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CHRISTIAN MISSION IN AN ISLAMIC ENVIRONMENT
Religious conversion in North Sulawesi in the light of a case-study from Bolaang Mongondow*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Successful missionary activities naturally attract more attention and tend to be better documented than unsuccessful ones. In this article, however, I shall focus on a Christian mission project which had only rather limited success in converting the indigenous population in a mainly Islamic environment. I pose the question how the story of this endeavor relates to stories of conversion to Islam in that region and to Christianity in a neighbouring region, because a comparision of these cases can help us to better understand processes of religious change in general. I will give an account of the activities of the Protestant Dutch missionary society (NZG) in Bolaang Mongondow regency in North Sulawesi and describe the different stances local people and colonial administrators took towards the mission throughout time. A discussion of the processes of religious conversion to Islam in Bolaang Mongondow and to Christianity in Minahasa during the nineteenth century and of the quite different results of NZG activities in both regions will show how the local population not only responded to outside influences but actively took part in the process of shaping a new understanding of ethnic and religious communities in the political arena of the Dutch colonial state.

The response of a nobleman from Bolaang Mongondow to the Minahasan companion of two missionaries who wanted to establish mission posts and schools in Bolaang Mongondow in 1876 directs our attention to some of the essential determinants that influenced decisions about religious conversion, namely formal education, group identity and power relationships:

> So what benefit do you and your children get from all those schools and education? Did you folks learn the power to oppose the Dutch Government? [...] If one learned to oppose the Dutch Government through this, I would quite like to have schools [here].[1]

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1 Schwarz and de Lange (1876:175; all translations of quotations S.K.): 'Maar wat voor nut trekt gij-

The irony is that when these schools where finally established some thirty years later, rather than being highly effective means of Christian proselytization they actually soon became a breeding-ground for indigenous resistance to colonial rule in the area. But before turning to these final episodes in the history of Christian missionary activity in Bolaang Mongondow, I shall start by discussing the political implications of this project from its very beginnings. In this paper I shall argue that, for both the Dutch authorities and their Mongondow counterparts, religious affiliation cannot be separated from the political aspects of identity and power relationships. Moreover the Mongondownese case shows that the latter two aspects were clearly noticed as such by the indigenous population at the time and that people consciously manipulated these aspects on occasion.

2. *The local setting*

The province of North Sulawesi is well known as one of the pockets of a Christian majority population in Indonesia, the ethnic groups of Minahasa and Sangir-Talaud in the respective regencies mainly being Christians. However, the third regency comprising the province, Bolaang Mongondow, has a mainly Islamic population. The overall religious composition of 74 percent Muslims, 23 percent Christians and 2.4 percent Hindus roughly mirrors the religious diversity of Indonesia as a whole.

Bolaang Mongondow and Minahasa, the two regencies discussed in this paper, seem to be a perfect pair of opposites, not only in terms of religion, but also because of stereotypical identifications of Bolaang Mongondow with a strictly hierarchical social system versus the Minahasan egalitarian tradition, and the former region's late exposure to colonialism in contrast to very early colonial rule in the latter region. Unlike Minahasa which came under direct Dutch control as early as 1679 and was well connected to trade and transport routes as a producer of goods for the market (rice and wood in the eighteenth century; mainly coffee in the nineteenth century) Bolaang Mongondow remained a semi-autonomous kingdom, marginal not only because it was an economic backwater but also because of its geographical remoteness and inaccessibility.

Nevertheless the first contacts between European Christians and Bolaang Mongondownese date back to the seventeenth century, when North Sulawesi was a stepping stone on the trade route to the Moluccas. Both the Spanish and the Dutch regarded the conversion of indigenous rulers to Catholicism or Protestantism respectively as

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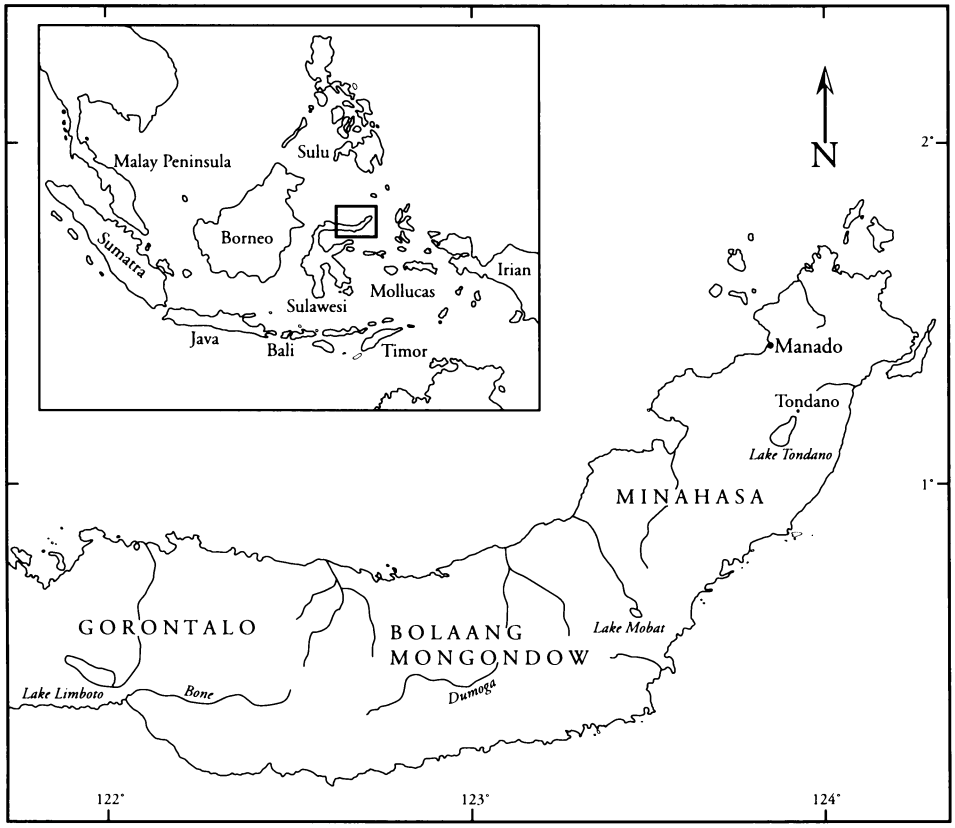
lieden en uwe kinderen van die menigte scholen en van al dat onderwijs? Hebt gijlieden door al dat onderwijs nu de magt geleerd om het Nederlandsche Gouvernement [Kaparentahan Wolanda] te bestrijden? [...] Als men daardoor leert, hoe het Nederlandsche Gouvernement te bestrijden, dan zou ik wel scholen willen hebben'.



