# ETHNIC IDENTITY, INSTITUTION, AND SECESSION IN INDONESIA: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN THE ACEHNESE REBELLIONS

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## ABSTRAK

Tulisan ini berusaha menjelaskan kemunculan dua phenomena yang berbeda dalam pergerakan kemerdekaan Aceh, Indonesia: 1) kemunculan gerakan pemberontakan Darul Islam pada tahun 1950an, dan 2) perkembangan Gerakan Aceh kemerdekan (GAM) pada tahun 1980an hingga 1990an. Penulis berpandangan bahwa kekuatan utama yang menyebabkan dua perbedaan dalam periode pemberontakan yang berbeda tersebut adalah interaksi institusional yang mendesign ide Negara bangsa dan peluang untuk untuk memobilisisi budaya yang didapat oleh institusi yang lainnya. Dengan kata lain, gerakan-gerakan kemerdekaan di Aceh dibentuk dan di mediasi oleh institusi-institusi yang memanifes-tasikan diri sebagai insititusi politik dan memiliki dampak yang besar terhadap perkembangan sebuah identitas etnik. Identitias tersebut dimobilisasi dan sekaligus untuk klaim sebuah grup (Horowitz, 1985: 229-235). Para elit etnik, sebagai pimpinan dalam sebuah gerakan, bertindak sebagai agen untuk memperkuat mobilisasi politik dan mendefinisikan keinginan sebuah daerah yang menjadi daerah basis budaya mereka. Isu yang terdapat dalam identitas etnik dan tantangan-tantangan institusi merupa-kan permasalahan yang juga akan dibahas dalam tulisan ini. Khususnya, tentang apakah persamaan yang alami pada pondasi ideology yang diwariskan dari satu ke gerakan pemberontakan lainnya pada periode yang berbeda? Kenapa, contohnya, pem-berontakan pertama yang terjadi pada tahun 1950an berhubungan dengan gerakan Darul Islam lainnya di Republik ini?Lalu kenapa GAM pada tahun 1980an mengunakan dasar dasar etnik untuk pemberontakan politik mereka? Demikian juga, kenapa kedua gerakan pemberontakan tersebut muncul dengan varian yang berbeda. Misalnya, Darul Islam dipimpin oleh para Ulama sedangkan GAM dipimpin oleh kelompok Sekuler. Jawaban-jawaban untuk pertanyaan tersebut akan digali melalui sejarah insititusi kedua gerakan perberontakan tersebut.

*Keywords*: *Aceh, Secessionist, Darul Islam, GAM, Institution*

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## A. Introduction

Students of nationalism have developed and refined approaches to the study of ethnic secessionism in the context of global ethnic conflicts.[1] However, most theoretical discussions have been with reference to Africa, Eastern Europe, North America and Central Asia. It is interesting to note that although many secessionist movements have emerged in Southeast Asia, literature on ethnic secessionism tends to be almost anti-theoretical. This phenomenon is evident in Horowitz's encyclo-pedic study on ethnic conflict. Horowitz only briefly mentions ethnic secessionist movements in this area (Horowitz, 1985:213-238). Area specialists focusing on Aceh secessionist movements illustrate the other trend in this sphere. Literature on this particular topic is in many ways impressive, but for any one seeking explanations of the root causes and possible common patterns underlying this ethnic secessionist phenomenon a number of different conclusions are offered (Morris, 1984; Sjamsuddin, 1985; van Dijk, 1987; Kell,

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[1] See, for example, Wood, Secession: A Comparative Analytical Framework, in *Canadian Journal of Political Science,* 14, no. , 1 (March, 1981). There are at least four perspectives which have been employed in the study of secession: (1) strong state theory that argues that common cultural basis for plural societies requires a strong state or regime to uphold national integration; (2) "internal colonialism" that argues that ethnic nationalism has its roots in the uneven regional economic development between the centers and the peripheries of multi-ethnic societies. Such a relationship may in turn be the result of policies of "internal colonialism". Perceptions of relative deprivation may develop, and they generate demands for a "better bargain". If the demands are ignored, societies on the peripheries will call for secession legitimated by reference to ethnic differences; (3) Territorial history stress that ethnic groups define themselves by reference to their history in a particular homeland territory. Should they occupy a homeland which is within the borders of a state controlled by members of an alien ethnic group, they will defend their inalienable rights to retain control of their own culture, language and territory; and (4) elite theory that argues that elites in ethnic minority groups seek to promote their own careers and interest in politics by acting as ethnic entrepreneurs. These ethnic entrepreneurs are identified as the educated youth, the intelligentsia, or the professionals. Other theorists of ethnic movement try to deny the validity of single-causal explanation and argue that "secessionist movements would seem to emerge when one or a combination characterizes a particular situation" (p.119). Rather than taking a side single theoretical framework, this paper seeks to take eclectic position to combine those theories in explaining Aceh case.

