the end of the meeting, - which looked more like a music festival-, people donated large sums of money which amounted to 1.1 billion rupiahs. A similar gathering was held following the “pledge of determination”, in February 2007 in Medan. This one generated 2.1 billion rupiahs for the Protap. However, some of the elites who were not invited, - because they were

²⁰ Chandra Panggabean himself is listed as one of the richest member of DPRD, along with other supporters of Protap such as Budiman Nadapdap and Toga Sianturi.

considered not as wealthy or for some or other reason-, would jeer at the Panggabean and other elites who attended. As a Toba government official, -who did not get invited-, told me once during a personal communication in his fully air-conditioned government-office at the Home Ministry in Jakarta, “Do you know what they are doing? They just want to raise fund. They want the money. They couldn’t care less about what we could do for Protap. You see, it’s all about the ego, [about] who is seen to give the most²¹ .

Nevertheless many of Batak-Christian elites in North Sumatra and in Jakarta either support or at least did not oppose the Protap. A personal communication with the head of the committee of Protap in Jakarta, Prof. Midian Sirait, a renowned national figure in Indonesia’s bureaucracy considered it very important for Batak people to have their own territory with one homogenous “social structure”, he took the example of the more developed province of Western Sumatra which is more homogenous with one ethnic group and one religion. The governor had been busy with other “social structure” while the central state is “too far away”²². He envisioned that there should be three provinces in North Sumatra: Propinsi Tapanuli, North Sumatra, and Angkola-Mandailing. The latter is a region of Batak-muslim from South Tapanuli. By this definition, it is clear that he thought of North Sumatra as a region of Toba-Batak, Malay and Muslim Batak. While being very careful not to accuse the Muslim North Sumatran as the biggest opposition for the Protap proposal, Sirait admitted that many street demonstrations have been conducted by muslim organizations in North Sumatra.

An exception would be the opinion of the Toba-Batak elite Nortier Simanungkalit, a nationally renowned Toba author of Indonesian nationalist songs, who also wrote an ethno-nationalist article on Tapanuli as the ancestral land of Batak²³. He considered that Protap is an affair of several Toba men who could not be

²¹ Personal Communication with N.S. a sub-division chief at the Home Ministry in Jakarta, who had been initially engaged in the fund-raising events conducted by Protap elites in one particularly luxurious Batak-owned entertainment centre in Jakarta.

²² Personal Communication with Midian Sirait, 5 Maret 2006.

²³ Nortier Simanungkalit, *Tapanuli Sebagai Daerah Batak*, unpublished paper, Jakarta 1999, presented in a meeting of Batak elites in Indonesia, in which he enlisted all the names of Batak elite-men in Indonesia and Malaysia who did not put their Batak surname, so that their Batak-ness was obscured. One of the famous ones is ex-vice president Adam Malik, who had a surname of Batubara, and Tun Abdul Razak in Malaysia.

leaders in Indonesia in general, thus would like to be *radja* or kings in North Sumatra. He was disappointed with the meagre purpose of securing bureaucratic position in the “little” province and was not too enthusiastic about the prospect of having a small territory for the Batak people.²⁴

Meanwhile, the *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (MUI) of Kota Sibolga enacted the “haram” *fatwa* (an Islamic declaration that something is ‘unclean’) for Protap. The official letter of the muslim priest organization to its people renders it forbidden for muslim to support the Protap proposal as it is considered as the affair of only a “certain group” of the society.²⁵ On 24 September 2008, Indonesian Home Ministry has sent its team to several districts aspiring to be part of the Protap (districts of North Tapanuli, Humbang Hasundutan, Toba-Samosir, Samosir, Central Tapanuli Tengah, South Nias and Sibolga municipality) for preliminary evaluation. The team observed the financial and other assets, the number of civil service, supporting infrastructure and other local resource.²⁶ The team concluded that the “technical requirements” have been met. Nevertheless, the result still has to be reported to the Home Minister and discussed by *Dewan Persiapan Otonomi Daerah*, the Body for the Preparation of Regional Autonomy (DPOD). Subsequently, the result will be submitted to the President and later discussed at the Parliament, DPR RI.

The result of the survey was accepted and signed by the new governor of North Sumatra, Syamsul Arifin. The chairman of Protap Committee, G.M. Panggabean proudly claimed that the Home Ministry team had observed the technical preparation and found that Protap would have its own airport, a temporary provincial office building hosted by the University Sisimangaraja XII Tapanuli (UNITA) in

²⁴ “Why do we want to create a small province for the Batak? The whole North Sumatra is a Batak province! Therefore we have to keep that province intact... Batak would never be the head of this country because the electoral democracy would not allow a Batak to be the president, yes, but we should still keep North Sumatra as a Batak province”. Interview with Nortier Simanungkalit, 15 January 2006.

²⁵ *Medan Bisnis*, 2 February 2007.