Bolaang Mongondow and North Sulawesi in Insular Southeast Asia (map: G. Hampel).

part and parcel of political alliances. At that time the Dutch therefore took more care to prevent possible allies from converting to Catholicism than to spread their own faith to the 'heathens' of the hinterlands, who were insignificant as either economic or military partners. The indigenous rulers easily accepted this eclectic, power-oriented approach to religion. As Mieke Schouten (1998) has demonstrated for Minahasa, the traditional local religion was very much concerned with the achievement of power and prosperity, which were regarded as the visible manifestations of divine blessing. Thus, from an indigenous point of view, the powerful Europeans seemed to represent the effectiveness of their religion, and there was no problem in 'betting on two horses' and acknowledging a world religion besides traditional beliefs. In 1677 Raja (Malay: 'king', 'ruler') Binangkal of Kaudipan (nowadays 'Kaidipan'), a petty kingdom on the northern coast of Bolaang Mongondow, so welcomed the military interference of the Governor of the Moluccas, Padtbrugge, in North Sulawesian affairs, that he promised to convert to Christianity together with all his subjects,

> saying that he as well as his people already were Christians, because they were now already eating pork; [those] good people thought this was enough already, but the Governor and the hon. preacher Caheyng explained it to them differently in greater detail (Padtbrugge 1867:123).

Describing the rivalry between the Dutch and the Spanish for indigenous converts, or allies, Padtbrugge (1867:123) adds, '[t]he Spaniards' idolatrous superstition would not listen that carefully, and that is why they [the local people] run over to them more easily'.[2]

It seems that the Dutch proselytization efforts declined in accordance with the waning of the Spanish presence in the region. Sporadic missionary efforts occurred throughout the eighteenth century, mostly in coastal areas of North Sulawesi, but with minimal success. For the common people the word of the Raja remained decisive; when various travellers in the nineteenth century asked people in Mongondow whether they wanted to have schools and missionaries the answer was almost always that it was up to the Raja, or that the Raja alone is mighty (Schwarz and de Lange 1876:174, Wilken and Schwarz 1867a:14).

3. *Common themes*

The mid-nineteenth century forms a crucial watershed in the history of the spread of world religions in North Sulawesi. There is a remarkable coincidence concerning when religious conversion was launched in both Minahasa and Bolaang Mongondow. In the 1830s the NZG decided to focus on the Minahasa as its main mission, sending on the evangelists Riedel and Schwarz, who were to begin the extraordinarily successful religious conversion of almost the entire Minahasa region. In a period of fifty years until 1880, three-quarters of the Minahasans were to embrace the Christian religion (Müller-Krüger 1968:108).

In Bolaang Mongondow, all the kings had been Christians, at least nominally, since the end of the seventeenth century. When the single Christian schoolteacher in Bolaang died in 1831, the only focus for the congregation was lost. The Raja and the local leaders did not want a replacement, not the least, probably, because they were mostly only Christians in name who clung to this label only 'out of fear of the Government, which was initially thought to demand the Christian faith'.[3] But by then

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2 '[...] zeggende nu reeds met alle de zijnen genoegzaam Christenen te zijn, alzoo zij nu nal varkens aten; vermeende die goede lieden, dat zulks al genoeg was, doch onderrigtte den Gouverneur en de Eerw. predikant Caheyng hun anders en nader. [...] De Castiliaansche beelden en diensvolgens afgodendienst luisterde zoo naauw niet, en daarom liepen zij er te ligter over [...]'.

3 Uit vrees voor het Gouvernement, dat men in het eerst meende, dat het de christelijke godsdienst verlangde [...]' (Anonymus 1881:82).

Islamic teachings had become known through Muslim traders from South Sulawesi and Gorontalo.

At least among the elite, Islam was not a stranger when in 1844 the Raja officially asked the Dutch Resident in Manado to give him and his subjects permission to convert to Islam.[4] Reportedly the answer was that the Resident had no objection at all so long as the people, whether Christian or Muslim, remained obedient to the government. Two decades later, the source of this information, the missionaries Wilken and Schwarz, criticized the Resident for this decision, seeing it not only as a missed opportunity, but also blaming the Raja for abusing the permission granted to him:

> On returning to B[olaang]. the Raja publicly converted to Islam and [also] ordered his subjects to become Muslims in the name of, and by command of, the [colonial] government. Many submitted to this command; those who were reluctant had to leave B[olaang].[5]

In fact, the whole episode over the closure of the school and the conversion of the Raja sparked some polemics between missionary circles and colonial bureaucrats. Colonial officials sharply rejected accusations that the Christian mission in Bolaang Mongondow had failed in the nineteenth century and had to give way to Islam because of the government's neglect. Instead, they argued, it was already a lost case anyway, and the government had neither the power nor the obligation to impose the conditions necessary for the Christian religion and European missionaries to win a stable foothold in these lands (Anonymus 1881). These contrasting perceptions highlight the inner tensions in the Dutch empire. As Cooper and Stoler (1997:6) remind us, '[c]olonial regimes were neither monolithic nor omnipotent. Closer investigation reveals competing agendas for using power, competing strategies for maintaining control, and doubts about the legitimacy of the venture'.

