In Indonesia, national broadcasting in the 21st century has been characterized by increasing Muslim normativity across the spectrum of commercial programming, along with sectarian clashes that have further marginalized religious minorities. This article investigates the case of a small, regional television station in one of the country’s Christian-majority provinces to explore the ways that such minorities have exploited a relaxation of broadcast regulations to form distinctive and insular micromediascapes within the larger field of Indonesian media culture. I suggest the need for a more graduated articulation of Arjun Appadurai’s “mediascape” concept that foregrounds the import of local, small-scale production and broadcasting, particularly to marginalized groups. Based on an ethnographic study in Manado, North Sulawesi, I argue that local TV has risen to the foreground of the province’s public culture in a manner that mobilizes its religious, ethnic, and historical identity narratives to reterritorialize audiences and reify the region’s distinction from the state. [Christianity, Indonesia, Islam, media, television]

Introduction

In the summer of 2011, as part of my fieldwork for this article, I visited Bunaken, a small island with a population of around 1,800 that attracts a steady trickle of tourists due to its coral reefs. I had been there several times since attending Indonesian language school in the nearby city of Manado, North Sulawesi, in 2000, and was familiar with the island’s three villages. This time, I was surprised to find that evenings between 6:00 and 11:00 p.m. were dominated by an island-wide loudspeaker system that served as a sort of public radio, which everyone was essentially compelled to listen to. Even in the bungalow area populated by diving centers and tourist-catering homestays, powerful loudspeakers rebroadcast a resident disc jockey, who punctuated domestically produced Christian pop music with reports on locals’ donations to a church rebuilding project. She loudly repeated the amounts that each resident had given several times over, adding greater emphasis to match the generosity of the donor. Eventually, I found the broadcast booth near the island’s largest church. Ibu Riska, along with neighbors and the church’s minister, told me that the practice began three years earlier to raise money for a different church construction project. She said that although the causes kept changing, the institution of nightly broadcasts through the loudspeaker system was unlikely to go away, and that residents enjoyed the entertainment and sense of community it brought. Indeed, the booth was a lively scene, with local children playing outside, and many village residents hanging out to discuss a variety of topics, including their neighbors. Ibu Riska kept tight control of the DJing duties, however, and told me that she played exclusively Indonesian-language, Christian music, of which she assured me there was a great variety.

What struck me about Riska’s and her friends’ claims regarding the community-building nature of the broadcasts, however, was that despite being quite small, the island was far from homogeneous. One of the three villages on Bunaken is populated predominantly by Muslims. Walking through it the next night, I could not help but notice that the Christian music and church
announcements could be heard almost as easily as they were in the other villages. Speaking with a few residents there about the broadcasts, I encountered a strained ambivalence. “You can’t really hear it from my house, so it’s ok,” said one; “I don’t really enjoy the music, but I understand their goal,” said another, adding, “if we could raise money to build a big mosque here, we would.”

I was surprised by the unusual reversal of roles that the two religions’ adherents were experiencing on Bunaken as compared with the national media culture in Indonesia, which has increasingly, and more overtly, catered to the country’s nearly 90 percent Muslim population since the fall of the New Order government in 1998 (Hefner 2011). As I continued my research among local TV producers in the urban Manado area, the experience served as a curious exemplar study’s findings, encapsulating on an even smaller scale the Christian construction of what I term micromediascapes, with deference to Appadurai (1990). Here, I am referring to the active modification through production and broadcast (or other means of distribution) of the ambient (trans/)national mediascape available in a given locale, be it a province as large as North Sulawesi, a city like Manado, or even a cluster of villages on the small island of Bunaken.

In this essay, I seek to clarify this practice and reconcile it with Appadurai’s (1996) articulations of the mediascape through an investigation of local television in Manado, particularly as it relates to ethnic and religious subject-making. Drawing on Aihwa Ong’s (2006) recent work, I discuss local broadcasting and its relationship to the fragmentation of Indonesian sovereignty, and the reterritorialization of the region’s dominant Minahasan ethnic group as geographically bound and distinct from the state. Through an ethnographic case study of Pacific TV in Manado, I explore the ways in which that region’s historically ambivalent relationship to the Indonesian state (Kosel 2011) has found a new and powerful mode of expression, and importantly a forum for development. Drawing on the region’s colonially bound history, I argue that regional television has risen to the foreground of North Sulawesi’s mediascape in a manner that draws on its religious and ethnic identity narratives and its history of marginalization to constitute and reify its distinction from the state (Bourdieu 1984).

FIGURE 1. This photo I took of the scenery beyond Manado inadvertently captured a number of television transmission towers dotting the city. Pacific TV’s is not among them.

