

# Eastern Indonesia: Transport and Social Relation that Stretch Across Space

**Catharina Purwani Williams**  
(Australian National University)

## Introduction

Ambon is in state of simmering civil war. The latest outbreak...left dozens dead. Hundreds died in earlier fighting between Christian and Muslim...Many thousands of refugees, mostly Muslim, have fled the conflict for South Sulawesi (van Klinken, 1999).

The eastern part of Indonesia is viewed as a difficult region and lags in development relative to the rest of the country<sup>1</sup>. The perception of a difficult region result from complex processes. One way to understand attributes of a region is by understanding the social relation it internalises<sup>2</sup>. How does a subjection<sup>3</sup> as 'difficult' occur and how does it affect the people in the region? The recent conflict in Ambon and Halmahera in the eastern region are indication of an increasing tension within and across regions. Deterioration

<sup>1</sup> The 1990 presidential budget speech for example expressed publicly this view and the resulting priority of developing the eastern region (Chauvel 1996: 61).

<sup>2</sup> See (Harvey 1996: 51-3) for dialectical way of thinking about space and place.

<sup>3</sup> By subjection here I mean the way the region is treated as a subject.

in social relation threatens integration.

National intergration is a multidimensional and dynamic concept involving many interacting elements. Drake (1989) contends that common historical experience, shared socio-cultural attributes, regional economic interdependence, and interaction among diverse peoples are cohesive forces that bind the communication existence of the nation state (Drake 1989:2). How are social relation so crucial in maintaining integration in Indonesia?

I argue that social relation or interaction are paramount to maintain the bonds between people in the archipelago. The everyday life of face-to-face interaction, namely direct personal communication of people among various spaces, is a basis for building an understanding of each other's differences. This personal interaction interrelates with a complex macro interaction, such as between the state and the region, determining the cohesive force of integration. Transport and communications are the means for interactions.

Transport links are crucial in both interaction as it many "shrink" space. However it may also stretch and change the relative location of places in the archipelago. I first explore transport as the link that enables interaction. Secondly, I canvass spatial discourses of the region as one way to examine the state and the region interaction. What is crucial however is not simply the interaction, but more significantly the practice of governmentality<sup>4</sup>. The focus is on an interpretation of boundaries, vocabularies, and inscriptions<sup>5</sup>. An example of rhetoric showing a system of judgement used for the eastern provinces will be given. Concluding remarks challenge a possibility of the emergence of new regional subjectivity in Eastern Indonesia.

## Eastern Indonesia: transport and social relation

When the Muslims of Ambon and Christians of Halmahera fled, they went mostly by sea to South Sulawesi and North Sulawesi respectively, as amplified by the recent flows of refugees. Sea transport in this region has long been established and so there has been a close interaction between these two pairs of communities. Although I will not discuss further this particular incident in the paper, I take this specific example to show that travellers or refugees are affected not only by the common cultural bond, but also by the availability of spatial links or transport routes.

The idea of providing transport to connect various people

<sup>4</sup> Gibson (1999) following Foucault and drawing from Miller (1990: 2) suggest that governmentality is a way of governing or 'mentality' formed by a combination of "institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of government.

<sup>5</sup> I derive from Gibson (1999) method.

<sup>6</sup> Based on the direct air connection, it was interesting to see that a pattern of a 'belt' enclosing the archipelagic area emerges. The pattern reflects a strategic spatial policy to control all the regions

of different spaces in the country to minimise social exclusion has been the Indonesia government's strategy (Departemen Perhubungan 1996). The persistence of subsistence farming with very little external trade in areas of East Nusa Tenggara in Eastern Indonesia suggests however, that there is still a 'disconnected places' mean economic and social exclusions from the rest of the country (Meegan 1995: 90). Behind the government's aim to minimise the exclusion is a major objective of preserving national unity, which is the underlying motive of the state's exercising control over the region .

Giddens' work is illuminating in seeking to understand social relations that stretch over space. Social life can be viewed as made up of two main types of interactions. The first interaction consist of face to face contacts in daily activities. The second type of interaction is more 'remote', permitting people to interact across space and time and described by Giddens as time-space distanciation. His conceptualisation of 'presence and absence' is useful to understand social interaction. The physical presence of others at a locality is consequential to the conduct of social life and the implementation of institutional activities (Giddens 1985). In this way the state and the region are able to come into contact with one another and become interdependent. And assert influence across space, without it being present in the places. Transport and communications are means in conducting the interactions.

The Indonesian government is aware of the role of transport for connecting people, which is reflected by increased transport links in the past two decades. The share of transport sector to the total Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This also translates to the increasing transport infrastructure in terms of air and sea transport capacity and road capacity, including road vehicle fleets (Hill 1996:4). Comparison of the total number of road vehicle fleets in 1976 and in 1995 shows a more than six-fold increase over two decades. Between 1991 and 1995, the annual average rates of growth of motor cycle and passenger cars are 10 percent and 9 percent respectively. For the same period, the number of buses increased by 15 percent and trucks by 6 percent on average annually. These transport indicators tell us that there has been more movement of people with the resulting interaction among places.