1992). My comment on the trend is straightforward: the focus on the unique and complex circumstances of the Aceh case –as commonly promoted by most Southeast Asianists-- neglect general explanations and the theoretical aspects of this particular secessionist movement.

The aim of this paper is to observe important variables of the Acehnese rebellion in order to find a general explanation on this particular ethnic secessionist movement. I believe that behind the unique appearance of the Aceh case we can discern elements of a common pattern within the framework of theoretical discussion on ethno-nationalism. This exercise has led me to focus attention on the character and the impact of the state institutions of Indonesia as key elements in explaining the emergence and the development of the Aceh secessionist movements.

## B. State-Building, Centralization, and Regional Rebellion; A Historical Background

Indonesian society is multi-ethnic in character, and yet the circumstances in which the modern state was formed have been such as to promote the identification of the state with the region inhabited by a majority ethnic community. Ethnic minority groups have been excluded from full membership in the state, both in the sense that the senior positions in the state machinery came to be virtually monopolised by the dominant ethnic majority and also, more importantly, in the centralizing character of state economic development. In the Indonesian geographical context, central governments in Java are associated with both domination of the ethnic majority and a center for economic distribution (McVey, 1984: 21-40).

It is this association of the state, and hence the economic well being, with the majority ethnic groups which provides the starting point for explaining the development of ethnic secessionist movements among the Indonesian ethnic minorities. The centralizing character of the Indonesian state derives from circumstances of its formation. Although Indonesia is unique in having achieved both its independence and its colonial system since the sixteenth century, it shared similar pattern with most of the states in the post-colonial world. It was colonial conquest by

the Dutch which determined the character of the state. The Malay-Indonesian archipelago comprises up to two hundred and sixteen distinct linguistic groups. However, the eight largest (82 percent of the population) are predominant in the major islands of Java, Sumatra, Borneo and Sulawesi, where important Islamic sultanates and kingdoms shared both the experience of conquest and colonization by the Dutch and the struggle for ethnic-regional freedom (McVey, 1984:19-20; Brown, 1989:157-171). Batavia -- found within modern day Jakarta-named after the Roman designation for Holland-- located in north western part of Java, was the most important city during the Dutch colonial administration as it the home office for the governor general of the Netherlands East Indies. From the seventeenth century onwards, the main geo-political division in the Malay-Indonesian archipelago was the cleavage between Java under effective control and cultural development of the Dutch and regions of the other major islands. The non-Javanese regions were meanwhile still referred to as underdeveloped ("*terbelakang*") and less educated (McVey, 2003:7-9; Morris, 1984: 28).

This cleavage was consolidated during the subsequent two centuries of Dutch colonial education policy for the native population and then the early period of independence. While the policy was meant to "transforming the native in the archipelago into a modern civilization" (Benda, 1980:160), it is in the cities of the Java regions that the Dutch established learning institutions ranging from preliminary schools to medical academies for the native inhabitants. It was the elite Javanese families who took advantage of the policies and brought them into the state machinery and whose culture defined the national character of the state. The colonial origin of the Malay-Indonesian archipelago was to give it a predominantly developed and westernized Javanese character. The independence of Indonesia in 1945 and its subsequent history came to be portrayed in terms of the development and nationalism of Java, with other regions being portrayed as less significant. Cities in Java, Jakarta in particular, emerged as "the locus of political power, cultural core, and major concentration of economic distribution" (McVey, 1984:40).

After independence, all Indonesian regions experienced political tensions as a result of attempts by the central government in Jakarta to expand influence and attempts by regions to defend their autonomy. However, ethnic-regional secessionist movements in Indonesia cannot be explained simply in terms of center-periphery tensions since it is the character of state and the consequence of its assimilations patterns that have determined the nature of the ensuing politics. It must be noted that although the Indonesian state cannot be identified with any one indigenous linguistic group, it can be characterised in terms of the cultural and geographic cleavage that has become so politically evident between the "overwhelmingly modernized and bureaucratized state system in Java," and "the most disaffected regional communities … in the outer islands" (McVey, 1981:37). So that when the state attempted to introduce the values and institutions associated with a modern state system it implied that the central government must integrate and assimilate the ethnic groups along the peripheral regions within the fold of the ruling cultural. This in turn created a situation in which the values and institutions of the latter was in some way inferior. The result was, as McVey notes on the post-independence Indonesian state, "insofar as members of the ethnic groups have a role in the power structure, they have performed that function in the context of new state, subject to central government approval" (McVey, 1981:37).