Over time, different sets of administrators in the colonies and at home, as well as other groups with a stake in the colonies like entrepreneurs and missionaries, had come to hold widely differing views about the nature of the colonial project and the content and the extent of their civilizing mission. In spite of all these differences, one common aspect shines through concerning the role of religion: obviously, for all sides involved – the colonial government, the Mongondownese Raja, the missionaries and certainly also the common people in Bolaang Mongondow – there was no doubt at all that religious conversion was, at least partially, a political act that involved a choice in making one's allegiance to a wider group, in which one also had to consider the ruling powers.

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4 Wilken and Schwarz (1867b:44). However according to Anonymus (1881:83) this happened in 1848.

5 'Te B. teruggekeerd, trad de Radja openlijk tot den Islam over, en beval zijnen onderdanen in naam en op last van het Gouvernement mohammedaansch te worden. Aan dit bevel voldeden velen; de ongehoorzamen moesten B. verlaten' (Wilken and Schwarz 1867b:44).

Before going into more detail as to who or what these powers were in the case of Bolaang Mongondow, I would first like to note the remarkable fact that Islam in Bolaang Mongondow and Christianity in Minahasa initially took firm roots at roughly the same time, in spite of quite considerable historical differences in their exposure and contacts to adherents of these two religions respectively. More generally the historian Anthony Reid (1993:153) remarks that 'it is surprising that Southeast Asianists have not attempted to analyse Islamisation and Christianisation as part of a similar process'.[6]

In the case of the Minahasa, while the missionaries themselves often credited rapid conversion to the presence of the Holy Spirit (e.g. Linemann 1859), more recent authors attributed it solely to colonial activities aimed at destroying the fundamentals of the local religion, such as feasts of merit, head-hunting etc., leaving conversion as 'the only way out' (Buchholt 1994, Tauchmann 1968). The possibility of viewing conversion as reflecting some crisis in the indigenous religion was raised early in the writings of missionaries and colonial officers, who painted a stereotypical picture of deceitful and tyrannical indigenous religious leaders abusing simple-minded peasants who should be freed and protected from their influence (Gunning 1924, Wenzel 1872). Their motives for these all too extremely prejudiced views were obvious enough.

Unfortunately these stereotypes seem to have discredited all attempts to explain conversion by scrutinizing factors within Minahasan society itself. Given especially the fact that during the nineteenth century a majority of Mongondownese converted to a world religion (Islam), although there were no institutions equivalent to the Christian missionaries and direct colonial rule in Minahasa which were capable of exerting any pressure, we should generally credit the local people with a more active role in bringing about religious change. In order to fulfil Reid's call for a more comprehensive view of religious conversion, it might be helpful to draw on the theory of the anthropologist Robin Horton (1971, 1975) and the critical response to it by, among others, Fisher (1973) and Ifeka-Moller (1974), which is known among Africanists as the 'conversion debate'. Echoing in part Max Weber's idea of the 'rationalization' of religious doctrine as the major characteristic and intellectual appeal of scriptural 'world religions', Horton argues that Islam and Christianity are mainly concerned with explaining the world at large, that is, providing coherent and systemized answers to problems of meaning. Traditional religions, by contrast, are seen to be relatively more concerned with prediction and control of a more locally circumscribed environment, such as dealing with ancestors and local spirits in order to cure illness, ensure fertility and so on. Horton stresses that traditional religions are not less rational than world religions, just narrower in focus, because traditional societies lived in smaller, more territorially restricted areas. In the light of the dramatic changes that many traditional societies

6 Recently the literature on conversion to world religions in Indonesia has increased, part of it also addressing comparative perspectives (Aragon 2000, Hefner 1993, Hoskins 1987, Kipp 1995, Schrauwers 1995).

have gone through in the wake of colonialism, he suggests that African religions would necessarily have shifted attention from the microcosm to the macrocosm, even without the direct influence of Islam or Christianity.[7] Although Horton has been criticized for overemphasizing the isolation of traditional societies and for not giving credit to the specific characteristics of Islam and Christianity and their particular force, his ideas are to be welcomed for attributing an active role the converts and for pointing out that world religions are influenced by the local cosmologies they encounter, rather than depicting converts merely as passive 'victims' (Hefner 1993).

Given that, in theory, the choice between Christianity or Islam was an open one for the Mongondownese, it is not sufficient to invoke a historical situation conductive to religious conversion and to point to the 'competitive advantage' of scriptural religions that provided ready-formulated answers to the challenges posed by rapid change. We have to go a step further and ask what this choice meant for the would-be converts in order to understand why Christianity was so successful in the Minahasa and among Minahasans residing in Bolaang Mongondow but not so among the Mongondownese for whom by and large Islam was more attractive. The most convincing answer lies in I.M. Lewis' insight (1980:viii) that world religions provide 'an identity as well as a religious faith'. Similarly, Robert Hefner (1993:17) points out that 'deeply systematic reorganizations of personal meanings' are less crucial for religious conversion than a re-orientation of one's self-identification, since world religions provide their adherents with a reference group and a feeling of belonging to cope with the problems of asserting one's dignity and position in a plural world. Conversion, says Hefner (1993:17), 'implies the acceptance of a new locus of self-definition, a new, though not necessarily exclusive, reference point for one's identity'.

The case of Mongondow described below shows that such considerations of identity and political affiliation are more than just anthropologists' ex-post facto explanations. The actions and statements of different groups prove that all the parties involved, not the least the people of Mongondow themselves, were clearly aware of the multi-layered meanings of conversion.

To add an identity perspective to the discussion of conversion does not diminish the importance of Horton's point about the contributory effects of a situation of overall change and crisis to religious conversion. On the contrary, the readiness of the people to re-orient themselves fundamentally to a new group of reference and to new values in the face of crisis is one element in the complex set of mutually enhancing factors contributing to religious change. In Asia as in Africa, Islam and Christianity became attractive to people who were experiencing a crisis of meaning due to the changes brought about by increasing intensities of communication between distant

7 Geertz (1973) discusses religious rationalization not only in relation to conversion to world religions but also as a process that happens within religions. Like Horton he stresses that 'the process of religious rationalization seems everywhere to have been provoked by a thorough shaking of the foundations of social order' (Geertz 1973:173).

cultures, colonialism and integration into the world-market, all of which drew the focus away from the local microcosm to a macrocosm that demanded new answers to new questions.

