If any slogan can be said to sum up the Indonesian national revolution, it is ‘From Sabang to Merauke,’ a geographical assertion of the Indonesian national space. Under this slogan, Indonesian nationalists began to organize against Dutch colonial rule in the first half of the twentieth century, fought a war of independence in 1945-9, and then campaigned for the transfer of Papua (Irian Jaya) from Dutch to Indonesian rule from 1950-62. Under the same slogan, the unity of the unitary Republic of Indonesia has been defended ever since.

Yet the slogan can also be used as an expression of the secessionist tendency within modern Indonesia. Sabang is an island off the coast of Aceh, where independence sentiments run strong. Merauke lies in the southeastern corner of Papua, the province where the demand for independence is stronger still.

Movements for an independent Papua and Aceh are generally described as ‘separatist’ efforts to divide Indonesia, with their armed wings labeled under the Suharto regime as little more than ‘security disruptors’ (gerakan pengacau keamanan). It is more useful to regard them as nationalist movements, which seek to define their nation not as Indonesia, but as their own province. Scholars of the history of nationalism have characterized secession movements as the latest wave in the two-century history of nationalism (Smith, 1982; Anderson, 1991). Indeed, it is remarkable the extent to which new ethnic nationalisms parallel the earlier emergence of an Indonesian nationalism that sought to separate from the Netherlands. ‘Indonesia,’ both as a concept and as a state, is the invention of a nationalist movement; so too with Aceh and Papua. It is almost as
remarkable how closely the discourse of the Indonesian centre has paralleled that of Dutch colonialists who refused to recognize that their East Indies colony was becoming an Indonesian nation in the minds of its people (Webster 1998:9). Yet it is in the minds of their people that nations exist. As Mohammad Hatta pointed out: ‘Once a nation has become convinced of the rightness of its cause, the ideal of independence can no longer be suppressed.’ (Hatta 1972: 570-1).

Although Indonesia has often been viewed as a state in danger of disintegration, it has shown an impressive ability to invoke unity. Despite numerous conflicts in early Indonesian history, secessionist sentiment was very low. The 1950 declaration of a Republic of the South Moluccas was primarily a leftover of the revolution in which leaders of Ambonese ‘loyal minority’ who had supported continued Dutch rule attempted to resist incorporation into the new Republic -- a secession that lacked support from many Ambonese (Anderson, 1998: 330; Chauvel, 1985). Early rebellions in Aceh, West Java and South Sulawesi were under the banner of the Darul Islam, a movement that aimed at reinventing the whole of Indonesia as a state guided by Islamic principles. Uprisings starting in 1958 in West Sumatra and North Sulawesi explicitly rejected secession. Rather than demanding independence for the provinces concerned, these rebellions raised the banner of the Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia (PRRI) (Mackie, 1980: 673; Kahin & Kahin, 1995). Papuan secessionism, rooted in the years before the Indonesian take-over, was for many years the only movement explicitly seeking separation from Indonesia.

Only after the Indonesian state changed the constitutional definition of its territorial extent by annexing East Timor in 1975-6 was there another challenge to Indonesian unity. East Timorese nationalists had already declared their independence when Indonesian troops invaded. Their resistance from 1975 to 1999 was essentially a defensive nationalism which aimed at the restoration of that independence. The expansion beyond the original Indonesian national space,
however, opened the door for regional challenges to Indonesian unity: the first explicit declaration of Acehnese independence came in 1976. Finally, the success of East Timor in regaining its independence after the fall of the Suharto regime has served as a demonstration effect to other restive regions. Civil society in Aceh began to organize around the demand for a referendum on independence. Papuan leaders called for a dialogue that might lead to independence. Demands for secession were heard for the first time in other areas: Riau, Sulawesi, the South Moluccas again, and even Bali.

Still, the real force of secessionist nationalism remains at the two extremes of Indonesia: Aceh and Papua. It is important that these two movements be considered as nationalist movements in the same way that the movement for Indonesian independence was a nationalist movement. In both territories, as in Dutch-ruled Indonesia, a nationalist movement built a sense of identity as a nation, even before gaining the apparatus of an independent state. Not yet a nation-state, Indonesia was already a real nation well before 1949 in the minds of opinion leaders and increasingly among the bulk of its inhabitants. Especially in the years 1945-9, it might be dubbed a notion-state, a people who believed themselves to be a nation and who therefore acted in defence of their nation against an attempted Dutch recolonization. Neither Aceh nor Papua is a nation-state, but both have passed a point of no return in their nationalism: they are already notion-states. This is not something that can be solved through a repressive approach.

Nationalist movements are not grounded only in space, in their homelands. They are also located in time, looking to history as a vital component of the nation, reading the nation back through time in order to assert that it has ‘always existed’ (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). They look also to the future, drawing much of their strength from the promise that the future they can provide will be a
better one. While focusing on territorially-defined nationalism in Aceh and Papua, this paper will also give attention to the historical construction of identities.

The Invention of Indonesia

Indonesia is a twentieth-century invention. Its independent governments often spoke of their country as the inheritor of such ancient empires as Srivijaya and Majapahit, but evidence that the archipelago formed a pre-colonial political unity is slim to non-existent. The need to recall traditional glories was less grounded in accurate history than in the need of Indonesian nationalists to show ‘natives’ were as civilized as their Dutch colonizers. Edward Said calls this ‘reinscription,’ the emotional need to find pre-colonial traditions, ‘the rediscovery and repatriation of what has been suppressed in the natives’ past by the process of imperialism’ (Said, 1993: 210).