Historically speaking, the expansion of state penetration was implemented partly by military force, but also by reinforced policies of administration within the framework of a unitary state system. This includes the use of *bahasa* Indonesia as a national language, the promotion of the modern education system, and the centralized nature of political institutions (Sjamsuddin, 1984:56; Sukma, 2003:52-55). Perhaps the two politically significant aspects of state policy have, however, been the policy of reorganizing the military between 1948 and 1953 and the introduction of provincial government institutions in 1950 (van Dijk, 1981:77-90). In post-revolutionary war Indonesia, local unit guerillas involved in the war for independence were bypassed by the central Government as it recruited Dutch educated traditional-elites to become leading commanders in a new Indonesian military institution (Tentara

National Indonesia, TNI), especially in the regions where the local guerilla fought (Sjamsuddin, 1984:52-57).

The same policy was applied to the civil administration (Sjamsuddin, 1984:60-64; Morris, 1984:27-40). As new divisions of the provincial governments were established, with nine provinces across Indonesia, the authorities relied on members of the former pre-war bureaucracy. In some cases, outsiders to particular regions were appointed to such positions in the civil offices. This policy gave rise to regional feelings of discontent and increased accusations that the central government in Jakarta wanted to restore the traditional elite to power, as van Dijk noted:

At the proclamation of Indonesian national independence the provincial governors in the rudimentary administration of the time were still mostly sons of the region…[At] the lower levels the Republican Government simply took over the local officials who worked for the Dutch and Japanese. After formal recognition of independence the situation was reversed, and as a rule governors no longer were natives of the region of which they were head (van Dijk, 1981: 356).

The periodic expansion of the Republic Government in Jakarta to other regions provoked numerous rebellions. From the early 1950s onwards, the majority of insurgent activities that arose in the Archipelago took place on the part of regional communities.[2] As regards to Aceh, the central government policy on Provincial Institution in 1950 to incorporate this region into provincial part of North Sumatra, and headed by a non-Acehnese, was clearly a major situational change for the formation of their ethnic group identity. This produced correspondingly major

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[2] A number of rebellions emerged during the post-revolutionary war Indonesia. They were mostly a consequence of regional-central political tensions. We can list a few of them: The Darul Islam rebellion (1949) in West Java intended to establish an Islamic state. In 1950 in South Sulawesi a clash between the army and guerrilla leaders resulted in a similar rising under the leadership of Kahar Muzakkar. At the same time the Acehnese rebellion broke out in 1953 under leadership of Daud Beureuh joining the Darul Islam movement in West Java. Other rebellions took place in North Sulawesi in 1958, South Molucas Islands in 1956, and West Sumatera in 1960. See, Boland, *The Struggle of slam in Modern Indonesia*, The Hague: Martinus Nitjhof 1985).

changes in their ethnic-regional challenges of the central government. However, what is worth mentioning here is that the Darul Islam rebellion of Aceh during the 1950s had a definitive republican nationalist character (Sjamsuddin, 1984:23-51; Morris, 1984:7-18; Kell, 1995:3-11). In 1959, the rebellion ended, in return Jakarta recognized Aceh as a special administrative region (*daerah istimewa*) with autonomy in religious affairs, law and Islamic education. A native Acehnese, Ali Hasymi, was named as its first governor. From then on, most Acehnese were reduced to trying to negotiate favourable conditions through political parties associated with anti-government and/or Islamic ideologies, and resolved to establish an Islamic society in Aceh (Kell, 1995; Syamsuddin, 1984: 17-18).

However, by the mid-1980s a new form of rebellion in Aceh arose declaring a Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, GAM). Unlike the Darul Islam in the 1950s, the GAM's concerns were predominantly secular in nature. The movement's propaganda "made a clearly ethnic appeal to rise up against Javanese colonialism," (Kell, 1995:14) and paid great attention to "Aceh's natural wealth and past glories" (Kell, 1995:61). Not only did The Declaration of Independence of Aceh-Sumatera make no mention of religious issues, the key actors within the GAM were dominated by secular-elite intelligentsias who emerged during the process of economic development (Kell, 1995: 67-8). By highlightting the economic resources of the region, and by giving voice to a sense of resentment against the Javanese-dominated state, the elites within GAM promoted Acehnese distrust of solutions within institutional boundaries of the Indonesian state. Thus according to GAM independence from Indonesia is the final solution for the failure of institutional building of Indonesia within the framework of center-periphery relation.

## C. Traditional Authority, Islamic Mobilization, and Rebellion: The Darul Islam

The process of incorporation into, and penetration by, the modern state was clearly a major situational change for the Aceh community in post-war Indonesia. Consequently, it produced a shift in the Acehnese ethnic-regional identity. How then did this

shift in identity promote the secessionist rebellion during the 1950s under the banner of Islam? My preliminary observation of the roots of the Aceh Darul Islam rebellion reveals that such a formation of an ethnic-regional identity on a popular level was accompanied by the dramatic decline in the power, authority and status of the indigenous elites as a result of state penetration. Both changes contributed to the development of the appeals to primordial sentiments which were useful for political mobilization during the rebellion.