The Rise of Regional Television

In Indonesia, national broadcasting in the 21st century has been characterized by increasing Muslim normativity across the spectrum of commercial programming (Heryanto 2011). Not only has the number of explicitly Islam-themed programs increased, but based on my own interviews with national TV producers, the industry has also increasingly approached general programming development with an imagined Muslim audience in mind (cf. Ishadi S. K. 2011). During the era preceding commercial television, and as private stations came to prominence in the 1990s, religious programming was minimal and generally limited to sermons from ulama and other religious figures. Broadcasters embraced (willingly or not) the Suharto government’s effort to minimize the representation of potentially divisive social issues (Hollander et al. 2009). As a result, Islam-themed programming was minimal and generally limited to sermons from ulama and other religious figures. Broadcasters embraced (willingly or not) the Suharto government’s effort to minimize the representation of potentially divisive social issues (Hollander et al. 2009). As a result, Islam-themed programming was minimal and generally limited to sermons from ulama and other religious figures.

That changed in 1998 when the collapse of the New Order was accompanied by the first Ramadan sinetron, a wildly successful prime-time drama that aired each night of the Muslim fasting month. Initially broadcast on RCTI, the country’s first private station, the Ramadan serial was immediately replicated by other stations, and

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soon became a staple genre on Indonesian television. It also opened the door to more widespread, commercial leveraging of religious sentiment on national TV. Accompanying a revitalization of religious sentiment on national TV, programming overtly oriented toward Muslims has moved beyond sinetron, or prime-time dramas, and into other genres, while sometimes taking on a more conservative tone. Although industry pioneer Ishadi S. K. (2011) has recently pointed out that on Indonesian television Islam has remained relatively compartmentalized around Ramadan, and while I made a similar argument some years ago (2005), this has begun to change in the last few years. Recent hits include a number of “reality shows,” which, mirroring the most common sinetron plot narratives, tend to focus on families or groups of friends trying to negotiate challenges through the lens of Islam, such as bringing a straying child or friend back from drug addiction or promiscuity through consultation with a religious expert. Other programs, like TransTV’s Halal?, are built around clerical judgment of pop-cultural trends, problematizing the division between Indonesia’s historic pluralism and what some media critics argue is an increasingly Arabized model of Muslim practice (Sabarnini 2010).

Since the advent of popular, commercial Islam in the late 1990s, however, Christian-oriented production houses, and later regional television stations, have been gaining a gradual if lower profile within the industry. Whereas I have previously argued (Barkin 2005, in press) that most programming that caters explicitly to Muslim audiences represents a commercial Islam aimed at mobilizing religious sentiment within a neoliberal field, broadcasting in Christian-majority North Sulawesi illustrates what I argue to be an ideologically distinct approach to religious identity construction rooted in the charged subjectivity of a persecuted minority group eager to elevate itself above the religious and political norms of the ambient, national mediascape. Here, I examine the case of one such regional TV station in an effort to illuminate recent changes in the production culture of regional broadcasters among Indonesia’s Christian populations. I draw on my experiences conducting interviews at local stations in Yogyakarta, as well as at Christian production houses in Central Java in 2011 and 2012.

Having conducted research largely on national television production for the past decade, I was drawn to the subject of regional TV in the Manado area because I noticed how disproportionately prominent the industry was there, and wanted to understand the role it played in daily life, especially in the context of the difficulties that Christians have recently faced in Indonesia. The fieldwork for this article was conducted largely in the summers of 2011 and 2012 in North Sulawesi, but I also draw on data collected over the previous decade studying national TV producers. This project began in 2001, with a 20-month field study of national broadcast culture production in Jakarta, and has continued with regular short-term research trips.

My previous work investigated ideologies and practices behind influential models of national culture and lifestyle that TV producers create. Among these, the handling of religious content and religiously associated audiences was cast into relief after the New Order’s fall (cf. Kitley 2000), as discussion and representation of previously forbidden topics no longer threatened TV stations with closure or disciplinary action. I came to focus on the transformation of religious programming, and in particular the burgeoning of a discursively commercial Islam that endeavored to represent religious themes in ways that comported with national citizenship and neoliberal subjectivities (Barkin in press). As with Abu-Lughod’s (2002) work on Egyptian TV and Mankekar’s (2002) discussion of the Ramayana TV series in India, these changes have come to fuse the country’s dominant religion with conceptions of national citizenship in such a way as to sideline religious minorities, and in this case challenge their “Indonesianness.” My initial goal for this project was to explore what might be characterized as reactions to these broad sociopolitical and mediacentric changes from the country’s margins, where Christian minorities have exploited a relaxation of broadcast regulations in the past decade to form distinctive and insular mediascapes within the larger field of Indonesian media cultural production (Bourdieu 1993).

To focus on this issue, I began ethnographic work among regional TV broadcasters in predominantly Christian North Sulawesi, focusing on the troubled development of local television, as well as explicitly Christian production houses in Jakarta and Yogyakarta, which develop religious programming for other local and national stations. As it became clear that Yogyakarta would provide an informative contrast to North Sulawesi, I conducted a number of reception-focused interviews there on the subject of local TV across several key demographics, including industry professionals, and university students and academics, as well as rural farmers, government employees, and service and factory workers.