Indonesia was an anthropological term, rendered political starting in the 1920s by a nationalist movement that flowered in the Dutch East Indies in the early part of the century. The word’s importance lay in its use to describe a nation, rather than a collection of Dutch colonies that happened to be contiguous through the vagaries of imperialism’s division of the globe. The subversiveness of the word ‘Indonesia’ can be seen in the adamant refusal of the beleaguered Dutch government to employ it, as late as 1941.

Indonesian nationalist streams coalesced in 1928 with the ‘Youth Oath,’ which pledged support for ‘one country, Indonesia; one language, Indonesian; one people, the Indonesian people.’ It may also be worth noting that these new Indonesian nationalists did not hearken back to Majapahit, but were engaged in a self-conscious invention of something new. The fact that both Indonesian nationalism
and Indonesia itself were constructs does not, however, lessen the very real commitment to Indonesia as a focus of loyalty.

It only remained to define the bounds of this new nation. Jacques Bertrand has argued that the Indonesian ‘national model’ was developed during a series of ‘critical junctures’ beginning with the Indonesian revolution in 1945-49 (Bertrand, 2004). As part of the formation of this original national model, the territorial extent of Indonesia was defined. Two concepts contended, based respectively on cultural and political considerations. In 1945, the Preparatory Body for Indonesian Independence voted for a Greater Indonesia encompassing the entire Indonesian cultural area (including British Malaya and Borneo and Portuguese Timor as well as the Dutch East Indies). This concept, which can be described as ‘ethnic nationalism,’ had currency even outside Indonesia: Philippine President Diosdado Macapagal’s advocacy of ‘Maphilindo’ in 1963-5 was one echo. Within Indonesia, this vision stressed assimilation of minorities into a new Indonesian identity, which in practice often meant informal Javanese dominance. However, Indonesia ended up being defined according to the second vision, as the political successor state to the Dutch East Indies. The familiar schoolroom map of Indonesia became ‘a powerful emblem for the anti-colonial nationalisms being born’ (Anderson, 1991: 175). This is important because it also offered an alternative definition of who was Indonesian, based not on blood but on territory — in other words, a ‘civic nationalism.’ An Indonesian was not someone who was part of the Malay world, but an inhabitant of the territory bounded by Indonesia’s borders. The two visions would contend throughout Indonesia’s independent history, and their interplay did much to shape secessionist conflicts.

Indonesia has often been characterized as a ‘plural society’ in which different ethnic groups lived side by side, but had little interaction (Furnivall, 1939). David Brown calls the plural society
analysis an outgrowth of a primordialist view of ethnicity, one with strong implications for state strategies in encouraging an authoritarian state. He does not accept all aspects of the primordialist approach, but seeks to marry it to the situationalist alternative (ethnicity-as-construct) by focusing on the role of the state. Ethnic separation movements, in this conception, are defensive reactions to encroachments by the state, which seeks ‘increasingly systematic control over peripheral regions through the expansion of their administrative bureaucracies, their armies and their educational systems.’ Ethnic consciousness rises on the periphery in response (Brown, 1994: 1,5).

The plural society argument began with the colonial period. Where the pre-colonial pattern of the archipelago had been one of extensive trade and cultural mixing, the Dutch East India Company’s policy of monopolizing trade built new barriers between ethnic groups. In the past, it had been much easier to cross ethnic lines (conversion to Islam in Borneo, for instance, might make one into a Malay). Ethnic divisions were entrenched under Dutch divide-and-rule tactics and by Dutch preservationist rhetoric, which sought to codify indigenous traditions. The Dutch also employed ‘loyal minorities’ to keep down not only the Javanese, but also other peoples like the Minangkabau. Dutch employment of ‘loyal minorities’ differed from those of other colonizers in the region in a number of respects. Generally these were Christianized peoples like the Ambonese, set up over Muslim neighbours. In Java, however, the Javanese traditional rulers were brought in as partners, at first to rule their own people and later as a counterweight to Islamic modernism. It was far easier for a Javanese to advance in the Dutch East Indies than for a Burmese in British Burma; Javanese even outnumbered Ambonese in the Royal Netherlands Indies Army. The Dutch, having solidified ethnic categories, went on to argue that their rule was the only thing preventing inter-ethnic civil war in Indonesia.
Two patterns of ethnic tension were thus established: Christianized ‘loyal minorities’ against the rest, and Javanese elites (the priyayi) against the rest. The ‘loyal minorities’ scattered throughout the archipelago often resisted Indonesian nationalism. The priyayi, in contrast, saw themselves as leaders of the revolution, leading to tensions between the ethnic and civil nationalist visions. Both nationalist streams saw the need for integrationist nation-building strategies after independence. Where the two streams disagreed, however, conflict resulted, as in the 1958 PRRI uprising in which civic-nationalists in the Masyumi and Socialist parties made common cause with regional military commanders.