Likewise one can see that the eighteenth and especially the nineteenth centuries brought dramatic changes to North Sulawesi, like the long-term establishment of new powers, the monetarization and commercialisation of agriculture and a need to explain the differences between religions and between peoples. Seen in the light of newly emerging demands for religions to position their adherents in relation to a wider macrocosm, the missionary Ulfers (1859) might have been close to the truth when he wrote about Mongondow in the year 1851: 'If these people had received a missionary 12 to 15 years ago, they would now a l l be Christians, but instead h a l f [of them] have become Muslims'. Ulfers goes on to explain why the Raja had chosen to convert, suggesting that purely nominal adherence to Christianity in an isolated location far away from any functioning congregation did not provide him with a group to identify with or to be identified with, nor did he feel himself ready to enter into disputes over religion with Muslim preachers who had come to spread their faith in Bolaang Mongondow. Finally he had had enough of being the object of ridicule, 'because he stood almost alone, and also knew nothing about Christianity'.[8]

Wider circles of Mongondownese must also have felt the necessity for a fundamental choice to be made, as expressed in the words of leading nobles (*rijksgrooten*) in Bolaang to the Minahasan teacher Rintjap in 1875. The nobles rejected the idea of having a Christian mission in Bolaang Mongondow, saying that the people were already Muslims. This was the colonial government's own fault, they said, because in 1830–1840 there had been Christians and a school in Bolaang, but that these were then neglected by the colonial government:

> So the school and the congregation were left on their own without a leader. [...] When they saw that there were no more leaders coming to them and that they had no more religion, they said to each other, it is better for us to embrace Islam, so that our souls shall not be blown away by the wind one day, because we have no more religion. This is how it happened, that from about the year 48 up until today the Mongondownese started to embrace Islam. That is why we blame the Government for it.[9]

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8 Ulfers (1859:22; original emphasis): 'Had dat volk voor 12 à 15 jaren een' zendeling gekregen, dan waren nu a l l e n Christenen, terwijl thans de h e l f t Mohammedanen zijn geworden'; '[...] omdat hij bijna alléén stond, en ook niets van het Christendom wist'.

9 'Djadi, skola dan Djamaät, sudah tertinggal bagitu lama dengan tijada saorang penghentar. [...] Dan sedang marika itu lihat, bahuwa tijada lagi saorang penghentar datang padanja, dan tijada lagi barang agama padanja, maka marika itu sudah berbitjara sama-sama, jang lebeh baik kami masok djuga agama Islam. Sopaja djangan kami ampunja djiwa akan diterbangkan oleh angin kamudijen hari, karna tijada lagi berpunja agama. Demikijen djadi, sakira-kira tahon 48 orang Mongondou sudah mulai masok agama Islam sampej sekarang. Tagal itu kami kaseh salah itu pada Guvernement' (Rinjtap 1878:290f.) Of course, this statement was also partly tactical. As already noted, the Raja did

The form and content of this argument already testify to the capacity of the world religions to alter radically indigenous social and cosmological frameworks. Moreover, the quotation also hints at the possibility that, even before conversion took place, the encounter with the mission introduced new ways of thinking and talking about religion (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991).

4. *Changing strategies*

In view of this background, the NZG's calls to open up Bolaang Mongondow to missionary activity always had a strong ring of urgency to regain lost grounds in competition with Islam. In the eyes of the colonial authorities, however, this made the whole project precarious from the start. It seemed too risky to support Christian missionaries if this was not explicitly welcomed by the indigenous ruler. The prospect of having Europeans stationed in the isolated hinterlands of Mongondow, which was only ruled indirectly, aroused fears that in case of conflict the colonial government might have to intervene with military means, thus spending large amounts of money on an area which brought no financial profits. The tensions between the missionaries and the colonial authorities caused by their widely differing agendas can best be shown by describing the successive efforts of the NZG to obtain permission for proselytization, because their changing strategies reflect the missionaries' self-image as well as their responses to the image of the colonial government as they perceived it.

The first move towards setting up a mission in Bolaang Mongondow was made in the 1850s by the missionary Ulfers, who worked in southern Minahasa on the border with Mongondow. When he first asked permission from Resident Jansen to go into the area, he gave only religious reasons in support of his request, which was rejected: he was told that he would have to wait until there was a Controleur in Bolaang Mongondow (Ulfers 1859). Nonetheless Ulfers started to collect money for Bolaang Mongondow from among the Minahasan Christians in his own congregation (Neurdenburg 1882:359), probably because he expected that colonial expansion was on the agenda anyway, given that Resident Jansen was the first official to visit Mongondow in 1857.

In 1867, the NZG started a second initiative, this time also including economic considerations in their request. The missionaries Wilken and Schwarz had travelled to Bolaang Mongondow and then proposed a thoroughly worked out plan to start proselytization there. Any mission in that area would simply be an extension of the mission in Minahasa and would be as fruitful. They reminded the government of the 12.5 mil-

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not want a replacement for the teacher. However, at least we learn that the argument that they had no more religion was a plausible reason in the view of the local people.

lion guilders it had earned in 1865 alone from Minahasan coffee exports and pointed out how economic success and loyalty to the government went together with 'civilization' in the sense of the Christian faith, moral standards and education (Wilken and Schwarz 1867b:42). Even though the Resident 'advised against' starting a mission in Bolaang Mongondow after discussing the matter with the Raja, the NZG board members did not give up their plans due to their conviction that a mission was not like a business venture: 'the spreading the kingdom of God may not be abandoned because of authorities forbidding it', and they fell back on the clause that 'advising against is not [the same as] forbidding'.[10] Their hopes rested on a statement made by the minister for the colonies, who said that the NZG could learn from the Roman Catholics, this being interpreted as a reference to the financial backing of missionary projects. The NZG remained optimistic and in 1868 published a booklet written by Herman de Ridder with a title that can be translated as 'Forty thousand souls: a supplication to Netherland's sons and daughters', to raise funds for Bolaang Mongondow. In that year alone more than 20 000 guilders were collected specifically for spreading the gospel in Mongondow.