The crisis of traditional elites in Aceh can be traced in the periodic decline of the Sultanate of Aceh and the expansion of Dutch colonial conquest in North Sumatra between the 18th and early 19th centuries. During Dutch colonial times, there was rivalry "to gain control over the politics and economy of Aceh between *ulama* (Muslim scholars and clerics) and nobility (the *uleebalang*) within the sultanate of Aceh" (Morris, 1984:37-40; Kell, 1995:17-18).[3] Concerned primarily with the defence of the Acehnese sultanate territories, the *uleebalang* could not provide the unity necessary for resistance against the Dutch. Most compromised with the colonial government and as administrators in the colonial government, the nobility became politically dependent on Dutch authority and alienated from the wider population. By the early 18th century, the "sultanate of Aceh became a weak institution, largely without influence in the internal affairs of territory" (Kell, 1995:19), the struggle for resistance came to be led by the ulama who had always been revered in Aceh but had been largely uninvolved in the running of society. During the 1880s, as Anthony Reid notes, "the war was gradually transformed into genuinely popular cause under ulama inspiration." (Reid, 1979:60) The foremost theorist and tactician of the holy war was Teungku Chik di Tiro of Pidie (Reid, 1979:58). However, by 1903 a stable *uleebalang* administration under Dutch control was in place and, in

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[3] Nobility and ulama classes represent social elites in most Indonesian Muslim communities referring to political and religious elites. In Aceh, Sultan Iskandar Muda brought this nobility into being during the golden era of the Aceh sultanate in the 16th century. See, Hadi, *Islam and Politics in Aceh in Seventeenth Century*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2003), p. 14-56.

1913, the Dutch could at last be said to have conquered Aceh, the ulama having finally given up the guerrilla struggle (Morris, 1984: 71-73).

In the late 1920s a reformist religious revival was initiated by the ulama, inspired by "the new forces transforming both the Islamic and Indonesian worlds" (Noer, 1984: 42-46). The reformist movement swept the rural areas of Aceh, providing the Acehnese with a hope for a better future for their society. Reid (1979) observed that social and economic conditions in the early twentieth century Aceh were conducive to the success of the revival: the collapse of pepper production in the mid-1910s led to high unemployment in the 1930s, and consequently were drawn to the teachings of the reformist ulama. The reformist enthusiasm culminated in the formation in 1939 of the All Aceh Ulama Association (Pusat Ulama Seluruh Aceh, PUSA). This organization was "the nearest approach to a popular movement of an all-Aceh character" (Reid, 1979:64). The PUSA Acehnese demographics rendered it acceptable to the Dutch, for whom the activities of Indonesian nationalists were a greater cause of concerns. But as the divisions between the nobility, ulama and their subjects became bitter in the fading years of Dutch rule in Aceh, "all of the anti-establishment forces gradually associated themselves with Ulama Association (PUSA), transforming them in the process into more political organization" (Morris, 1984: 77).

A short period of Japanese occupation in the former Dutch East Indies was welcomed by the ulama (Sjamsuddin, 1985:31-33). With the collapse of the Japanese war effort in 1945, Aceh joined the struggle for Indonesian independence. In October 1945, the ulama indicated their support for the new republic with the "Declaration of Ulama Throughout Aceh," signed by four prominent religious leaders, including Daud Beureuh, and declaring the struggle a holy war (Sjamsuddin, 1985:39; Morris, 1984:99-111). This support did not, however, extend to the "new official Republican leadership" in Aceh, which "was virtually to a man the *uleebalang* establishment," (Morris, 1984:107) and many of whose members looked forward to the restoration of Dutch power and of the prewar status quo. In these circumstances, as Reid noted, "the revolutionary impulse came from a coalition of PUSA

ulama and young educated in the Islamic learning institutions" (Reid, 1979:90).

The Ulama resistance movements soon became social revolutions as these groups confronted the *uleebalang* (Kahin, 1970). By March 1946, the nobility had been decimated, and political, economic, and military power in Aceh fell into the hands of the PUSA ulama and forces associated with it. From then on, the only institution that defined the character of anti-Dutch nationalist movements was the ulama. During the central government's preoccupation with the struggle against the re-imposition of Dutch authority in Java, from the late-1940s to the mid-1950s, this new emerging elite in Aceh operated with almost complete autonomy (Kell, 1995:45-46). Its members consolidated their positions within the Acehnese social structure and controlled all political and economic activities, including "a lucrative barter trade across the Straits of Malacca with Penang and Singapore" (Kell, 1994:46). But Aceh's choice to integrate itself into the struggle for the Indonesian independence was mainly inspired by the desire to run its regional affairs without interference from Jakarta. The Acehnese elites also expected that their region's contribution to the national revolution would be acknowledged in the new Indonesian state. But the new-formed government in Jakarta soon demonstrated that it had no intention of securing both the creation of an autonomous Acehnese region and preserving the role of existing traditional elites in governing their territory. With the central government policy of provincial division in 1949, in which Aceh was incorporated into the Province of North Sumatra, the Acehnese community came to see the their support of the new Republic betrayed (Sjamsuddin, 1984:57-63; Kell, 1995:18-19).