The centre responded in this case in a purely military fashion, moving swiftly to put down the rebellion. The PRRI was not an ethnic secessionist movement, but the ethnic-nationalists who held power interpreted it that way. Thus the result was a more repressive system by the centre. The main result of the regional rebellions was to change the way the state was organized (Kahin & Kahin, 1995: 217-20). Martial law was imposed in 1957, ‘guided democracy’ replaced the parliamentary system in 1959, and the army under Suharto seized power in 1965-6. Ethnic nationalists were now firmly in charge. With 45% of the population, the Javanese held 50% of leadership positions in the revolutionary period. This climbed to 66% by the ‘guided democracy’ period. The post-1965 ‘New Order’ regime took neo-patrimonialism to new heights. Ethnic tensions were handled through the choking off of public participation from about 1970 on, which included a ban on public discussion of ethnic, religious or racial disputes. Javanese dominance continued to escalate: Javanese officers went from 66% in 1965 to 80% in 1978 (Brown, 1994: 128-9). With Javanese ethnic nationalism dominant at the centre, it is hardly surprising that other forms of ethnic nationalism have risen in reaction in the periphery.
Under the New Order, the state responded to regional ethnic tensions by rejecting their validity. The form of that rejection varied. It is going much too far to suggest that ‘the Indonesian military has always treated the military option as a last resort,’ but there is some truth to the assertion ‘that “bargaining” and “coercion/violence” represent the extreme ends of a range of response alternatives [and] in practice all are used in different combinations’ (Kuntjoro-Jakti & Simatupang, 1987: 99). The military (almost invariably given the job of containing local conflicts) moves rapidly and easily from one type of action to another. One example is the use of ‘territorial’ troops assigned to do development work at the local level. Development projects aim to win the loyalty of villagers, but they also serve as a means of surveillance and control, deny village resources to dissident forces, and can rapidly shift over to combat operations (Amnesty International, 1993).

The persistence of resistance in Aceh

Aceh, located at the extreme northwestern tip of Sumatra, is well-known for its long history of devout Islam and resistance to outside rule. It was a flourishing Sultanate in pre-colonial days. An 1871 British-Dutch treaty consigned Aceh to the colonial sphere of influence of the Netherlands. The Dutch quickly moved to incorporate Aceh into their empire by force, since economic penetration was prevented by the entrenched position of American and British merchants (Reid, 1969). In the course of an unexpectedly long and bloody war, traditional leaders (ulebalang) were defeated, but resistance was carried on by religious leaders (ulama) who gave the war an increasingly Islamic character. Eventually, the Dutch turned to a strategy of allying with the ulebalang against the ulama. Large-scale resistance continued until 1913; many Acehnese say they were never conquered. The result was a strong anti-Dutch feeling and a reinforcement of existing Acehnese allegiance to Islam, with the ulebalang confirmed in their positions by the Dutch but stripped of their popular legitimacy.
Aceh fought fervently in the 1945-9 revolution. It was the only part of Indonesia not over-run by Dutch troops. During this period, ‘Acehnese leaders thought and acted in Acehnese, Islamic and Indonesian terms, with little awareness of the possibility — and certainly no sense of any inevitability — of conflicts among the three’ (Morris, 1985: 83). Leadership belonged to the All-Aceh Union of Ulama (PUSA) led by Daud Beureueh. As a province of the Republic, Aceh was exercised effective self-rule in wartime conditions. The paradox of the revolutionary period is that a strong Acehnese nationalism emerged under the leadership of PUSA, which declared Islam a fundamental tenet of what it was to be Acehnese. At the same time, there was an equally fervid commitment to the Indonesian national cause. ‘The loyalty of the public to the Republic of Indonesia is neither pretended nor fabricated but rather is honest and sincere loyalty which comes from pure heart-felt commitment as well as from firm calculations and considerations,’ Daud Beureueh declared. ‘The Acehnese people are convinced that separate independence, region by region, state by state, can never lead to enduring independence’ (Sjamsuddin, 1985: 99).

Problems were not long coming. They involved the alternative, non-Indonesian identities: Acehnese and Islamic. First, Jakarta revoked Aceh’s provincial status in 1951, adding it to North Sumatra, controlled by Christian Bataks in Medan. Second, government economic policies worked to Aceh’s disadvantage. Third, the centre failed to make what PUSA considered adequate steps towards the entrenchment of Islam, since in the view of civic nationalists like Hatta this might antagonize non-Muslim minorities. The government even intruded on local religious schools. Fourth, Aceh’s isolation from the rest of the archipelago ended, and the central government began to intrude its institutions. All this seemed like a betrayal of the revolution to PUSA. In 1953, then, Daud Beureueh launched a rebellion under the banner of the Darul Islam movement. This was not an attempt at secession, but rather a continued participation in the Indonesian national scene.
Jakarta’s response was not calculated to reduce tensions. Jakarta recognized that popular support lay with Daud Beureueh, so relied on repressive military force. Provocatively from the Acehnese perspective, if reasonably enough from the vantage point of Jakarta, the troops used were from North Sumatra (Ali Sastroamijoyo, 1979: 250). The invasion of Christian Batak soldiers is likely to have increased separatist sentiment still further. So too are violations of human rights by soldiers. In 1955 Daud Beureueh’s movement redefined the Islamic Republic of Indonesia as a federation, with Aceh a Constituent State. At the same time, however, Daud Beureueh saw his position as a national player within the Darul Islam, taking it upon himself to announce a new cabinet for the movement in which he was vice-president and Acehnese held five of 14 cabinet posts (Sjamsuddin, 1985: 201, 234-7). If this indicated some divergence from the Darul Islam centre, it was also evidence of continuing Acehnese loyalty to the idea of Indonesia. Daud Beureueh later signed Aceh up as one of ten constituent states in the federalist United Republic of Indonesia (Republik Persatuan Indonesia), an alliance with the PRRI remnants, including anti-Jakarta Batak and Minangkabau (Kahin & Kahin, 1995: 201).