The Shifting Constraints of Private Television

Private television stations in the post-Suharto era are no longer burdened by the threat of government sanctions...
or closure. Yet they have encountered a new and more volatile set of constraints in the form of conservative “Islamist” organizations and complicit law enforcement, as well as a public wary of a secular or anti-Islamic media (Van Bruinessen 2002). In my earlier work (Barkin 2005, 2006), I have discussed producers’ efforts to ameliorate risk while appealing to moderate Muslim audiences. More recently (Barkin in press), I argue that this contrast between commercial mobilizations of Islamic images and narratives and rising religious conservatism that rejects these appropriations has created a volatile tension in the national discourse surrounding the popular representation of Islam (see also Weintraub 2008). But during this shift from a largely secular media culture to one inflected by a neoliberal Islam, and then to one characterized by struggles to negotiate the tenor of the national media’s increasing Muslim normativity, the country’s religious minorities have in many ways been left out of the discussion, at least on the national level. This concern is particularly poignant for Christians, who have struggled in other ways since the fall of the New Order government.

Intimidation and violence against Christians, who make up between 5 percent and 7 percent of Indonesia’s population, have grown dramatically in the post-Suharto era (Sidel 2006). In 1999, sectarian violence began in Ambon. It would continue through 2003, eventually displacing approximately 500,000 people, most Catholic. When I conducted research in Manado in 2000, there was already a large camp for refugees from the Maluku Islands, of which Ambon is the capital, as well as one for those fleeing sectarian violence that occurred in Poso, Central Sulawesi, during the same years. Rather than returning, many decided to stay in majority Christian areas like North Sulawesi and southeastern islands, such as Flores and Timor (van Klinken 2007). Also beginning in 1999, East Timor, which is predominantly Catholic, was granted independence by the Indonesian government after a referendum that angered the country’s military, which had been fighting a guerrilla insurgency there since the province was annexed in 1975. The military, which sponsored a “pro-integration militia,” reportedly killed over 2,000 people, raped hundreds of East Timorese women, and burned or demolished approximately 75 percent of the country’s infrastructure, forcing over 300,000 into West Timor and displacing nearly three-quarters of the province’s population (McDonald 2002).

These two large-scale traumas introduced new generations of Indonesian Christians to an increasingly precarious position within a country that appeared progressively less capable of defending its minority populations. Anti-Christian violence dipped in the mid-2000s, but has recently escalated. In 2010, a record number of anti-Christian incidents were recorded, while in 2011 this number nearly doubled (Compass Direct News 2012). Although none matched the scale or scope of the early 2000s, recent church bombings and a resurgence of violence in Maluku have been compounded by prosecutions of anti-blasphemy laws and apparent government complicity or inaction in cases of Christian victimization (Crouch 2012).

Thus, Christians living in places like Manado have been regularly hearing for nearly 15 years not just that their religion is under attack, but also that their government has failed to represent them and to prevent their growing marginalization. This marginalization of Christians (and other religious minorities), along with the graduated deterioration of state authority and the rise of popular Islam, has all been widely documented and discussed (e.g., Aragon 2005; Bruinessen 2011; Hefner 2002; Salim 2012; van Klinken and Barker 2009; Weintraub 2011). My purpose here is not to contribute another case study to these literatures, but rather to use them as a platform from which to address the supposition that the Minahasans are taking advantage of local broadcasting to creatively reframe their mediated relationship to the state, and how the legalization of regional TV has fractured the national mediascape in such a way as to make new forms of identity-building possible.

Pacific TV Manado

Pacific TV in Manado is one of the more successful local stations in a country that, despite government efforts to
discourage it (Republik Indonesia 2002), is still dominated by nationally oriented programming broadcast from Jakarta over satellites and networks of relay towers. It represents a recent trend in the otherwise troubled sector of regional television. In particular, minority religious communities and cultural groups whose discursive identities have developed, to varying degrees and in different ways, in opposition to national norms seem to be among the only audiences making regional television economically lucrative (Nielsen 2009). Bali, for example, where most identify as agama Bali or Balinese Hindu, and where the tourist-driven economy was greatly damaged during bombings carried out largely by Javanese and other Muslims in 2002 and 2005, also has one of the most successful regional TV stations, Bali TV, the influence of which Mark Hobart has studied for years (2002, 2007, 2010).

While Balinese, including diasporas, have used television to help mediate and reproduce their own identity narratives (Bhaskara 2012), Christian-dominated areas like the Minahasa region of North Sulawesi have also seen a blossoming of local TV stations. Manado is now home to five private, local stations, while nearby Tomohon, the province’s second city, has one of its own. Considering the relatively low population of the region, this is well out of proportion with the national average, which I will discuss in greater detail below.

It should first be noted that regional television in Indonesia has largely been an unkept promise by the government. To counter the center-controlled national broadcasting environment that dominated the country during Suharto’s New Order government, Indonesia’s Parliament in 2002 endorsed a new broadcast bill that required a shift toward a different model. The model, which is similar to that of the United States, would have the national stations become networks that, instead of broadcasting directly to national audiences via relay towers, would be required to profit-share with local affiliate stations that would air their own locally produced programming as well. Ten years later, this law has yet to be implemented, and although a number of regional stations have cropped up across the country, the national stations—which command the vast majority of viewers in most if not all provinces—have been largely unwilling to work with them to develop the affiliate model (Hidayat 2010; Natalia 2011). When describing this situation and Parliament’s intentions to me, Tito, head of production at Pacific TV, claimed that “they’re good at making rules, but not at enforcing them.”