This process was furthered by the disruption of traditional authority structures. As Jakarta attempted to establish leadership of the modern state machinery in Aceh, it removed the ulama from positions of political and administrative power and replaced them with new elites based on modern-Westernized measures as

administrators over the region4 (van Dijk, 1981: 236). The cumulative effect of these pressures on Aceh was, as noted by Morris, "a situation where completing elites, ulama and young educated in Islamic schools, were seeking ways to regain support and legitimacy in their community. Thus they were in a position to take advantage of the incipient ethnic-regional consciousness by articulating and ideologising it" (Morris, 1984:57)

This situation gave rise to "anti-Jakarta" sentiments, particularly in the period of centralization of state institutions and military organizations. With the undermining of the *uleebalang* influence, it was the ulama that were able to maintain the claims of leadership in Aceh territory. The emergence of the Darul Islam revolt in West Java in 1949, followed by other regions in South Kalimatan (1951) and South Sulawesi (1952), facilitated the popular discontent amongst the Acehnese arising from the Indonesian government's disruptive policies in the region. Subsequently various political movements and militias were formed, and although few groups demanded a separate state of Aceh, the dominant trend was to declare the Acehnese rebellion as a part of the Darul Islam in West Java, Indonesia. Within this framework, the Aceh Darul Islam movement against the Indonesian republic did not seek to secede but, instead, to transform it.

Like the Darul Islam movements in other regions, the role of the ulama in the Acehnese rebellion was salient. The population was mobilized by religious leaders around Islamic symbols; not exclusively ethnic, but at the same time tied with Indonesian nationalism (Morris, 1984:111-117; Sjamsuddin, 1984). While the idea of an Islamic state might have been unclear, in Aceh, the mobilization for rebellion developed out of attempts by elites to respond to institutional changes that threatened the traditional structure and authority: namely the Muslim communities in

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4 Karl Jackson (1980), in his study on the Darul Islam of West Java, suggested that the decline of traditional authority has become a source of social discontent that inspired Muslim elite in West Java to join the rebellion. See, Karl Jackson, *Islam, Traditional Authority and the Darul Islam Rebellion,* Berkley: Stanford University Press, 1980).

Indonesia. It appears that by expressing the idea of an Islamic state in the context of an ethnic-regional identity (i.e., the assertion that the cultural integrity of Indonesian Muslim community makes self-government not just a desirable goal but an inalienable right), the ulama of Aceh ensured the escalation of political tension with the Jakarta administration into a direct confrontation between secular-state nationalism and Islamic nationalism.

Two important political developments in post-independence Indonesia contributed to the Islamic mobilization in Aceh. Firstly, as the ulama power and authority base grew stronger during the Indonesian revolution, the ulama leadership began to dominate the administrative structure of Aceh-Indonesia. As a result, Islamic symbols and identity became a source of unification of the Acehnese in their relationship with central government. Secondly, the failure of political elites in Jakarta to adopt an Islamic constitution in Indonesia in 1945 had been particularly important in signifying the formulation of vision of an Islamic state for the Darul Islam rebellions (van Dijk, 1981; Boland, 1984:20). This, linked to the formation of provincial institutions in which Aceh was incorporated into non-Acehnese-led North Sumatera government in 1948, determined the success of the ulama to integrate the political interest of Acehnese territory into its religious markers.

The Acehnese population supported the rebellion that began in 1953. The Ulama, high ranking civil servants and ex-military commanders constituted the core members of the rebellion but tens of thousands of villagers joined (van Dick, 1981:219). Even if the supply of arms limited their ability to fully participate, they supported the rebellion by monitoring Indonesian troop movements or providing material support (Sjamsuddin, 1985:81-86). As Sjamsuddin noted, the ulama could mobilize the population in large part because of the respect they enjoyed among the Acehnese and because of their Islamic goals (Sjamsuddin, 1985:83).

The settlement of the rebellion narrowed the field of possibilities for the future resistance in Aceh. Three aspects were important in the resolution of hostilities. First, the declining struggle for an Islamic state in other regions with the capture of its

central leader, Kartosowirjo-West Java, in 1960, and the assassination of Kahar Muzakar-South Sulawesi, in 1961, created a situation in which the Acehnese leaders began to question the moral objective for the establishment of an Islamic state (Boland, 1984:63; van Dijk, 1981:214).