Domestic air transportation in particular has increased steadily, as shown by the number of air passengers<sup>7</sup>. Distance between islands seems 'shorter'. In others words, the amount of time required for travel, such as from Jakarta or Surabaya to the main destination around Indonesia has significantly decreased. It is much 'smaller' place than a few

decades ago. Relatively speaking the place is 'shrinking'<sup>8</sup>. In 1996 (before the crisis) not only had Jakarta 27 direct connections with other cities across the countries, but Jayapura, Nabire, Surabaya, Depansar, Makassar, Ambon, Kupang, Balikpapan, Batam and Medan had between 10 and 20 direct connections with other cities in Indonesia<sup>9</sup>. Similarly, in road and ferry transport improvements, Sumatra, Java, Bali and Lombok have well connected road and ferry transport. Nevertheless, the Eastern Indonesia region has not enjoyed similar increased mobility. Fewer interactions with the rest of the country can be detected from the lower passenger movements in the Eastern islands, including West Nusa Tenggara, East Nusa Tenggara, Maluku and Irian jaya. Moreover, the economic and political crisis in 1997-98 has impacted badly on transport links across the nation. Eastern provinces' transport link is exacerbated as a result. The inadequacy of spatial links in some areas in Eastern Indonesia hinders interactions. The degree of spatial links or transport network decides the extent to which people in different settlement areas interact and benefit from social relations. The social exclusion of Eastern Indonesia, stemming from being a disconnected place amplified by lack of communications creates conflict and an antagonism. Observing the process of people movement, however, one soon realises that not all people travel between spaces. This raises the issue of inequality of mobility. Transport improvement in the region does not necessarily benefit all locations and all groups of a community. Places are linked in unequal ways and changes in transport connection favour some locations and groups of people, depending on the relative position in the network of physical and social relation (Barke 1986; Leyshon 1995; Massey 1995; Harvey 1996). An implication of the shrinking space is that of an increasing interpenetration and integration of places (Leyshon 1995: 17-9).

The Indonesian government has emphasised the role of transport for national integration. From the strategy of a national transport system it can be inferred that the national strategy has situated Eastern Indonesia as an isolated re-

<sup>7</sup> However the passenger movement have been concentrated in Java, Bali and Sumatra. The total air passengers carried increased from 2.3 million to 11.5 million, which is about fivefold between 1975 and 1995.

<sup>8</sup> A nation of transport link among places facilities the examination of distance. Janelle was the first in introducing the useful framework of time-space convergence. As the travels time between place decreases the distance declines in significance (Janelle 1969). This framework is used 'to analyse how development and technological change affect patterns of social activities. Time-space convergence refers to the way in which, with improved transport systems, distance 'shrink' (Giddens 1985). This is necessitates distance to be measured in terms of the amount of time it takes to travel through space rather than in terms of absolute distance. The idea of a shrinking world is discussed further in (Allen and Hammet 1995) and in particular the implications of transport and communications revolution in (Leyshon 1995)

<sup>9</sup> in 1997 for example, there were 216 flights weekly from Jakarta to Surabaya whilst a decade ago there were only 110 flights. In 1997 from Surabaya to Ambon, there were daily services which took 3 hour and 40 minutes. A decade ago, it would have taken almost twice as long including a transfer in Makassar.

gion needing opening up. One aim of the national transport system among others, is described in the national strategy as follows:

The national transport system provides effective transport services to uncover isolated areas, to serve remote islands and to promote backward regions and undeveloped villages particularly in Eastern Indonesia, as well as to serve the border and transmigration areas so that the unity of the archipelago is strengthened (Departemen Perhubungan 1996: 10).

The transport strategy as a practice of governmentalities, embraced vocabulary such as 'isolated', 'remote', 'backward' and 'undeveloped', for Eastern Indonesia. This implied that by spatially linking this problematic region with the rest of the country, it is expected that the unity of the country will be strengthened. The strategy, translated into policies and projects, is an example of a state's remote but complex macro interaction implying a process of asserting influences without necessarily a physical presence in the region. To understand the government's practices in Eastern Indonesia and the possible effects on the people it is useful to consider the regional spatial discourses examining examples of vocabulary that are loaded with subjection as an economic entity at a distance.

### Regional Spatial Discourse

It is evident from the central government's rhetoric on the region that the state's view of Eastern Indonesia is as an economic entity full of challenges. The region has been associated with 'problems' arising from the 'highly uneven distribution of resources', the low density of population and the 'unbalanced development' (Repelita VI, Buku I:55). A representation as a problem or a difficult region can be found in various practices of governmentality, such as policies of granting 'special treatment' to the region.