The Acehnese revolt was settled by stages in which all of Daud Beureueh’s original regional demands were eventually met. As each concession was made, more of Daud Beureueh’s supporters ended their rebellion. So while he might have insisted on Indonesia-wide changes, the movement proved in the end to value Acehnese nationalism more highly. Aceh was granted its own military command, then provincial status. The new Acehnese military command renewed the informal barter trade. Finally came status as a ‘special region’ with the right to protect religious and cultural affairs, and finally, to entice Daud Beureueh out of the bush, Jakarta accepted Islamic law for Aceh in 1962.
The settlement was a victory for Acehnese sentiment, without any abdication of the idea of being Indonesian as well as Acehnese. Under the New Order, however, Aceh’s status as ‘special region’ was stripped of its meaning. Like all other provinces, Aceh’s governor and local administrators were appointed by Jakarta. Religious education of Acehnese children was disallowed. Jakarta prevented Aceh from implementing Islamic law as promised. The ulama, articulators of the Acehnese national identity, were displaced by ‘Acehnese technocrats whose positions in the government were based on receiving higher secular education’ (Morris, 1985: 1). The New Order’s national vision stressed economic development (pembangunan). Accordingly, the local technocrats assailed Aceh’s Islamic backwardness. At the same time, their poor relations with the ulama left them dependent, like Jakarta technocrats, on the New Order regime. The ulama were more and more alienated by the regime, which was moving against political Islam.

Paradoxically, this economic emphasis contributed to a resurgence of Acehnese nationalism. Massive resource development in Aceh, particularly of natural gas, has not delivered significant improvements in the local standard of living. In 1980, the province’s per capita income ranked fourth in the country, but its household income index stood 21st (Brown, 1994: 298). The New Order regime partly soared on the strength of foreign support, benefiting from an oil and gas boom drawn overwhelmingly from three provinces: East Kalimantan, Riau, and Aceh. Largely on the strength of Acehnese LNG, Indonesia became the world’s largest exporter (Kell, 1995: 14). Aceh’s LNG earnings were pegged at $1.2-billion (US) annually, with only 1.6% of that returned to the province (Kearney, 1999). Many saw this is ‘internal colonialism.’ With the alliance with Jakarta technocrats apparently reaping no benefits, the obvious alternative was a secessionist response. Aceh has also been subjected to an increasing influx of Javanese officials and economic migrants, a natural outgrowth of nation-building on the ethnic-nationalist assimilation strategy. Acehnese can clearly see the evidence of other ethnic groups coming into their land, getting rich, and
contributing nothing locally except pollution. It is perhaps not surprising that the great majority of guerrilla activity in the 1970s and again in the 1990s was in the northern coastal areas where uneven development was at its starkest.

This economic theme was strongly stressed by the Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM), headed by Hasan di Tiro, a former Darul Islam representative to the UN. Tiro declared the independence of ‘Acheh Sumatra’ on December 4, 1976, employing a heavy dose of nationalist and internal-colonial rhetoric:

We, the people of Acheh, Sumatra, exercising our right to self-determination, and protecting our historic right of eminent domain to our fatherland, do hereby declare ourselves free and independent from all political control of the foreign regime of Jakarta and the alien people of the island of Java.... During these last thirty years the people of Acheh, Sumatra have witnessed how our fatherland has been exploited and driven into ruinous conditions by the Javanese neo-colonialists: they have stolen our properties; they have robbed us from our livelihood; they have abused the education of our children; they have put our people in chains of tyranny, poverty and neglect (Tiro, 1976).

The GAM had moved several steps further than Daud Beureueh ever intended. Some of the 1950s rebel leaders, in fact, opposed it strongly (Saleh, 1992). It is for the first time an organization grounded squarely in Acehnese ethnic nationalism, with the old loyalty to Indonesia stripped away. In GAM rhetoric, Indonesia is derided as an artificial country that should never have come into existence. Tiro argued that the GAM had been successful despite military defeat in the 1970s, since it ‘has successfully revived Acehnese historic consciousness.... Politically we have won; the only thing that separates us from victory is the guns’ (Tiro, 1985: 5, 2).

The GAM returned in greater force in 1989, with some guerrillas having in the meantime undergone training in Libya. This time, according to the regional army commander, the GAM ‘had a concept, had guns, and on the ground had the masses’ (Kell, 1995: 66-7). The centre met this new uprising with ‘shock therapy’ led by KOPASSUS special forces, which included fence-of-legs counter-insurgency operations pioneered in East Timor, the display of corpses, mass killings of an
estimated 2,000 people and other atrocities. The counter-insurgency campaign was a military success, but a political defeat for the New Order regime. While it concentrated on a repressive military response, forces within Acehnese civil society were becoming increasingly disillusioned with the Indonesian state. Acehnese nationalism had grown massively as a defensive reaction to the ‘security approach’ of the Indonesian military. At the same time, the feeling of being Indonesian had declined. Acehnese people ‘had woven a hidden transcript of shared suffering, alienation from the Indonesian state, and anger at their treatment by the armed forces’ (Bertrand, 2004: 173-4). Nationalists were quick to seize the window of opportunity created with the fall of the New Order in 1998. A year later, one million people (a quarter of the provincial population) rallied in Banda Aceh demanding a referendum like the one promised in East Timor. It was a solid show of strength by a vibrant civil society sector that had grown up in the space between the Indonesian state and the GAM.

Acehnese civil society organizations were part of an international civil society of non-governmental organizations which played an active role in the attempt to resolve the Aceh conflict through dialogue. In May 2000, after talks mediated by the Swiss-based Henry Dunant Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, President Abdurrahman Wahid’s government signed a ‘humanitarian pause’ with GAM representatives. However, violence increased on both sides. President Megawati Sukanroputri’s government offered special autonomy, a larger share of natural resources income to the provincial government and local Islamic law. But both sides remained adamant on the demand for independence, which had become the psychological heart of the issue.