Second, the compromise with the Republic allowed the Acehnese elite to redefine its objectives in regional terms. Meanwhile, the elites abandoned their broader struggle. In order to weaken the Acehnese aspirations, in late 1958 the Indonesian government reinstated Aceh's provincial status, returned many PUSA members to their previous positions, and reassigned Acehnese soldiers to serve in the region. When a cease-fire was reached in early 1959, rebel leaders were split into groups between those who rejected the Jakarta compensation and those who compromised and accepted a settlement on Aceh. However, most rebels abandoned Daud Beureueh's group, the radical faction, and joined Hasan Saleh's which negotiated the compromise with the government. At the end, the government agreed to extending wide-ranging autonomy in religion, education, and customary law, under a new status as a "special region" (Sjamsuddin, 1985: 81-84).[5]

Third, such an agreement with Jakarta further divided the Acehnese political elite. Most civil servant and administrators of the region, who later joined the Darul Islam rebellion, accepted the settlement with the Republic. They were not ulama, but had strongly supported the PUSA leadership during the revolution. Agreements that were perceived as a return to the special status of Aceh meant a return of power and cultural autonomy for them. This segment of the political elites served as the primary actors who persuaded the Acehnese community to settle for an Islamic Aceh, far short of the broader goal of an Islamic state for Indonesia. The peace was reached between Darul Islam of Aceh and Jakarta in 1962 that brought Aceh into the Indonesian nation.

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[5] Within the Indonesian provincial government system, there are only two provinces with special status: Aceh and Yogyakarta.

**D. The New Order and the Rise of Free Aceh Movement**

By the end of the 1980s another Acehnese rebellion against the central government arose: the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, GAM). This second rebellion emerged with different leaders, agenda, and forms of mobilization. Nevertheless, its rise can be explained as an unintended consequence of the three pillars of the New Order's institutional development: political homogenization, military force to eliminate political opposition, and economic growth (Sulistyanto, 2001:213-230). Although a peace settlement was reached between Aceh leaders and the central government in 1962, the authoritarian rule of the New Order tightened the institutional constraints on Aceh and promoted greater integration into the Indonesian nation. This political development created its own untenable tensions and, in the case of Aceh-center relations, led to escalating violence. My argument is straight forward: the defeat of the Acehnese in the Darul Islam uprising, the strong sense of communal identity, and their special status, created they political and social environment in which negative reaction to the economic exploitation of their region and the use of military force to solve center-regional problems found fertile soil.

Historically speaking, less then a decade after Aceh had been granted "special region" status, in 1965 a major political change took place in Jakarta: the fall of Sukarno and the emergence of the New Order government under Suharto. Aceh was one of the areas where this new government received warmly, primarily because of its strong anti-Communist stance (Boland, 1982:29). However, the Acehnese soon found that their early optimism had been misplaced. The authoritarian character in the ending years of Sukarno's rule continued to appeal for the institutional development of the New Order. Not only did the regime have no intention of giving wider scope to Islam as a social and political force, Aceh's special status faded rapidly with the centralization of political, economic and military power. The regime legitimized its centralizing character by promoting homogenization, military force to suppress any opposition –especially those who were separatist in nature—and economic development. In the political sphere, mobilization in favor of an Islamic state was

no longer tolerated. Furthermore, Suharto and the military consolidated their power relative to the legislature, political parties and business groups, which became very restricted. As Robison (1987:154) noted, "patrimonial networks were the only means left of accessing resources and power in Suharto's New Order."

In 1968, the Acehnese provincial assembly implemented elements of Islamic law through the regional regulation No. 6 (Schwarz, 2001:316-318). Despite its limited application, for instance to minor issues such as holiday in public offices and schools on Friday to give Muslims time to go for Friday prayers, the regulation was never approved by Jakarta. In the realm of education, the ulama proposed modifications that would have reconciled the traditional Islamic schools and the public elementary schools, so that the Acehnese would be exposed to both. This proposal never received an answer from the Ministry of National Education, and was therefore never implemented. Within these constraints, the ulama could no longer promote Islam in the political realm in Aceh and were restricted even in the Islamic education system.

In 1973, the New Order took steps toward curtailing all political parties, especially those associated with the struggle for an Islamic state (Liddle, 1985:97-119). Through manipulation, co-optation, and repression, the New Order virtually rendered impotent the Islamic organizations. It maintained the ban on Masyumi, the largest Islamic party in the 1950s, and prevented its former leaders from leading a government-created version of the party under the Development Unity Party (PPP). Its creation further weakened Islamic politics by forcing all Muslim social organizations with different ideological backgrounds under the same umbrella. As the vehicles to promote Islamic values were constrained, some ulama in Aceh sought to utilize the new channels for access to the regime and its patronage network. They joined the government party, Golongan Karya (Golkar), and the regime-sponsored Indonesian Council of Ulama (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, MUI).