The lack of cooperation from national stations has led regional television to languish in relative obscurity through much of the country, forced to procure or produce all of their programming independently. As a result, many have limited broadcast hours, or fill the day with inexpensive foreign programs of limited appeal. Although station managers often cite local news as a key advantage, most of these stations are not able to bring in sufficient revenue to afford their own news crews, and so their reports frequently depend on information from the same national news organizations to which they are ostensibly the alternative. Although they predominantly depend on advertising for their revenue, they are too small for the country’s primary ratings agency, A. C. Nielsen, to take notice, and as a result, few have any ratings data beyond what they are able to collect themselves.

Pacific TV was developed by a local couple and began broadcasting in 2003. The station quickly met with success in appealing to advertisers, and went from broadcasting eight hours to 18 hours per day by the end of that year; currently, they broadcast 20 hours and claim to have 80 percent “local production.” Although not the first, they are now the longest running station in the region. However, station manager Ertina, and others at Pacific TV, told me that they rarely turn a significant profit, and that it is “hard to find advertising in this environment,” wherein few local business can afford their rates, the highest among North Sulawesi’s stations. They often described themselves with the phrase “televisi lokal biasa,” or “normal” local television, meaning that they were not part of any larger media group or network. They are a terrestrial broadcaster with two towers, covering 71 percent of the North Sulawesi province’s population, but have no satellite presence.

When I first visited them in June 2011, I was warmly greeted by Ertina, who introduced me to several
producers, the head of production, and the station’s owner, Natalia. All proved open to interviews and discussions, while allowing me the opportunity to observe production practices and spend time informally at the station, talking with staff, on-air talent, and other guests. I have organized my observations around three themes (“Prominent Role,” “Christian Worldview,” and “Looking Westward”), which I argue to be indicative of the emergence of new, geographically delimited mediascapes among North Sulawesi populations, where the sovereignty of the center’s national imaginary has lost much of its preeminence.

Prominent Role

The first is that, based on all available measures, the regional television scene in this Christian-majority area genuinely appears to be more popular and dynamic than it is in more nationally representative, Muslim-majority and Javanese regions. Although, as noted above, A. C. Nielsen has no precise viewing figures, corporate executives anecdotally confirmed this disproportionate popularity based on a proprietary survey conducted in 2009, while internal polling data from Jogja TV versus Pacific TV in Manado (both based on their own research) showed that Pacific TV reached nearly the same audience numbers, despite having one-fifth the population within its coverage area. Pacific TV also has greater competition within its region, including four other local private stations, with one more set to premiere soon. Yogyakarta has a total of four local TV stations, despite its large population, and provinces closer to Manado also manifest a similar pattern.

Sulawesi’s most populated province, Sulawesi Selatan, boasts five stations, while Sulawesi Tengah claims two, Sulawesi Tenggara just one, and North Sulawesi’s neighboring province, Gorontalo, also boasts a single station.

Given the difficult economic environment that broadcasters confront in Indonesia, this would seem to indicate that local TV in North Sulawesi—to the extent that Pacific TV can be taken as exemplary of the field—is more popular among advertisers, and presumably audiences as well, than it is in most regions. According to accounts by station executives who have attended conferences with their peers from around Indonesia, the region is among the most dynamic and competitive in the country, along with Bali and Medan, in Sumatra, which is also home to significant Protestant audiences. This is not to say that these data alone denote audience engagement, or that cities and provinces with non-Muslim majority populations are the only areas where local TV is successful—Banjarmasin in South Kalimantan is one counterexample of a thriving local broadcasting culture—but it seems clear that outer island cities are disproportionately turning to regional television, and even among these, Manado appears to be exceptional, especially considering its low population and relative isolation. Finally, while many regions turn to local stations because audiences are eager to watch TV in their own local languages, Minahasans tune in even though they do not themselves have a shared language (more on this below) and their stations broadcast in the same Indonesian used by national stations, with only occasional use of regional slang.

Because there is great diversity and variation in population and demographics between cities and regions, these sorts of comparisons are far from conclusive. However, having spent months in both Yogyakarta and Manado over the past three years, I found the role and reception of regional TV among locals to be quite different. Although North Sulawesi residents certainly discuss national TV on occasion, bringing up the subject of television by itself more often leads people to talk about their regional stations. I found that most people I spoke with knew of several local TV personalities and were familiar with local talk shows and news anchors. Also, many large churches had relationships with one or more of the local stations and would host live religious events on weekends or even during the week. A number of Manadonese cited having participated in or observed these events as being central to their relationship with local stations.