A common point of agreement between the government and the missionaries was an acknowledgement of the success of the Christian mission in neighbouring Minahasa, where the spread of the Christian faith, the establishment of schools and the integration of local agriculture into the world market had gone hand in hand. Mostly through forced coffee-cultivation, the Minahasa had turned into one of the few constantly profitable regions in the colony. The great number of relatively well-educated Minahasans who served as soldiers in the colonial army, as clerks, teachers or overseers in European plantations and business enterprises throughout the archipelago, led to a situation in which the Minahasa, besides being a source of financial profit, became a strong pillar of colonial rule in general.

This political aspect would become increasingly important in the years that followed, but it was already expressed by Ulfers, who saw the civilizing mission as being connected with stability: 'Civilization and edification without CHRIST makes contempt and arrogant, and thus becomes a weapon for the Indian, which he will as soon as possible use against he who gave it to him'.[11] In his view, the mission should be seen as constantly expanding from Minahasa to Bolaang Mongondow to the rest of Celebes and all over the Dutch East Indies.[12]

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10 '[...] maar de uitbreiding van het koningrijk Gods mag niet worden prijs gegeven, omdat overheden het verbieden [...] Ontraden is geen verbieden' (Anonymus 1874:134).

11 Ulfers (1868:25, original capitals): 'Eene beschaving en verlichting zonder CHRISTUS maakt opgeblazen en hoogmoedig, en wordt dus voor den Indiër en zwaard, dat hij zoo spoedig mogelijk keert tegen hem, die het gaf'.

12 'Spoedig zal dat zelfde begin ook reeds gezien worden in Mongondou, en zoo zal het voortgaan over gansch Celebes en door geheel Indië [...]' (Ulfers 1868:23, original emphasis).

Consecration of the church in Poopo on the 17 December 1917 (Anonymus 1919:115).

Already in 1868, with the start of the war in Aceh, the wider political context of the Dutch East Indies could be felt in North Sulawesi. When the Raja of Bolaang Mongondow came for his annual visit to Manado, Schwarz asked again to accept the establishment of mission schools. However, the time for negotiation was not good and the Raja, supposedly awaiting further developments in Aceh, felt strong enough to put the NZG off (Anonymus 1874:135). In 1874 when the crisis in Aceh had turned into outright war with the Dutch being defeated for the first time (Ricklefs 1993:144), another such meeting was held. Now not only did Schwarz not get what he wanted, but even the Resident was affronted by the Raja, who left Manado without signing the renewed contract with the government (Neurdenburg 1882:380).

Given what was said earlier about the inter-relatedness of religious affiliation and power relationships in earlier times and the appeal of world religions, which were often associated with the power and wealth of their most prominent adherents, we should

also note that conversely the prestige of a religion may also suffer from a reduction in the perceived power of its representatives. The rise of security considerations in Dutch views of missions paralleled the increasingly self-assertive stand of the Muslim rulers against colonial interference. Religion proved to be a way of articulating difference, and by identifying with Islam the indigenous people found a way of rejecting Dutch dominance without rejecting the powerful ideas of supra-ethnic identification and formal knowledge.[13]

While travelling overland to Mongondow in 1875, the missionaries Schwarz and de Lange were asked revealing questions by village heads, such as whether the Acehnese used European or indigenous weapons, how mighty Turkey was and the size of Napoleon's army, as well as whether the king of the Netherlands actually went to Church (Schwarz and de Lange 1876:164, 168). The Dutch authorities in Manado started to fear for the security even of Christian Minahasa and Manado if the signs of unrest in the Islamic regions of North Sulawesi – which had been stimulated by Islamic preachers, who mostly came from outside the Residentie Menado – were to turn into outright unrest (Anonymus 1876:142). These outsiders had brought information which made it clear to the Mongondownese that the Dutch were not invincible. Although the government was now generally more positive towards missions and the campaigners were using security related arguments in their writings (Ulfers 1868:26, Neurdenburg 1882:369), regarding starting missionary activities in Bolaang Mongondow, the Resident of Manado decided 'that the establishment of a Christian mission in a kingdom where the king wants the people to be Muslims, will only bring quarrels and differences'.[14]

At the beginning of the 1880s, when the former Raja was imprisoned and replaced by a rival, a third attempt was made by the NZG to obtain permission to work in Bolaang Mongondow. Once more their hopes proved fruitless, and finally, in 1893, the NZG used the funds it had collected for the mission at Poso in Central Sulawesi (Schuller tot Peursum 1904:180).

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13 Although Islamic preachers in Bolaang Mongondow mostly originated from either South Sulawesi or Gorontalo, neither group played a prominent role in the emerging Islamic consciousness. To the Mongondownese leaders Gorontalo did not look like an attractive example to follow, since, because of colonial interference, the Raja had not been replaced since 1864, leading eventually to the introduction of direct colonial rule in 1889 (Haga 1931:194f.). The Bugis were viewed with even more suspicion; the Mongondownese elites were certainly well aware of conditions in nearby Buol, where the Raja had completely lost his influence over some areas to Bugis religious leaders (Anonymus 1876:142).

14 'dat de vestiging van Zendelingen in een rijk, waar de Radja de bevolking mohammedaansch wenscht te zien, slechts twist en oneenigheid zou ten gevolge hebben' (Neurdenburg 1882:373).

5. *The mission starts*

Eventually the Christian mission in Mongondow was established together with the introduction of colonial administration for Bolaang Mongondow. In 1901 a Dutch Controleur was posted to the Mongondownese highlands. This decision, although formally introduced on the grounds of the political turmoil in the area and of a move to depose the Raja, was inspired by the colonial government's economic considerations. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, European investors had become interested in Bolaang Mongondow as a promising region for gold-mining and coconut and coffee plantations. Vast, thinly populated inland areas with an amiable climate seemed to make this region fit for European settlers to establish small- to medium-scale plantations (Pekelharing 1921).