### Eastern Indonesia: an economic entity at a distance

The governmentality of the Eastern region has a strong economic dimension. The subjection as an economic entity at a distance posing development challenges was evident in the Broad Outlines of State Policy (GBH) for the sixth Five Year Development Plan (REPELITA VI 1994/5-1998/9) (Repelita V, Buku I: 55). The Indonesian government has formalised efforts 'to solve problems' of unbalanced development in the eastern region. The National Advisory Council for the development of Eastern Indonesia (Dewan Pengembangan kawasan Indonesia Timur) was established in 1993<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> The council was established through the Presidential Decree (Kepres) No.120/1993 with the aim to plan strategies to develop KTI. At the time, East Timor was included. Within KTI, there was been a huge variation in income levels. While average GDP per capita for Indonesia in 1995 (constant price) was 1.8 million (US\$ 800), there eastern provinces performed below the average: East Timor (Rp.0.3 million). East Nusa Tenggara (Rp.0.7 million) had the

The subject as an economic entity at a distance under the 'New Order' was consistently maintained. The state had subject the region with a system of judgement of economic efficiency. Up until recently the 'highly centralised system of governance has implemented most programs nation-wide where income from natural resources is supposed to accrue to the government' (Hill 1996: 17)<sup>11</sup>, in addition to determining inter-regional resource allocation (Daftar Islam Proyek, Inpres, IDT). In spite of natural potentially existing in Eastern Indonesia, such as forest products of Maluku and Irian Jaya (Barlow and Hardjono 1996:13), the region has to follow a system of accounting, which has not given a financial autonomy. The central government decides the terms of interaction with the region. In the words of former local governor of East Nusa Tenggara: 'being a poor province means at the same time poor people and poor government implying weak bargaining power' (Mboi, 1996).

Singling out the eastern provinces and treating this region as an economic entity having difficulties keeping up with the pace of national development created a sense of 'outliers'. This judgement of economic efficiency often as a non-performer<sup>12</sup>. The subjection regional the government attitude in terms of an emphasis in the economic sphere, as if it is the only reality of the region.

Regional subjection as a problematic place has evolved in official boundaries the area is formally defined as Kawasan

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lowest GDP per capita in 1995. East Kalimantan (Rp.4.2 million) had the highest in KTI and the second largest nationally. As expected GDP per capita for Jakarta was the highest (Rp.6.7 million), followed by Bali (Rp.2.3 million). However, the relatively high GDP per capita in Maluku (Rp.3.3 million) and Irian Jaya (Rp.2.8 million) even including oil, was influenced by not only by the revenue from the natural resources but also their small population. The official definition of KTI is all the 13 provinces leaving Java/Bali and Sumatra as the Western provinces (Tirtosudarmo 1995; Hill 1996).

<sup>11</sup> The resource rich areas under this financial arrangement have to forgo their income to the central to the government. Regional finance under this system has the central government as the primary revenue collecting agency which then disburses funds to DATI I to DATI II, mainly through Inpres (presidential instruction) and DIP/Daftar Isian Proyek (list of project proposal). There is no clearly stated rationale/coherent formula for the allocations across regions (Hill 1996b: 235).

<sup>12</sup> In terms of the economic and social indicators of Eastern Indonesia, East Nusa Tenggara had the highest proportion of people living below the poverty line in 1990 (45 per cent, excluding East Timor, with Maluku (29 per cent) and west Nusa Tenggara (28 percent)). The concept of 'poverty line' is based on the daily minimum requirement of 2 100 calories per person added by non-food minimum requirement such as accommodation, clothing, schooling, transport, household necessities and other basic needs which are converted to the value of expenditure in rupiah. East Nusa Tenggara was the outlier with the lowest per capita expenditure per month (Hill 1996a:230). Life expectancy in West Nusa Tenggara was the lowest (46 years) with the rest of Eastern Indonesia marginally close to the Indonesian average (60 years). The five provinces in Eastern Indonesia also recorded on above national average infant mortality rate (Hill 1996a:230).

Timur Indonesia (KTI) consisting of 13 provinces<sup>13</sup> (from Kalimantan, Sulawesi, the Nusa Tenggara, Maluku and Irian Jaya).

Other boundaries such as Indonesia Bagian Timur (IBT), the National Development Planning Agency (Bappenas) eastern province classification has stigmatized the region.

How do we think the manner the government treat the region affect the way the region itself? The history of the region showed turmoil from separatist movement and resistance. It is obvious that on one hand there have been indication of the region's preference towards a change in the government practices. On the other hand, the state's task of delicate balancing of many layers of interactions is a complex process. It is important to bear in mind that this kind of interaction is a means to engage and bring the people together. Social relations or interaction can be used to maintain social integration in many ways, not only in economic, but also in social and cultural spheres.

### Is a new regional subjectivity possible?

Viewing social relation as both local face to face and more remote 'distantiated' contacts allows us to think of social relation as a means for practices of government to influence the way people think about themselves. The dynamic process of social interaction has the capacity to tie the community together by way of transport and communications. The transport link in the region suggest that Eastern Indonesia is the least connected region in the national system. Physical links shape the processes of interaction among various settlements.

The changing space of Eastern Indonesia is a part of the reorganisation of social relations affected by the process of governmentality. The long-term subjection through the New Order government has shown the emphasis on the strong economic and administrative realms. This can be argued to result in the current regional antagonism. It is a challenge to us and the present government to translate the opportunity of the gap created by the collapse and disillusion of the previous 'difficult and distance economic entity', to new, vibrant and valued regional subject, in order to foster integration.

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<sup>13</sup> Until 1999 including East Timor.

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