For example, Eddi is a musician and the son of a dosen (lecturer/professor) at Manado’s public university, Universitas Sam Ratulangi. He had performed on a local
affiliation, might indulge in approbations of local dis-

Indeed, one could argue the probability that every

east Java, and even nearby Surakarta (Sutiyono 2010).

the local practice

cultural status (Woodward 2011) in a manner that might

reflect our culture,” adding, “it’s really a blessing that

we are able to make television that’s authentically

Minahasan,” referring to his and North Sulawesi’s pre-

dominant ethnic group. Eddi’s comments reflected a

number of themes I encountered in my discussions of

regional TV with Manadonese people, in particular (1)

the claim that it was preferable to national TV, which

was characterized as everything from a guilty pleasure
to outright sinful to “televisi kami,” or “their television”; (2) the perceived cultural ownership of local TV,
as expressed through (among other things) use of the
phrase “televisi kami,” or “our (not your) television,”9

which seemed to be aimed at excluding other Indone-

sian ethnic groups more than me personally, and which

also came to the fore when interview subjects discussed
friends they knew who had been on a local program, or

their own experiences participating in a broadcast; and

(3) the presumption that local TV reflected a Minahasan,

Christian worldview, and as such that supporting it was

a moral and religious imperative, rather than just a taste

preference.

A key counterexample can be found in Yogyakarta,
a predominantly Muslim and ethnically Javanese city
that is often described in travel literature as the “cultural
heart of Indonesia.” Over the past three years, I have had
the opportunity to discuss local TV there with a wide
variety of residents. Yogyakarta makes for a helpful
comparison because it shares its majority religion and
ethnic group with the Indonesian state, unlike Manado,
but it also celebrates its distinguished local history and
cultural status (Woodward 2011) in a manner that might
easily invigorate local broadcasting. The local practice
of Islam, for example, is often contrasted with that of
East Java, and even nearby Surakarta (Sutiyono 2010).
Indeed, one could argue the probability that every
regional media market, regardless of religious or ethnic
affiliation, might indulge in approbations of local dis-
tinctiveness that mirror Manado’s, but at least in Yog-
yakarta, I found little support for this supposition.

When I brought up the subject of regional televisi-

on, most locals were unaware of the majority of sta-
tions that covered the area, and very few claimed to be
regular viewers of any of them. On the other hand, the
great majority was familiar with prime-time sinetron,
and often had strong loyalties to one Ramadan serial or
another. Local stations were often spoken of as “a bit
backward” (agak terbelakang) or “rural” (kampungan),
as they were compared with national TV in production
value, actors’ talents, and other measures of perceived
quality. There did not seem to be any discourse com-
parable to the points discussed above regarding Mina-
hasan audiences. Rather than a regional loyalty, I found
a range of reactions, from complete indifference or
unawareness to an apologetic embarrassment at local
stations’ quality.

The subjects of ethnic affiliation and religion only
came up if I mentioned them, and in such cases I was
generally met with confused looks; clearly, these were
not great concerns, although a few mentioned that they
liked local stations’ frequent use of the Javanese lan-
guage. Although national TV might not often celebrate
Javaneseness or syncretic Yogyakartan Islam in the
way that locals often do, it was clearly still their TV and
not someone else’s. “I do not think it is really any
different from the [national] private stations,” Soetoyo,
a restaurant owner, told me. He kept a TV turned on in
his restaurant, but always tuned to a national station.
“That is what people want to watch,” he told me. “No
one knows about Jogja TV or these others.” A restaurant
patron named Adi jumped in, adding, “I’ve seen Jogja
TV, they watch it in the village sometimes because they
can get a clear signal.” Most of my discussions in
Yogyakarta mirrored this one, with vague recollections,
references to rural consumption and the use of
Javaneseness, as well as critical comparisons to national
stations. In North Sulawesi, I rarely heard such
comparisons; residents tended to speak of local TV as
though it were a separate medium, not to be evaluated
on the same bases.

Christian Worldview

Second, in my research on Pacific TV—which I focused
on in part because it produces the most local content of
the stations covering Manado9—I found religious
themes and references to be front and center in a great
deal of their programming. This is not to say that most
of their programming is explicitly religious; it is not.
Their local productions mostly focus on Minahasa as a
territory—local news, travel and tourism around the region, Minahasan food and cooking, the province’s national parks and wildlife, and local events. Although these programs rarely address Protestantism or Christianity explicitly, a number of indicators foregrounded Christian identity, both on and off the air. Several of the sets featured Christian decoration and imagery, and the same was true of the staff offices, which were festooned with crosses, framed images of Jesus Christ, and Christian-themed calendars. This is not unusual for an office in Manado, but Christian culture came across on the air in other ways as well. On many of the programs that ostensibly had no religious connection, such as a live pop music broadcast from a shopping mall, Christian music could be heard as background music during “bumpers,” when transitioning to or from commercials. Newscasters and talk show hosts often wore visible crosses. On-air personalities frequently threw in phrases that establish or reference their Christian identity, such as “Insya Jesus,” which roughly translates as “Jesus willing” and serves as a sort of substitute for the common “Insha’Allah,” commonly heard on national TV. Music video programs, common during daytime hours, featured many Indonesian artists, most of them overtly Christian and often singing Christian-themed material. Overtly Muslim artists, or those whose music invokes Islamic themes, are virtually never broadcast.