In order to install an efficient administration and infrastructure, educated indigenous leaders and a workforce with at least basic education became necessary. Unlike the government, the NZG missionaries from Minahasa could provide the resources and manpower to establish a network of elementary schools in a short time and for lower costs, and the missionaries were more than willing to step into the gap. They made an agreement with the newly installed Raja and the Controleur, which reserved to them the exclusive right to organize formal education. It was agreed that no government schools would be opened in Bolaang Mongondow as long as the mission fulfilled its promise sufficiently (MvO van Geuns 1906:44, ARA: Min. van Kol.).

The missionary W. Dunnebier with his wife and daughter (Anonymus 1919:116).

The missionary W. Dunnebier came to Mongondow in 1905, opening no less than fourteen village schools there during 1906 (Dunnebier 1907:10). The teachers were all Minahasa Christians educated by the mission. They were also supposed to become the leaders of local Christian congregations under Dunnebier's supervision. The mission aspect of the schools was most successful in villages with an ethnic Minahasa population, such as Poopo and Mariri, or the remote village of Dumoga, where Islam did not yet have firm roots. Having been treated unfavourably for decades by the local authorities, the Minahasa settlers in Bolaang Mongondow found that Christianity provided the opportunity to assert their distinctiveness in positive terms, since through conversion they forged a new bond with their homeland, claiming an equally high status in the colonial hierarchy to their ethnic compatriots in Minahasa and probably hoping to be favoured by the newly arrived Dutch overlords.

The religiously mixed village of Pangian was an exception in that the village head and his family had already converted, and the conditions for a permanent Christian congregation in an otherwise Islamic environment were also favourable because the village of Poopo in the vicinity provided a source of Christian marriage partners. Elsewhere too there were converts, but they had to face intimidation from their local leaders, who also understood religious affiliation as a sign of political loyalties. In the words of the second village head of Otam to a convert, 'How dare you become Christian, although you never asked for advice from me, a chief of this village?' He then went on to warn the man not to trust the Dutch: 'They are not yet asking for anything, but afterwards they will make themselves the masters of all of your possessions. I know it because I have been long in Menado'.[15]

In order to discourage people from associating with the new powers, those who wanted to convert were warned that the Turks would soon replace the Dutch colonial masters, and then Christians would have to pay higher taxes (Dunnebier 1911:122). The prospect of Christian converts obtaining better positions and higher pay as, for example, teachers in the mission schools might have pragmatically influenced individual decisions,[16] but this also created some alienation from the mission among the Muslims (Lantong 1995:38).

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15 'Hoe komen jelui er toe Christen te durven worden, terwijl jelui niet eens opheldering hebt verzocht aan mij, een hoofd van het dorp? [...] nu vragen zij nog niets, maar naderhand maken zij zich van al jelui bezittingen meester. Ik weet het, want ik ben lang in Menado geweest' (Dunnebier 1911:119).

16 For similar examples among the Karo Batak, see Kipp (1995), who also points out that 'NZG missionaries did not try to incite conversion as a dramatic, emotional transformation of the person. Rather, they sought a formal commitment of aspirant Christians' (1995:870).

6. *Religion and political factions*

The Dutch hoped more or less openly that if the Raja became a Christian (or a Christian became Raja), this would be a breakthrough for Christianity and for smooth colonial government. For the time being, however, the Raja was regarded as 'the head of the Muslim community' (van der Endt 1914:4). After returning from a visit to Java in 1907, he had become a stauncher Muslim than before and increasingly critical of the NZG-mission (Dunnebier 1908:144). The preachers therefore looked out for other influential allies.

The missionaries in Minahasa had used the so-called *murid-stelsel* or pupil-system to recruit their foremost helpers. Young children of either sex, some from prominent families, some poor, were taken into the households of Dutch dignitaries, where they had to help with the household chores and experienced an European way of life and education. There had also been Mongondownese children in Dutch households in the Minahasa. The missionary Ulfers (1959) writes about a Mongondownese boy who lived in his house in the mid-nineteenth century. When he already knew how to read and write, he ran away back to his homeland. He had stolen a bible, but Ulfers soon forgave him when he learned that the young man later became the private teacher and scribe of the Mongondownese Raja, teaching the royal family to read and write by reading the bible to them.

At the beginning of the colonial era high hopes rested on Abraham Patra Mokoginta, a member of the high nobility and a possible candidate for the throne, who had finished the *hoofden-school* (school for the sons of indigenous chiefs) in Tondano and during that time was staying in a Dutch household. He was said to have converted to Christianity and to have been baptized in Manado by J.A.Th. Krol before returning to Bolaang Mongondow (de Vries 1905:41). He is usually referred to as the 'most civilized' man in Mongondow at that time (Dunnebier 1907:21). From 1903, when he was eighteen, until 1907, he was the district chief (*penghulu*) of Kotabunan. The Resident of Manado described him as follows: '[He] is still young and full of "feu sacre"; sometimes too zealous. [He] can be trusted completely, but [is] a bit choleric by character, but not prone to beating [people]'.[17]

From 1907 to 1909 Mokoginta studied at the agricultural school in Bogor and then returned as agricultural adviser (*mantri cultures*) to Bolaang Mongondow, until in 1911 he became Jogugu, a sort of first minister to the Raja. However, he turned out to be anything but easy to deal with for the missionaries and colonial officers. When Dunnebier published a report on the progress of missionisation in the Dutch mission journal 'Mededeelingen vanwege het Nederlandsche Zendingsgenootschap' in 1915, indirectly criticizing the indigenous rulers and officials for intimidating those who

17 'Is nog jong en vol "feu sacre"; by wylen to voortvarend. Is volkomen te vertrouwen, doch wat cholerisch van aard, zonder echter tot slaan over te gaan' (van Geuns 1906:51).