As the role of the ulama declined, the central government fostered the development of the technocratic elite of Aceh (Kell,

1995:87). Having received a modern education in Jakarta and abroad, yet strongly committed to Islamic values, this elite was sympathetic to the government's modernization programs. It gained ascendancy in administrative positions, the military, the provincial government, and the university, especially the local Syiah Kuala Unversity (Amal, 1997: 218-219). The technocratic vision began to supersede the Islamic vision of the ulama. And through this power relation among the elites, the central government was able to extend its influence and create a constituency with a strong interest in preserving the New Order institutional order. It is such a division in the elites of the Acehnese community that explains the relatively weaker support for Acehnese secession movement that emerged in the mid- 1970s and revived in the end of 1980s.

Economic development was the primary pillar of the New Order regime's legitimacy. In Aceh, this particular aspect of modernization was closely linked to the development of central-regional industrial enclaves. In 1971, large reserves of liquid natural gas (LNG) were discovered in North Aceh. By 1977, an industrial zone had been created near Lhoksumawe where most of the LNG reserves were located. By the 1980s, Aceh was supplying 30% of the country's oil and gas exports, which were the government's main source of revenue. Other energy-dependent industries were also established, such as the Aceh fertilizer plant and cement factories (Schwarz, 2001:311).

However, problems remained of economic resource exploitation in Aceh that were directed by Jakarta following a centralized pattern of fiscal management policy. The logic of the system followed that of a unitary state institution with national development goals that superseded any regional or provincial considerations. As a result, almost all of the revenues from these investments moved directly to foreign investors, their Indonesian partners in Jakarta, and the central government. The provincial government, in turn, received its annual budget through a system of allocation at the central government level and retained few rights to taxation. Therefore, the provincial budget amounted to only a very small fraction of the total revenues generated in the province. Such a centralized financial institution created a

situation in which the Aceh population received only a few benefits derived from this economic web.[6] A large proportion of Acehnese consequently saw little progress in their living standards, while LNG production and other industrial ventures developed.

Another pillar that constituted the New Order institutional approach to Aceh was the expansion of the military. Under the New Order regime, the military had come to play a central role. In line with the notion of unitary state system, the armed forces saw themselves as the ultimate guardians of national unity. The strong military presence in Aceh since the early 1970s, as Crouch (1989:46) noted, "is a consequence of institutional arrangements of the New Order's policy on national unity and political stability." Islamic politics was co-opted as they were seen as a threat to the state, and Aceh had been a main region where the issue of the Islamic state had been strong. While a negotiated solution, mediated by Acehnese military officers and politicians, allowed Islamic rebels to reintegrate into Acehnese society peacefully, the armed forces were not as tolerant of separatist rebels in the 1970s and in the late 1980s (Kell, 1985:57). Moreover, disgruntled elites resented the central government's control over LNG and other industrial production. As a result, it was common for the armed forces to use military repression as a primary tool to maintain national unity and political stability.

Hasan Tiro founded the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, GAM) in October 1976, he was at the time a local businessman and had previously been a representative of the Darul Islam at the United Nations. Its first emergence was marginal and had garnered little support. The GAM denounced the "Javanese" colonial empire and especially the exploitation of Aceh's natural resources and the use of military force to maintain

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[6] In the midst of national economic growth between 1987-1995, Aceh population was still left in agricultural production. Up until the 1980s, more than 68 percent of Acehnese remained employed in the agricultural sector and there were virtually no significant development in the industrial zone. Many of the skilled workers originated from out-side Aceh and lived in gated compounds. See, Hall, *Indonesian Economy under the New Order*, (Brisbane: Monash University Press, 1996), pp. 68-70.

control. With only a few hundred supporters, the movement declared the independence of Aceh-Sumatra in 1977, and raised the GAM flag in various locations, but undertook no significant military actions. This secessionist movement was formed mainly of intellectuals, technocrats and businessmen. Morris (1989) and Kell (1995) agree in their respective analysis of the movement that it failed to capture wide support, in part because it barely mentioned Islam. Certainly, the absence of an Islamic agenda kept the ulama from supporting the movement and a few even denounced it. Brown (1990:116-127) argues that among the broader population, it was too early in the development of the province's large economic resources for strong resentment at the few socio-economic benefits of industrial production to have arisen. The ethnic appeals to an Acehnese independent state did not seem to capture a wide audience. And the 1970s GAM was eclipsed by a political trend among the Acehnese ulama and technocratic elite to integrate the territory into Indonesian nation through maintaining their links with central institutions, such as bureaucracy, political parties (Golkar and the PPP) and Islamic social organizations such as Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama.