The same company that manages Pacific TV (Pacific Media) also owns a prominent radio station, which its manager claimed broadcast around 70 percent religious content. Tito, Pacific TV’s programming manager, made a point of emphasizing to me the cultural gaps left by national broadcasters and how seeing the world from a Minahasan perspective was a central goal of the station, although he stopped short of claiming a Christian agenda. Instead, he and Natalia, the station’s owner, seemed intent on communicating a message of tolerance and religious solidarity to me, recalling the country’s foundational Pancasila philosophy and the Suharto-era prohibition on controversial invocations of religion. They even showed me that they had done a Muslim program to celebrate the Idul Fitri holiday at the end of Ramadan, but when pressed, this proved the lone example they could cite. After a number of conversations with different staff members about this topic, I was left with the impression that it was important to them that they not appear to be overtly Christian, like their radio station, as that would delimit their scope and constrain the range of themes and topics in their productions. So they did what was necessary to perform a relatively symbolic inclusiveness. This performance may seem a superficial homage to Indonesia’s founding principles and the New Order’s religious inclusiveness, but as Berg (2011) recently articulated, maintaining the cordiality of interreligious relationships has long been a priority in North Sulawesi. In my own experience dating back to 2000, Manadonese often spoke of maintaining good channels of communication between church and mosque as key to avoiding the troubles experienced in Poso and Ambon.

Nevertheless, and although it is ostensibly just as commercially oriented as the national stations, in watching their programming, I found Christian themes, language, and references to be far and away more...
common than were similar phenomena on Yogyakarta’s regional stations. Tito often told me that local Minahasan cultural perspectives were rarely in evidence on national TV, and after a while it seemed that he was folding Christianity in under the aegis of this ethnoscape (Appadurai 1990). Indeed, despite its ostensible secularity and claims of balance, Pacific TV featured a number of rohan, or Christian worship programs. They also broadcast Christian media from outside sources, including the Christian Broadcast Network’s Solusi, a program based on the same company’s U.S. show, The 700 Club. Whereas CBN has struggled to get national stations to carry their programming, even when paid directly for the time in the manner of an “infomercial” (Barkin 2005), Pacific TV made no such demands, broadcasting the show’s dramatizations of Christian conversions without compensation. Moreover, religion was one of the central vehicles through which the station interacted with the Manadonese community at large. As noted above, they often engaged in live broadcasts from churches throughout the city, bringing in regional ministers and choirs, as well as musical performers, and conducted impromptu interviews with parishioners. Holiday specials broadcast from downtown locations, particularly around Christmas and Easter, were also cited as very popular and highly visible events to urban Manadonese, whether they watched them on TV or not.

Further, Pacific TV frequently had ministers, employees of the Church, and other clergy contributing to their productions. Beyond these overtly Christian programs, the line between religious programming and other categories appeared fluid and dynamic, with most on-air talent demonstrating that, whatever the subject at hand, expression of religious identity was normative rather than exceptional. This exceeds, in some ways, the Muslim-normative turn in national media culture that remains somewhat more compartmentalized in its representations of religiosity, confining them largely to entertainment programs, where they are explicitly marked as religious in character.

Looking Westward

Finally, in spending time at Pacific TV, I found not only Christian, but also themes that could be described as “pro-Western” to be deeply integrated into programming across several genres. For example, music video shows, discussed above with regard to their focus on Christian-Indonesian music, also featured Western artists much more frequently than did similar national programs, showing none of the shift away from Ameri-

can pop that has characterized Jakarta’s broadcasting in the past decade (Weintraub 2010). More surprising, in dialog or talk shows, American and European diplomats were frequent guests, seeming to reproduce an outsider’s gaze relative to the nation-state (see Barkin 2006), in that Indonesian government policy was often discussed as though by two friendly allies concerned about a looming threat on their borders. In 2011, they hosted both Kristin Bauer, the U.S. Consulate General, and Cameron Hume, U.S. Ambassador to Indonesia, based in Surabaya and Jakarta, respectively. This not only illustrates an exceptional interest in U.S. affairs and perspectives, but also serves as evidence of the close relationship between the region and the U.S. government. The national culture of Indonesia was often characterized as the absent “other” in these friendly conversations, emphasizing the imagined sociogeographic distance of “Indonesia” from the Minahasan community. This recalls Appadurai’s suggestion that the tacit scripts of globalized mediascapes “help to constitute the narratives of the ‘other’ and the protonarratives of possible lives” (Appadurai 1990:299), in this case constructing not just Minahasa’s distinction from Indonesia, but also its proximity to powerful allies.