Abraham Patra Mokoginta, the Jogugu (first minister) of Bolaang Mongondow (Spectator 1921:24).

wanted to convert to Christianity and 'heathens' who refused to become Muslims, this did not go unnoticed in Bolaang Mongondow. There are good reasons to suppose that it was a direct rebuke by Mokoginta which pressed him to renounce his views officially in the same journal a year later (Dunnebier 1915, 1916).

The role played by Mokoginta and his changing fortunes exemplify many of the ambiguities in the relationship between the Mongondownese people and the Christian mission, which at all stages were just part of a much more complex set of power struggles between the different factions among the Mongondownese and the Dutch. Some Controleurs cooperated closely with Jogugu Mokoginta because he seemed more energetic and able to organize than Raja Datoe Cornelis Manoppo, slowly working to undermine the Raja's position and entangling themselves in an escalating contest for power between the respective supporters of Manoppo and Mokoginta. In this conflict there were no longer any pro-Christian or pro-Muslim sides especially since Mokoginta was now professing Islam again. Instead, the conflict was intrinsically more local in character, though fought out using accusations with a religious ring to them. The association mentioned above of the Christian religion with European and Minahasan out-

siders made Islam a rallying point for an emerging ethnic identity and for the voicing of discontent with colonial policies.

In controversies over compensation for land being used by a European gold mining company, the treatment of compulsory labour workers and schools, both the Jogugu and the Raja tried to channel the ordinary people's sentiments against outsiders into support for themselves, alarming the colonial authorities by doing so. *Vis-à-vis* the colonial government, the Raja and Jogugu blamed each other for having incited protests against the gold mine, while both tried to style themselves as champions of the people's interests against European enterprises and against the mission. They were often able to play on the disparities between European office-holders. The conflict escalated when information was leaked to the Resident (presumably by members of the Jogugu faction) claiming that the Raja had threatened to abandon the Dutch flag in a meeting with local chiefs if the mining question was not resolved, and to have repeated his demand for the establishment of government schools alongside the mission schools (Kroon 1916). Although the Raja was reprimanded by the Resident, he was not replaced. Instead it was decided to strengthen his position to avoid his feeling of being pushed aside by the Jogugu leading to even more opposition to the government. In 1916, the missionaries Dunnebier and van der Endt, who deeply distrusted Mokoginta, thinking that he was working against the mission and private investors, convinced the Controleur and the Resident to turn the joguguship from being a sort of 'Prime Minister' in the Raja's executive into the position of a simple District Chief.

Mokoginta reacted calmly and patiently, gathering his forces before eventually striking back. He had retained his title and salary, but was no longer authorized to act as Jogugu. Only when his hopes of winning back his former influence under a new Controleur failed did he make a move to fight for his position by directing accusations at the Raja and the Controleur. At this point, Ulfers' warning of fifty years earlier, that civilization might become a weapon against those who brought it, thus came true in a way. Mokoginta, a fluent Dutch speaker, well versed in the conventions of colonial administration and well connected with acquaintances in Java, sent a letter of complaint to a high-ranking government official in Batavia. In his letters to the Adviseur Inlandsch Volksonderwijs, Ziesel, he protested against his removal, blaming popular protests against the policies and the inefficiency of the local government on his lack of former mediation, and linking his treatment to his role in exposing the Controleur's abuses of power and corruption among the Raja's relatives (Mokoginta 1919). Mutual accusations of this kind had been around for years, but now they acquired a new dimension. Eloquently arguing his case he succeeded in so far that a commission led by Ziesel was sent from Batavia to examine the whole affair (Logeman 1922:144).

Ziesel's report in favour of Mokoginta led to a decision to reinstall him as Jogugu. Controleur van Prehn, who was criticized for his aggressive measures against the Sarekat Islam, an Islamic political organization which was causing the government more and more headaches, and for his maltreatment of local workers was replaced

when he returned on leave to Europe. Even the Resident of Manado received an official reprimand because he had failed to exercise strict control over successive Controleurs in Bolaang Mongondow.

Mokoginta's victory was not absolute, since the affair had also highlighted his own involvement in fraudulent practices, as well as accusations that he was a member of Sarekat Islam, which had started to open Islamic schools competing with the NZG schools. This seemed to make the establishment of government schools – a neutral choice, as it were – an increasingly pressing issue, though a highly threatening one for the NZG. The colonial government eventually realized that the mission could not win this competition in the long run in a mainly Muslim society, but they felt bound by the initial agreement between Raja Manoppo and the NZG. A later Resident wrote:

> The [...] reported competition between the mission schools and P.S.I.I. schools still goes on. Since the population is mostly Muslim, this struggle will doubtless be won by the P.S.I.I. schools. The local government strongly disapproves of this, not because of any particular liking for the mission, but because the P.S.I.I. is showing an inclination to challenge the *adat* (Malay: 'indigenous law', 'customs') rule of the indigenous governor [the Raja] and his officials.[18]

Once again, the internal power struggle between the respective supporters of Manoppo and Mokoginta proved to be entangled with the clash of interests between the mission and Islamic groups. It is therefore not surprising to find that the missionary Dunnebier tried to intervene when Mokoginta's pretensions to the throne became pressing. Whereas Mokoginta had used the 'weapons' appropriate to the mechanisms of the bureaucratic colonial state, making use of legal regulations and procedures, in which he was aided by his fluency in Dutch and his experiences of administration, as one of his main opponents Dunnebier opted to rely on more traditional, indigenous forms. He invoked the authority of the Mongondownese *adat*, explaining to the Dutch administrators that according to *adat* a potential candidate for the position of Raja should never have been made Jogugu, and lining up with local experts who testified that it was against *adat* for the Jogugu to become Raja.[19]

Mokoginta could no longer hope for much support in his bid for the throne, even

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18 'De [...] vermelde concurrentie-strijd tusschen Zendingsscholen en P.S.I.I. scholen duurt nog altijd voort. Aangezien de bevolking overwegend Mohammedaansch is, zal deze strijd zonder twijfel door de P.S.I.I scholen worden gewonnen. Het zelfbestuur ziet dit zeer ongaarne, niet vanwege zijn groote liefde voor de Zending, maar omdat de P.S.I.I. weleens neiging vertoont om het adatgezag van den Zelfbestuurder en zijn ambtenaaren te negeeren' (Stuurman 1936:103f.). PSII is the acronym for 'Partai Sarekat Islam Indonesia', the successor of the Sarekat Islam.