The basic conflict was that the Indonesian government was willing to concede autonomy, but wanted this to be the final solution. GAM would accept autonomy as an interim step, but clung to its demand for independence. In August 2002, Indonesia delivered an ultimatum, giving GAM six
months to give up their demand for independence or face a military solution imposed by force. But international pressure was able to achieve a new deal. Just before the two sides were scheduled to meet in Tokyo, a group of donor countries met and agreed to the aid that would be needed to finance any agreement. By the end of the year, Indonesian government and GAM reached a Cessation of Hostilities Agreement which took autonomy as the basis for reaching a settlement and promised a full dialogue and greater local share of resource wealth (Sastrohandoyo, 2003). But the basic disagreement, GAM’s demand for independence, remained. ‘I can not tolerate [separatism] any longer,’ Megawati said in May 2003 as she ordered the army into action. With 50,000 troops, this renewed war was Indonesia’s largest military operation since the invasion of East Timor. Within a month, an estimated 40,000 civilians were displaced and 342 civilians were confirmed dead by local human rights groups (KONTRAS, 2003; Asia Human Rights Commission, 2003). In effect, martial law meant a beefed-up army offensive, the removal of international aid workers in favour of agencies of the Indonesian government (a party to the conflict), a crackdown on peaceful dissent, and the political screening of all civil servants leading to replacement of ‘unreliable’ officials, in many cases by retired army officers. The offer of special autonomy was undercut by a return to the Suharto-era security approach likely to increase Acehnese resentments and thus prove counter-productive.

**Becoming Papuan: Insurgency and Clashing Nationalisms**

Papua is separated from the Indonesian mainstream by cleavages of race and religion. However, this alone does not make it certain to separate, since much of eastern Indonesia is at least partly Melanesian and Christian. The cleavages have become salient under additional challenge from Indonesian nationalism, in the form of demographic pressures, economic exploitation, human rights abuses and a clash of historical narratives.
The case of Papua has quite a different history from that of Aceh. Dutch New Guinea was neglected, used by the colonial government mainly as a prison camp for Indonesian nationalists. The interment of many leaders there gave Papua (and its swampy southeastern corner around Merauke in particular) a central place in the nationalist imagination. Nationalists strenuously objected to Dutch moves to exclude the territory from independent Indonesia. When the Netherlands finally agreed to Indonesian independence in 1949, it decided to leave Papua out of the transfer of sovereignty. In this way, the Dutch kept a toehold in the Asia/Pacific area and a glimmer of their colonial mission (Lijpardt, 1966). There was also the promise of oil and minerals.

This problem of delayed decolonization ruined hopes for the Dutch-Indonesian postwar cooperation. No stream of Indonesian nationalism could accept the continued existence of Dutch colonialism in the archipelago. Allowing Papua to choose its future would even threaten the fabric of the existing state. ‘The application of the Netherlands’ concept of self-determination with regard to West Irian,’ foreign minister Subandrio told the UN, ‘would mean in fact that we should also accept the same concept with regard to the other islands or regions of Indonesia and consequently accept the disintegration of the Indonesian National State’ (Osborne, 1985: 21). As efforts at the UN failed, Indonesia prepared for war, which furthered the militarization of the whole country. Sukarno’s Indonesia followed a policy of brinkmanship, which eventually forced American intervention in the interests of maintaining regional stability, and a 1962 agreement for a phased hand-over of Papua to Indonesia. The agreement provided for an ‘act of free choice’ after a period of Indonesian rule in which the inhabitants would be given the chance to express their opinion, but this was primarily an attempt to save Dutch face. This omission would not have mattered if the Papuans had been Indonesia’s ‘brothers and sisters,’ as argued by Jakarta, or if they had been
passive stone age tribes, the apparent view in Washington. However, the years leading up to 1962 had seen the emergence of a distinctive and relatively new Papuan identity.

Papuan nationalism has been traced back to the Koreri movement, a millenarian group that fought Japanese invaders and invented the Morning Star flag that has become the central symbol of Papuan nationalism. Political parties quickly began to be formed in Papua — some accepting Dutch and others Indonesian patronage, but all of them essentially elite assertions of Papuan identity. In 1961, a National Committee was formed by Papuan elites, who echoed the Indonesian Youth Oath in a declaration of their new nation. They agreed on a new name, West Papua; a national flag; and a national anthem. In retrospect, the date the Papuan flag first flew has been asserted as Papuan independence day. On the eve of the transfer to UN control, three-quarters of the bureaucracy was Papuan (Robie, 1989: 59). Dutch policies had done much to foster Papuan nationalism, along remarkably similar lines to the earlier emergence of Indonesian nationalism. On the other hand, the emerging elites displayed a strong sentiment against becoming part of Indonesia, with most preferring a period of Dutch rule followed by independence, perhaps in federation with Australian New Guinea.

Papuan elites responded to Indonesian take-over by accepting it but demanding their national symbols (the flag and anthem) be respected and the promised plebiscite held in 1963 (Osborne, 1985: 31; Savage, 1978: 984). Indonesian officials showed striking insensitivity towards a people they believed themselves to be liberating from colonial rule. On the day after receiving the transfer of sovereignty, Indonesia’s culture minister presided over a bonfire of Papuan flags, schoolbooks, and cultural items (Anti-Slavery Society, 1990: 31). This sort of behaviour, combined with the immediate abolition of Papuan political institutions and parties and the imposition of ‘guided democracy,’ can only be viewed as the attempt to pursue assimilationist nationalism. It is hardly
surprising that under this type of repression (and associated human rights violations) Papuan nationalism soared. Forces contributing to early identity formation under Dutch rule accelerated under Indonesian rule, spurred by Indonesian officials’ refusal to view the Papuans as equals.