Frequent references to European and American sports and fashion pervaded even news programs, as well as tourism or “lifestyle” shows. Perhaps importantly, Pacific TV has working relationships with both the Voice of America and Deutsche Welle media agencies, whose content, Tito told me, was greatly appreciated by Minahasan audiences. “We are very open to Western culture,” the station’s manager, Ertina, often told me (sangat terbuka kepada budaya Barat), and explained that there was a tremendous amount of media content available to them for little or no money as a result. The satellite feeds are free to any domestic broadcaster, and sometimes even have subtitles already in place, but according to Tito, very few Indonesian stations would think to broadcast their programs, which are funded by the U.S. and German governments. Pacific TV, however, embraced the affiliations, and owner Natalia chuckled at the notion that other stations would avoid them. They argued that Minahasan audiences love the sports coverage provided by Deutsche Welle, which they often put on in prime-time hours, and that the Voice of America provided them with a good deal of “soft news,” heavy on human interest stories and movie reviews. And while most of Indonesia has embraced the country’s cinematic reawakening of the past decade, including its increasingly common Islamic themes (Hoesterey and Clark 2012), by showing domestically produced films all but exclusively, Manado’s primary cinema still heavily favors Hollywood.
Clergy from Australia, Europe, and the United States were also common guests on Pacific TV. Indeed, because of the region’s religious affiliations, many live in Manado and have close connections with particular churches. Tito noted that several churches had specific affiliations with Western partners that led to abroad programs, exchanges of ministers, and immigration opportunities for Indonesians. For example, the Seventh-day Adventists, who have a sizeable presence in North Sulawesi, maintain close connections with the group’s large “university church” in Loma Linda, California. As a result, many Seventh-day Adventists in the area have visited or studied in the United States, and Loma Linda is home to one of the larger Indonesian communities in the United States. Connections like these feed back into Manado’s mediascape, celebrating perceived cultural proximity to the imagined West, while fostering greater familiarity with Western-origin media.

Producing “Minahasa”

Christian-oriented television appears to build on that religion’s embattled, minority status within the country, engaging in what Wright (1989) called “preaching to the converted,” indicating the process of constituting and reifying ethnic-religious communities through broadcasting. Harkening back to Anderson’s “imagined communities” concept of national identity development through print capitalism (1991), Christian communities in North Sulawesi have long made use of various broadcast media to consolidate and organize; the arrival of regional television broadcasting in the past decade has allowed these efforts to gain breadth and character, much as radio did for U.S. evangelicals over the course of the 20th century (Goff 1999; Hangen 2002), or as “charismatic Christianity” over the airwaves turned audiences into communities in Ghana (Clarke and Clarke 2009). As a relatively recent ethnic and geographic designation, Minahasa is a prime candidate for this mediated identity production.

Although it has been thoroughly naturalized in popular culture, Minahasa was actually a colonial political designation for eight different (and often conflictual) language groups living in the region, and according to Henley (1996) did not exist before the 19th century. In local discourse, however, Minahasa is often represented as an ancient and primordial grouping, and it is not uncommon to hear passionate Minahasans proffer theories of the island’s peopling that racially distinguish themselves from even their close neighbors in Gorontalo. Jacobsen (2002) points out that the group’s status as a relatively modern colonial inheritance means that Minahasans cannot rely on common ethnic identity markers, such as a shared cultural history or language, to constitute and differentiate Minahasan-ness. Instead, he argues that modern Minahan identity depends on a number of other variables, including (and in order of importance) their land/territory, genealogies, Christianity, education, and Westernization. He adds that “having such a variety of identity markers to draw upon when defining Minahasa ethnicity makes it adaptable to historical as well as contemporary social and political changes” (Jacobsen 2002:40).

One, therefore, need not invoke Ong’s (2006) concept of graduated sovereignty, wherein she outlines growing fissures in Jakarta’s control over a once sovereign state, to understand Manado’s favoring of a Western imaginary over “Indonesia,” and Java in particular. Before “Java-centricism” marginalized outer islanders, Minahasans fought alongside the Dutch colonial armies to put down insurgencies and keep the Netherlands East Indies whole (Ricklefs 2001). In its early years as an identified region and umbrella ethnic grouping, Minahasa developed a reputation for loyalty to the Netherlands, particularly after helping to decisively win the bloody Java War of 1825–30. The group and territory’s early unity was, thus, built not just by...
colonial bureaucrats seeking political control over northern Sulawesi, but also as Dutch allies in the fight against indigenous Indies powers. Many Minahasans were given full European legal status by the Dutch in the 20th century, reflecting an unusually close relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, as well as the region’s historic embrace of Christianity (Henley 1996). This Dutch hegemony over the region lasted into Indonesia’s revolutionary war, which bitterly divided Minahasans, as many favored the Netherlands’ offer of federalism over outright independence. After the war, many Manadonese came to resent Jakarta for perceived corruption and exclusionary economic policies; the area became home to the Permesta separatist movement, leading Sukarno to bomb and later occupy Manado in 1958. Although there have been no further rebellions in the area, and Christian leaders go to great lengths to discourage sectarian hostility (Berg 2011), the post-Suharto era’s violence seems to have revived many of the anti-Javanese, anti-Muslim narratives that helped Minahasa develop such a close bond with its colonial rulers, while strengthening the belief that Minahasans as a whole, certainly includes a great variety of global image-makers and neoliberal distribution networks, but always in tandem with the viewer, who need only to turn her head to reframe the landscape on new cultural geography.