²⁶ The Information and Communication Body of North Sumatra (BAINFOKOMSUMUT) vaguely stated that the team investigated the “real condition” relating to the province’s and districts’ preparation for Protap. This real condition was mentioned as to include: the preparation for residency registration, the building of provincial office, the DPRD office, and other infrastructure to host the assets transferred from North Sumatra province to the new province. The aim of the preparation is to insure that personnel transferred will be readily received by “institutions”. Bainfokomsumut, *Depdagri Mulai Survey Kelayakan Protap* (Home Ministry Began Observing the eligibility of Protap), see <http://www.bainfokomsumut.go.id/open.php?id=3726&db=berita>.

Siborong-borong, a large area to build offices for the Parliament, and other infrastructures.

The team itself was extravagantly welcome in many districts, such as in Tarutung in which they, -again-, received the *ulos* in a traditional ceremony and in the Municipality of Sibolga albeit the dismay of many district parliamentarians who claimed that the people of Sibolga were not inclined to join the Protap and would go against the Municipality in this matter. A parliamentarian from PAN, R. Nasution, claimed that the ceremony to welcome the Home Ministry team “inflicts the anger of muslim people who are observing the fasting month”.²⁷

It is interesting to notice the superficiality of the survey which lasted only a couple of days and the fact that the aspects observed during the survey of seemed to be of physical nature, such as the buildings and assets, and not on more fundamental aspects such as the inclination of inhabitants of each districts concerning the Protap proposal which would be shown by the degree of coordination between the district-heads and local parliamentarians regarding the support or rejection towards the proposal, or the nature of financial resources, human resources and others potential that may support the new province. The discussion during the survey also seemed to revolve around the transfer of personnel and the existence of “institutional” support for personnel from the North Sumatra provincial bureaucracy, almost as if the only important feature of the new province is the employment opportunity and the institutional preparation to receive financial support from the central state which would be feasible when new provincial bureaucracy is established in Tapanuli.

In addition to highlighting the ethno-religious cleavage, in this case between Batak-Christian and other ethnic-group-Muslim inhabitants-, the Protap case shows that the most enthusiastic proponents were Toba elites in Medan. On the facade, elites and non-elites shared the sentiment to build the “homeland”, a campaign which had been initiated by a former governor of North Sumatra, Raja Inal Siregar in his project of “marsipature hutanabe” (“Each caring for his own village”) which invited Jakarta-based Batak elites to contribute to the development in North Sumatra. Nevertheless, as was implied in the statements of the preparatory committee, the purpose of the elites was to capture the state resources, while the central state continues to be relevant in the Protap.

²⁷ *Harian Waspada*, 30 September 2008.

The latest rally supporting Protap has had a gory turn. On 3rd February 2009, demonstrators at the provincial parliament (DPRD) in Medan ran amok, stampeded the building and killed the DPRD Speaker Abdul Aziz Angkat.²⁸ The Governor of North Sumatra immediately said that this tragedy had nothing to do with ethnicity or religion, in fear of possible Muslim retaliation.²⁹ The police immediately arrested the chairman of the preparatory committee of the Protap, Chandra Panggabean, along with six other people allegedly directing the rally. The police and Interpol are still searching for the main benefactor of the Protap, G.M. Panggabean, who was said to have fled to Singapore.³⁰ In relations with this tragedy and to maintain political stability needed for the presidential election in April 2009, the DPRD decided not to have anymore discussion on Protap this year.³¹ This is indeed a major set back in the Protap campaign. Elites are varied in their opinion about the matter, while some are still optimistic that in the next years the campaign might still be made possible, some are not certain in continuing their support for the campaign.³²

²⁸ *Kompas*, 3 February 2009; *Suara Pembaruan*, 3 February 2009

²⁹ *Suara Pembaruan*, 4 February 2009

³⁰ *Tempo*, 23 February 2009.

³¹ The fact that there is no official endorsement from DPRD because of this incident makes the Protap ineligible to be a new province. The Centre of Information of the Ministry of Internal Affairs Republic of Indonesia (PUSPEN DEP DAGRI) http://puspen.depdagri.go.id/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=656:provinsi-tapanuli-gagal-dibentuk&catid=60:aktual-media-elektronik&Itemid=76

³² A member of the President's Advisory Council, T.B. Silalahi, said that he had not agreed upon the Protap proposal because the province did not include the Muslim South Tapanuli. See *Tempo*, 23 February 2009. Ex-general Luhut Pandjaitan, said that while the perpetrators of the tragedy have to take responsibility of their action, the government still has to pay attention to the demands of many Batak people who had been striving for a new province because it is part of democracy. See *Harian Sinar Indonesia Baru*, 18 February 2009.