As a result, even pro-Indonesian Papuans became opponents. They included the first Indonesian-appointed governor, Eliezer Bonay, who was quickly disillusioned by the Indonesian presence: ‘as soon as the Indonesians arrived in our country, totally unexpected things began to happen. There were numerous brutalities, thefts, torture, maltreatment, many things that had not happened before.... When the Indonesians came, they took literally everything’ (Budiardjo & Liem, 1988: 17). In 1965, the Organisasi Papua Merdeka (OPM, Free Papua Movement) was established. When the ‘act of free choice’ was finally held in 1969, it became clear that no vote against Indonesia would be tolerated (Saltford, 2002). Allegedly the Papuans were not educated enough to be permitted a direct vote, but had to take part in a ‘traditional’ musyawarah (consultation, traditional in Java and hence in all Indonesia under the assimilationist national vision). The unanimous vote of delegates for Indonesia was considered to instantly have made all Papuans full Indonesians, however. Thus a direct vote could be held in the 1971 national elections.

The ‘act of free choice,’ by extinguishing dreams of independence and increasing Indonesian penetration to the village level, paradoxically solidified Papuan nationalism. During the consultation stage, the tribes of the Wissel Lakes region rose up in a new type of rebellion. Through perceived repression and denial of indigenous rights, Jakarta was stimulating the creation of a defensive Papuan nationalism that cut across ethnic lines. Elite national consciousness, bit by bit, was transformed into mass national consciousness.
The next step was a declaration of independence ‘from Numbay [Jayapura] to Merauke’ by OPM leader Seth Rumkorem (Rumkorem, 1971). Repeated clashes have taken place ever since, with each act of violence by the armed forces seemingly increasing Papuan resentment. The OPM used both traditional religious custom and Christianity as mobilizing factors. It was able to sustain guerrilla resistance thanks to a high degree of popular support, favourable jungle terrain, and the availability of sympathetic refuges across the border in Papua New Guinea.

Indonesian intrusion has come mainly in the form of natural resource exploitation and migration. Both intrusions into what had become seen as the Papuan homeland stimulated resentment. Mineral development is led by Freeport’s giant copper and gold development in the south central mountains, Indonesia’s largest taxpayer (Leith, 2003). Forestry is another area of rapid encroachment, especially as more accessible forests in Sumatra and Kalimantan are devoured. This is especially threatening to people like the Asmat of the Merauke area, whose livelihood is based on sago trees as a source of food and carvings from ironwood trees. Papua is one of the main export-generating provinces of Indonesia; however, like Aceh, few benefits can be seen flowing to the people.

Papua is a major destination for the transmigration program. This program’s targets, although rarely met, are seen to threaten the survival of the Papuan peoples. Governor Isaac Hindom predicted in 1984 that Papuans would soon look no different from Indonesian ‘straight hairs’ and said there was room for 12 million transmigrants (Osborne, 1985: 140). Actual numbers fell far short of the ambitious targets, but the key point here is the Papuan perception of transmigration as a programme designed to swamp them. Numerically, the greater demographic threat is spontaneous migration from Sulawesi, Maluku and Java into urban areas, where non-Papuan migrants fill the much-resented economic niche occupied by ethnic Chinese in Java. There are an
estimated one million migrants and 1.6-million indigenous Papuans in the province, with the major
towns already showing a migrant majority (Bertrand, 2004: 152; Defert, 1992: 331-55). Even
apparently well-meaning Indonesian development programs have caused problems through their
perceived lack of sensitivity to Papuan culture. Papuan culture has been at the heart of the current
generation of elite resistance.

Integration in Indonesia, it seems, has done little to substitute pan-Indonesian for Papuan
sentiment; quite the reverse, in fact. The feeling of being Indonesian, never strong in Papua to
begin with, has been eroded and a much stronger Papuan identity formed through a shared memory
of suffering (Sekretariat Keadilan dan Perdamian, 1999-2003). After the fall of Suharto, 100
Papuan leaders from provincial and district administrations told Indonesian President B.J. Habibie
that the unanimous demand of Papuans was for independence (Mote, 2001). In 2000, two national
congresses in Jayapura formed the Presidium Dewan Papua (Papuan Council Presidium), the
largest expression of civil society demands for independence to date.

President Wahid pursued a conciliatory agenda, allowing the nationalist congresses to go ahead,
restoring the name Papua in place of Irian Jaya, and agreeing to consider special autonomy. There
was a division among Papuans between those who supported this path of ‘two-flags’ nationalism
and the supporters of independence under ‘one flag.’ Although special autonomy is officially in
effect, it has not met the aspirations of either stream of Papuan opinion. Following the brief
‘Jayapura spring,’ Jakarta took a harder line against Papuan nationalism. The Papuan flag, allowed
briefly, was banned once again. PDP leader Theys Eluay, was killed in 2002 by Indonesian
security forces.
The Timor Effect

Indonesia’s invasion of East Timor in 1975 can be seen as the apotheosis of the ethnic-nationalist vision of a Greater Indonesia. Although the 1945 constitution explicitly defined the country as excluding East Timor, the Suharto regime decided nevertheless to invade days after the tiny state declared its independence. The result was a bloodbath that also dealt a body blow to Indonesian international aspirations for more than 20 years. Ali Alatas famously described East Timor as ‘gravel in our shoes,’ which made it difficult for Jakarta to pursue the rest of its foreign policy.