Conceived at a time of grand globalization theory, what the term “mediascape” seems to lack is a sense of scale, gradation, regionalism (e.g., Shim 2006), and the potential for local (co-)production of the image repertoires it relies on. The suggestion of micromediascapes is not meant as a significant departure from the original term, but rather an inductive addendum from the ethnographic trenches: a suggestion that mediascapes can be messy, geographically delimited (or not), overlapping, and their constituent elements—as I discovered on Bunaken—may be quite small in scale, but nevertheless ubiquitous for some. The Minahasan mediascape, as a whole, certainly includes a great variety of global images and narratives, as well as an Indonesian national discourse that remains in many ways paramount. In the foreground, however, is a local micromediascape of growing visibility. This micromediascape represents not the global deterritorialization of images and narratives often associated with neoliberal culture flows, but a locally motivated reterritorialization of “Minahasan-ness” that draws on the region’s distinctive historical affiliations and ambivalences to alter the landscape dramatically.

Ong’s articulation of graduated sovereignty focuses on the approaches of what she terms “postdevelopmental” states like Indonesia, and how they increasingly favor “a dispersed strategy that does not treat the national territory as a uniform political space” (2006: 77). In letting go of Suharto-era broadcasting legislation that mandated TV be exclusively a national endeavor, the 2002 Parliament failed to promote the democracy-building cooperation between national and regional broadcasters that they may have hoped for, but they
did allow for the emergence of newly graduated mediascapes, particularly in areas marginalized by the rise of popular Islam in the national media, by ceding television—easily the country’s largest media industry—to provincial competition.

That said, some provinces compete more eagerly than others. The idea of reterritorialization clearly resonates more in a group that has an adversarial history with the state and its predominant ethnic group, one that is defined largely by the land it occupies, and which shares its predominant religion with the nation’s former colonial power rather than the nation itself. I would not expect that the implications of this case could be broadly generalizable, although I would certainly be curious to see more ethnographic research on the role of regional broadcasting (and other contributors to the micromediascape) in areas of Indonesian Papua and Aceh, which have more recent histories of separatism. Even there, however, I would not expect to see a comparable development of the medium, as local tourism programs, talk shows, and music videos are hardly the parable of development of the medium, as local tourism programs, talk shows, and music videos are hardly the parable of development of the medium, as local tourism programs, talk shows, and music videos are hardly the parable of development of the medium.

Notes

1. All names have been changed to protect informants’ identities to the degree possible.
2. In order to promote an image of national unity, the New Order government severely limited media discussion of “SARA” issues, an acronym of Suku, Agama, Ras, and Antar-golongan, commonly translated as ethnic or tribal affiliation, religion, race, and intergroup relations. As a result, representations of religion on TV were minimal, relatively superficial, and highly compartmentalized.
3. A. C. Nielsen has done small-scale studies of regional TV viewership, but these have been largely limited to the five cities where they focus their research (see Barkin 2005 for a detailed discussion of A. C. Nielsen’s data collection procedures in Indonesia, as well as the ways in which they influence the industry).
4. The 2003 Indonesian broadcast legislation required that 60 percent of independent, regional station content be locally produced, although this is not effectively enforced. I was told different percentages of locally produced content by different people at the station, but it was clear that they were generally proud of how much production they did, considering it significantly more than their competition.
5. Bunaken, which began broadcasting in 2002, only lasted seven months on the air before shutting down for lack of revenue.
6. Natalia told me that she had taken possession of the station when she and her husband divorced some years earlier; they had developed and launched it together.
7. Manado’s population was 408,354 in 2010, compared with 2,389,200 for the Yogyakarta metro area. Pacific TV reported daily viewing averages of 20,000–30,000, compared with Jogja TV’s 30,000–35,000. These are estimates provided to advertisers based on the stations’ own research, and as such are to be interpreted critically.
8. For purposes of this comparison, I am focusing on private, local stations that produce a significant portion (although not necessarily the absolute majority) of their own content, as opposed to being rebroadcasters in a larger network system. As noted above, the major private stations have not yet engaged in a network model with local affiliates; however, the public, government station, TVRI, does engage, to varying degrees, in the affiliate model, and allows some local programming (particularly news) to supplement content from Jakarta. There are also some local stations set up by foreign interests that only rebroadcast imported content, which I have also excluded. For example, Spacetoon is a Dubai-based children’s network that owns free-to-air stations in 12 Indonesian cities at the time of this writing, but which broadcasts no local content.
9. The Indonesian national language uses separate words for the “inclusive we” (kita) and the “exclusive we” (kami), which excludes the person being addressed.
10. As noted above, Pacific TV claims to produce about 80 percent of the content it broadcasts, although it was
unclear whether repackaged music video shows with local hosts or other repurposing of purchased content fell within that calculation. Based on the variation in the percentage reported to me by different station employees, I suspect 70 percent might be more accurate, but this is still an impressive figure considering that it broadcasts 20 hours per day with a relatively limited budget.

11 Italicized to indicate the Indonesian language and thereby reference the local conception of Indonesia, as opposed to an abstract designation of the nation-state.

12 The languages of the eight different groups that were politically united as Minahasa by the Dutch (Bantik, Bentenan, Ponosakan, Tombulu, Tondano, Tonsawang, Tonsea, and Tontemboan) have largely been supplanted by Manadonese Malay, which is very close to the Malay-derived national language, Bahasa Indonesia. More importantly, these are/were mutually unintelligible languages, and as such do little to help unite Minahasans as a singular ethnic group.

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