19 See 'Nota van verdediging [...]' by the Controleur van Prehn (1923). In the same text van Prehn refers to the conflict between Dunnebier and Mokoginta over the former's negative statements in Mededeelingen vanwege het Nederlandsche Zendeling-genootschap in 1915 quoting Mokoginta: 'Ik ben niet antie-Zending vanwege het geschryf van den Heer Dunnebier indertyd in de mededeelingen van het Genootschap, alhoewel ik niet ontken dat het myn niet pro-Zendingsonderwys verhoogde'.

though he denied any involvement in Sarekat Islam.[20] In spite of Mokoginta's official reinstallation as Jogugu, the Governor General and the First Government Secretary in Batavia started to doubt the impartiality of Ziesel's report and the wisdom of their earlier measures (Schippers 1921); for the time being it seemed essential to prevent any more commotion. The colonial administrators felt Mokoginta had to be accommodated to some degree, as the Directeur Binnenlandsch Bestuur Carpentier Alting had put it earlier: 'I actually fear that if the Jogugu is not summoned [to be heard in the case], he could forget himself and as a matter of course become a revolutionary element'.[21] In 1925 Mokoginta was transferred to undergo training in the *ontvoogding* programme at the administrative school (Bestuursschool) in Batavia, where future indigenous administrators were being trained to replace the Dutch Controleurs some day. Afterwards the Raja and the missionaries found themselves unlikely allies in their efforts to contain the influence of Sarekat Islam (now PSII), which was threatening both their positions.

Soon after World War II Indonesian nationalism, intertwined with and bolstered by political Islam, not only brought Dutch colonialism to an end, but in 1950 the Raja of Bolaang Mongondow was pressed to step down by nationalist youth and Islamic political organisations. Although the ongoing reformulation of group identities once set in motion by the colonial encounter and the competition between religions did not replace identification with religious reference groups, it did create an idea of the nation which included Muslims and Christians alike.

7. *Conclusion*

I started with the question of how the story of the mostly unsuccessful Christian mission in Bolaang Mongondow relates to stories of conversion to Islam in Bolaang Mongondow and to Christianity in Minahasa, and what these three cases combined can tell us about processes of religious conversion in general. The comparison of Bolaang Mongondow with Minahasa supports Horton's argument about the importance of historical changes that are brought about by incorporation into a plural world. But it also made it clear that interpretations, like those referring to the spread of Christianity in Minahasa, which understand religious change as a mere reaction to outside pressures are insufficient. Instead converts must be credited with a more active role in participating in, interpreting and re-shaping existing power relationships.

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20 Resident Logeman stated in 1921 that he did not doubt that such contacts had existed, but he felt that further action was unnecessary since Mokoginta had distanced himself from Sarekat Islam realizing that its influence was on the wane in Bolaang Mongondow (Logeman 1921). A curriculum vitae written by Mokoginta's secretary S.A. Sugeha (1984:118) also claims that he had at least close contacts with Sarekat Islam leaders at that time.

21 'Ik vrees wel dat, als de Djogoegoe niet wordt opgeroepen, hij zich zal vergeten en allicht een revolutionnair element worden' (Carpentier Alting 1919).

During the nineteenth century, when the appeal of world religions to the Mongondow lay primarily in their capacity to offer systemized world views, Christianity failed to provide a reference group because, unlike in Minahasa, there were no representatives of that faith to act as a focus for orientation. This changed with the introduction of direct colonial administration and the establishment of mission schools in the twentieth century. For some Mongondownese, like Mokoginta, at first assimilation to European models (including the Christian religion) was an attractive option. However, whether intentional or not, the creation of administrative unity through the *onderafdeeling* (sub-regency) Bolaang Mongondow led to a reinforcement and reformulation of an ethnic identity that was being expressed more and more assertively by local elites. The same processes that had already started in the neighbouring regions of Minahasa and Gorontalo went very much along the lines of the development of 'imagined communities' described elsewhere by Benedict Anderson (1991). Islam proved to be an effective means for local elites to rally support, as demonstrated by the conflict between the Raja and the Jogugu, which left Christianity with the stigma of being the religion of the outsiders. This need not have remained the case, since religious affiliation was contested as such; religion is not only a matter of responding to and positioning oneself in power relations, but (among other things) also of the empowerment of individuals and groups.

Hefner's reference group theory has proved to be a useful approach in understanding religious change in relation to political and cultural processes. At least in Bolaang Mongondow and Minahasa, the particular inherent characteristics of Islam or Christianity seem to have had little influence on the acceptance of either religion, especially since purification of doctrine happened much later than conversion. What was more salient in the cases discussed above is how local people were deeply affected by their discourses with colonial and missionary personnel and by the civilizing mission, even when they rejected their messages.

The mutually responsive images and interests of the missionaries, the Mongondow people and the colonial authorities in relation to each other are illuminated by the changing strategies of the NZG in Bolaang Mongondow and by the equally varied positions of Mongondownese leaders and colonial officials towards the Christian mission. Stressing these interdependencies requires attention being paid to rifts in European conceptions of the civilizing mission and of the colonial enterprise in general. Individual indigenous strategies to cope with and influence the transformation of the indigenous social world were no less manifold, sometimes contradictory, but in any case connected with a particular historical juncture. General theories of conversion have proved to be an especially powerful tool in comparing histories of religious conversion in order to scrutinize the unique conditions of particular places at a particular time. However, only regionally specific histories of social and cultural transformations allow us to account adequately for individual agency in bringing about change.

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