East Timorese nationalism was already strong in 1975. It was given further strength by the visible intrusions of the Indonesian state, the repressive security approach, and even by Indonesian development programmes designed to win the hearts and minds of the younger generation. Jakarta pursued colonial policies in East Timor which had many similarities to those followed by the Dutch in their East Indies colony earlier in the century, with much the same result: an even more nationalist-minded younger generation (Pinto & Jardine, 1997; Taylor, 1999).

After the fall of Suharto, incoming President Habibie decided that the shoes should be removed and the gravel shaken out. A once-and-for-all decision was needed: would East Timor become Indonesian, or have its independence restored? Thus Habibie allowed a referendum that voted for independence, and afterwards accepted UN peacekeepers rather than allow his army to derail the vote. His policy required a psychological paradigm shift in a country where the dominant historical narrative insisted, in defiance of the facts, that Indonesia had acted to liberate its East Timorese ‘brothers and sisters’ and was now delivering only good things. As the President said: ‘For a long time, consciously or not, we have offered to the nation a version of reality that was not truly being experienced’ (Habibie, 1999).
East Timor’s independence did offer the chance for Indonesia to move ahead, free of the burden of this intractable problem. Yet it also served as a demonstration effect to other regions, especially Aceh and Papua. If there is one lesson from East Timor, however, it is that no amount of harsh repressive action can defeat a nationalist movement; rather, the security approach only stimulates further nationalism.

**Autonomy and history**

A number of regions including Riau, the South Moluccas, Sulawesi and Bali have seen secessionist musings since the fall of the Suharto, many with long-standing traditions going back to Dutch colonial times. Regionalist sentiment has been expressed, without the threat of secession, in North Sumatra, Lampung, West Kalimantan, and East Nusa Tenggara. Yet none seems likely to leave Indonesia. Under democratic governments, the centre has rebuilt its lost legitimacy by re-inventing the system in a manner that allows both public participation and greater autonomy for the regions.

Special autonomy packages for Aceh and Papua, however, have not had the same success. As in East Timor, identity formation in these two territories had passed a point of no return: not yet nation-states, they felt themselves to be ‘notion-states.’ The offer of special autonomy for East Timor was dismissed as ‘too little, too late.’ The same was true in Papua and Aceh, especially when the choice was posed as the O option (otonomi) versus the M option (merdeka, or freedom). Problems converting the offer of special autonomy into acceptable specifics raised the suspicions of Jakarta already prevalent in the two outlying regions. The stress laid in autonomy offers on Islamic law for Aceh, a demand made by very few Acehnese groups, added to the feeling that
Jakarta was simply not listening to Acehnese aspirations (Aguswandi, 2005). Similarly, Jakarta’s refusal to accept a full dialogue with Papuan nationalists strengthened Papuan perceptions of alienation.

The deadlock in Aceh was broken by a natural disaster. The devastating earthquake and tsunami which struck the province in December 2004, and its aftermath, claimed more than 131,000 lives. Foreign aid donors clearly accepted Indonesian sovereignty, thereby stepping up the pressure on GAM to reach an agreement, but there were also persistent allegation that the Indonesian army was using aid as a weapon in its counter-insurgency war. The pressure on both sides encouraged new negotiations.

A series of meetings in Helsinki saw the Indonesian government and GAM reach a compromise agreement which formally went into effect in August 2005, just in time for Indonesia’s sixtieth anniversary. GAM surrendered its demand for independence and accepted Jakarta’s offer of special autonomy, in exchange for the right to become a political party free to contest elections. Since the central government had long refused to permit regionally-based political parties for fear they could disrupt national unity, that marked a concession by the government of newly-elected President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. So did the centre’s agreement to a 300-strong team of international observers from Europe and Southeast Asia. Disarmament provisions called for GAM to surrender its weapons and for Jakarta to withdraw 50,000 troops (Memorandum of Understanding, 2005). While welcoming the agreement, Acehnese NGOs called for an enhanced role for civil society. Some observers worried that this deal, like others before, would be blocked in Jakarta. Still, by transforming a war for the separation of Aceh into a political conflict to be fought at the ballot box, the agreement raised hope that special autonomy laws and dialogue might hold the key to peace in Aceh and also in Papua.
The journey up until then of the special autonomy law for Papua provides a case of hope turning into disillusion. A widespread consultation among Papuans formulated a proposed autonomy law presented to the Indonesian parliament with the explanation that it represented the minimum demands of Papuan society. However, a number of modifications were made in Jakarta that weakened the law (Sekretariat Keadilan dan Perdamaian, 2001). The original package aimed to meet popular aspirations by developing mechanisms for genuine local control in place of authority wielded by the military, as well as a larger local share of natural resource earnings. It called for an upper house of the provincial parliament composed of traditional leaders, civil society organizations and women (Majelis Rakyat Papua, MRP), for the recognition of symbols of collective identity like the banned Papuan flag and anthem, and for a dialogue on the Papuan integration into Indonesia that could potentially lead to independence in the future, if it was determined that the integration process had not allowed a proper act of self-determination under international law.