The evacuation of DPRD Speaker, Abdul Aziz Angkat, during the violent demonstrations of supporters of Propinsi Tapanuli, 3 February 2009. (Photo: Antara/Irsan Muljadi)

5. *PROPINSI TAPANULI: LOCAL ELITES AND THE CENTRAL STATE*

The paper has indicated two important aspects concerning the history of the demand for autonomy in North Sumatra and the relations between elites, elites and non-elites as well as elites with the State, in the Protap campaign. The aspects will be elaborated below:

Firstly, the North Sumatran historicity shows that the demand for autonomy was not a novelty. Disorder, elite mobilization and economic discrepancy between regions, have almost immediately challenged the new post-colonial government to accommodate demands for autonomy which began in Eastern Sumatra areas. The State of East Sumatra advocated by ex-aristocratic families in 1947, the subsequent demand for East Sumatra's autonomy through the BAPOST in the end of 1950s combined with military politics and rebellion also indicated local dissatisfaction with the new Javanese-based central state leadership. The ethno-religious cleavages

manifesting within political parties in the central state and the regions posed further challenges to the post-colonial state's aim at national unity.

Albeit having its roots in the post-colonial era, the modern demand for autonomy in North Sumatra seems to be detached from the demand for East Sumatra, BAPOST and the military politics in the 1950s. The only similarity between the post-colonial demand and the Protap campaign was in its basic argument that there is economic inequality between the central and the regions, and that the regions should have the freedom to determine their own priorities. The Protap campaign, however, is not advocated by elites with any connection with the aristocratic advocates of the NST, political advocates of BAPOST or the generals at the rebellions. On the contrary, the Protap campaign is advocated by elites from the business sector in North Sumatra. Protap elites are renowned Toba-Batak, who mostly resides in Medan, the capital city of North Sumatra. Financial resources for the campaign come from Medan and Jakarta. Despite the rhetoric of bringing welfare to the inhabitants of the districts in concern, the new province is actually aimed at creating a new bureaucratic centre in the region, which would employ more Batak people, preferable those related with elites and supporters of the Protap campaign. There was no clear indication on whether advocates of Protap know on which economic resource the new province may rely when it is actually established. So far, the talk revolves mostly around the project to build new offices and other infrastructure, and human resources that may get employment thereof. This means that the new provincial bureaucracy will mostly depend on the resources (provincial subsidy) from the central state. Thus, despite the rhetorics of regional "autonomy" from the central state, the Protap is actually aimed at bringing more central state's resources to the region.

The second aspect is on elites relations with other actors in the campaign. The Protap's campaign which mostly revolves around the activities of elites, for example to generate financial aid for the new province from other Batak elites in North Sumatra and Jakarta and the lobby to the central parliament, makes the discourse of the new province escapes the attention of non-elites in the central. In North Sumatra itself, the focus on elites activities also indicates that the demand was not initiated by North Tapanuli inhabitants, or "sons of the soils" who live in the districts in concern. What was campaigned as the demand of "grass-roots" is actually far from the initiatives of the common people/ non-elites in the districts who are mainly mobilized as followers for the purpose of demonstrations and rallies. The violent turn-out of the

latest Protap campaign in Medan emphasized the disorder of the rallies and the campaign in general. Many of the non-elite supporters were lured by the rhetorics of the perceivable employment in the new provincial bureaucracies and some by the idea of getting the central state's resources closer to the region. In this case, we see that elites and common people share the idea that the central state is the sole provider of welfare of people in the region.

The elites opinion concerning the Protap campaign is also far from being unified. Some elites in the region readily support the proposal due to ethno-religious loyalty and some for the perceivable position they could obtain upon the establishment of the new provincial bureaucracy. Still some jeer at the Panggabean family exploit in this matter, maintaining that the new province would only benefit a few individuals connected to the Panggabean business empire. Elites in the central state are mostly connected to the campaign through the lobby in the parliament, -if they are members of the DPR or political parties supporting the Protap-, or the financial assistance for the campaign, -if they are invited to the endless ceremonies and banquets aimed at generating money for Protap-. Concerning the former, there was limited support by the Indonesian Democratic Party for Struggle and the Christian-based Peace and Welfare Party albeit without official endorsement. The latter included retired military generals and other wealthy businessmen, whose act of gift-giving could only be explained by drawing at the tendency of Batak to try to fulfil the traditional social capital revolving around wealth, success and glory.

The Protap sheds light into the impact of the decentralization project unto the relations between local elites and the central state. Concerning the ethno-religious cleavages used by the elites, the carving of the new province marks the "re-association" of ethnic, religion, class and territory, in its conflation of Batak, Christian and the struggle for an administrative boundary of this identity within the Propinsi Tapanuli. Nevertheless, the "pemekaran" tendency would not undermine the stability of the State. Instead of empowering the grass-roots and establishing accountable governance in the regions, the demand for autonomy aims at creating state-dependent territories which in turn would perpetuate the clientelistic relations between the central and local elites, and between elites and non-elites.

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