Once this draft reached Jakarta, the economic clauses were broadly accepted with the offer of 70-80% of resource earnings being returned to the province, but the more symbolic dimensions were watered down. In other words, the issue was considered as one of unequal development, which has been an irritant to Papuans but not the principal cause of rising Papuan nationalism. The other changes were all aimed at making a weaker special autonomy law into a ‘final solution,’ the opposite of what many Papuan nationalists had hoped for. For instance, special autonomy was granted only ‘within the context of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia,’ the flag and anthem were permitted only as ‘cultural symbols’ subordinate to the Indonesian national flag and anthem, the police remained under national rather than provincial authority, and continued
transmigration was permitted with the approval of the Governor, rather than halted entirely as demanded in the original draft.

Three changes were especially important. First, the power to designate administrative units within Papua was transferred from the provincial level to Jakarta. As a result, the centre has sliced off a piece of Papua to form a new province of questionable legality called West Irian Jaya. Second, the MRP was changed from an upper house into a consultative body, with its exact authority unclear, weakening the role envisioned for local traditional leaders and civil society. Third, the new autonomy law deleted the independent commission to look into the history of Papua’s integration, substituting a truth and reconciliation commission empowered to ‘provide clarification of Papua’s history in order to strengthen the people’s unity in the State of the Republic of Indonesia.’ The decision to deploy additional troops early in 2005 seemed to signal a more repressive approach, and reports continued of human rights violations by the Indonesian army and police.

The lack of progress on the autonomy law brought between 10,000 and 15,000 protesters into the streets in August 2005 under the banner of the Dewan Adat Papua (Papuan customary council), which symbolically ‘returned’ the autonomy law to the central government. Calling Jakarta’s plans for the MRP inadequate, the protesters alleged corruption on the use of regional funds and called for a comprehensive review of the special autonomy law and a dialogue on making Papua into a ‘land of peace.’ Prominent among the demands was a call for ‘a clarification of the history of West Papua so as to ensure that Papuan people no longer fall victim [to] human rights abuses simply because their understanding of history differs from that of the government’ (Dewan Adat Papua, 2005).
The OPM has already renounced the use of force in its campaign for Papuan independence, so the Papua situation lacks the military aspect of Aceh. There is no evidence, however, that independence demands are any less in Papua than in Aceh. Indeed, the secretary of the Dewan Adat Papua made an explicit comparison between central government policies in Papua and what they were in East Timor, raising the spectre of the same sort of international trouble for Jakarta. ‘The government has to respond seriously,’ he said, ‘otherwise Papua will remain a pebble in the shoe of the Indonesian government in international forums.’ The only answer, he argued, was a dialogue along the lines of the one that finally reached a peace deal for Aceh (Somba, 2005).

So far, the demand for a dialogue has been ignored. The centre has ignored the vital role played by historical perceptions in both Papua and Aceh. Acehnese nationalists make continual references to the glorious past of the Sultanate of Aceh and their fierce resistance to Dutch colonial rule, and use this history to bolster their future-oriented claim to an independent state. Papuan nationalists lack a pre-colonial state to reckon back to, but they recall the foundational moments of Papuan collective identity in the 1960s, even celebrating the date the Papuan flag was first flown as their independence day. ‘The people of Papua are already sovereign as a people and as a nation, and have been since December 1, 1961,’ the Papuan Congress declared in 2000 (Webster, 2001-2).

The official version of the integration of Papua has shown a remarkable consistency over the years. It asserts that Papua was wrongly split from Indonesia, then regained by the united action of all Indonesians, with the re-union confirmed in the ‘act of free choice.’ In opposition to this historical narrative a Papuan nationalist version of the same story has developed which sees Papua as robbed of its right to self-determination. A major demand of Papuan nationalists has been the ‘rectification’ of the historical record (*pelurusan sejarah*). Clashing historical narratives continue to fuel the conflict.
Conclusion

It has been argued here that regional nationalism has risen to a large extent because of repression by the Indonesian centre, delivered through the armed forces. It is no coincidence that secessionist sentiment under the New Order was strongest in the three ‘special military operations zones’ -- East Timor, Aceh and Papua. The return to a military approach in Aceh did not end resentment of the centre, it only added to resentment. Control-based solutions (Lustick, 1979) have failed. It seems that a lasting solution to the problem of Indonesian national unity will have to include more generous policies by the centre, including in particular the demilitarization of society. More than that, it is likely to require a re-imagination of the nation, and a dialogue between people in Aceh and Papua on the one hand, and the rest of Indonesia on the other. That dialogue would require also that the official narrative of Indonesian history make room for Acehnese and Papuan historical narratives that have developed since 1945. Attempting to preserve elements of the New Order will do nothing but exacerbate tensions. As one human rights activist says, the ideals of the 75-year old Youth Oath are no longer enough. ‘We need a new glue to hold our nation together’ (Widjojanto, 1999).

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1 The slogan is used repeatedly in nationalist documents and speeches, most notably by President Sukarno. Some publications even feature maps of Indonesia with only two place names marked: Sabang and Merauke.

2 Papua is the current official name of the territory known successively as Netherlands New Guinea, West New Guinea, West Irian and Irian Jaya and often called West Papua (and occasionally West Melanesia) by indigenous nationalists and their supporters. The name Papua will be used throughout for consistency.

3 US government documents on Indonesia make this very clear. Some of the documents are printed in Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, vol. 23.

4 The human rights group KONTRAS Aceh, for instance, documented more than 100 cases of human rights abuse by the army from January to May 2005 and highlighted a series of problems with aid distribution. Evi Zain, ‘Post-Tsunami Human Rights Concerns in Aceh,’ presentation to Canadian Parliamentary Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, 9 June 2005.

5 The essential arguments are identical in early government documents such as West Irian and the World (1954) and recent ones such as The Restoration of Irian Jaya into the Republic of Indonesia (2001).
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