The GAM secessionist movement re-emerged in the late 1980s. In this moment, the movement seemed to enjoy much broader support among the local population and, although remained relatively small number in fighters, was better armed (Kell, 1985:43-48). Yet, as in the 1970s, the Acehnese were not necessarily supportive of the idea of an independent Aceh but they saw an opportunity to share in common grievances against the Indonesian government. A couple of significant factors contributing to the stronger influence of the GAM were the continuing presence of the armed forces to protect industrial plants and the increasing gap created between the wealth surrounding LNG production relative to property of the population in Aceh.

What is worth noting from this second emergence is the fact that, while the GAM hold ethnic-communal mobilization, the Acehnese had begun to shift the nature of their grievances. From the Darul Islam rebellion, they retained their sense of identity, which was distinct from that the rest of Indonesian nation. Kell (1995:94) notes that:

> [The] Acehnese had fought for an Islamic Indonesia, had lost, and had retreated in a regionalist defense of Islam and local culture. As they become more marginalized, the autonomy for Islam was never implemented and only a small portion of the elite seemed to reap benefits from the New Order regime.

It is against this background that, for the Aceh population the exploitation of natural resource, other industrial production, and increased military presence showed that the Acehnese had little means to gain benefits from the development in their territory.

New Order's response to the rebellion was out of proportion to the estimate of GAM forces. Since 1989, parts of Aceh, especially its northern and western regions, were designated as a Military Operation region (Daerah Operasi Militer, DOM). In July 1990, 6,000 troops were sent to supplement the 6,000 already in the province, while GAM forces were numbered at only a few hundred (Sulistyanto, 2001:37; Sukma, 2003:24). By 1993, the rebellion was crushed but the armed forces continued their operation. Since the estimated that thousands of villagers supported the GAM, soldiers used torture, arbitrary killings, arrests, detentions, and other means of weeding out supporters. According to an Indonesian human rights group, Forum Peduli HAM (Forum for Human Rights Concern), which was founded after the end of the New Order in 1998, 2,000 people were killed during the decade of DOM implementation in Aceh. Hundreds also disappeared and more than 2,300 people were tortured (Sulistyanto, 2001: 40-42).

The continuing use of violence to suppress GAM activities, even after the sudden collapse of New Order, has brought cumulative grievances among the Acehnese as they share common suffering and alienation within the Indonesian state. The GAM secessionist movement then retained tremendous symbolic force as an organization through which all Acehnese grievances could be channeled. As a consequence, when democratization of the Indonesian regimes in post-Suharto New Order allowed cumulative grievances to express themselves, civilian movement began to demand a referendum on the status of Aceh (Sukma, 2003: 28-35). Although Jakarta has never admitted the demand for

the referendum, it is evident that a large proportion of the population supported independence.

As this paper seeks to argue, the development a small armed-secessionist struggle to widely-supported civilian move-ment is very much shaped by the New Order institutional legacy. With the use of widespread violence, the New Order regime shifted the Acehnese identity further away from an Indonesian national identity. As Brown (1999) notes on the armed separatist movements in Southeast Asia, "the terms of inclusion in the nation became defined as the silent acceptance of exploitation of natural resources for national interests, with few local benefits and violent military repression of suspected opposition." Within such a situation, many Acehnese abandoned their loyalty to the Indonesian nation. The objectives of creating an Islamic state had long given way to disillusion and, now, disgust with the treatment of the Acehnese at the hands of Jakarta's armed forces. Many people in Aceh had suffered from the military operation and, therefore, many more Acehnese shifted their support to the secession. From marginal movement, GAM ethnic appeals came to symbolize resistance not only to the New Order but also to the Indonesian state and nation.

## D. Ethnicity, Institution and the Choice to Secede: Concluding Remarks

As the purpose of this paper is to explain the continuity and change in Acehnese rebellion, our examination of the two periods of ethno-secessionist movement has offered several answers that illustrate a direction opposite to that which most studies on Acehnese rebellion have claimed. It is the interaction between institutional changes and opportunities that explain why such a politics of ethnic identity arose, and in what way ethnic identity was mobilized and politicized in the two period of rebellion. Primordial approaches to the phenomenon, as area specialists have pointed out, tend to interpret the meaning of the emergence of identity political movements by focusing on their cultural dimension. Consequently, as Acehnese case demonstrates, there are no significant differences between historical cultural /

social profiles among the ethnic movements in the two periods of mobilization.

My analysis to the two phases of rebellion reveals that the strength of Islam for mobilization in the first Acehnese rebellion and its virtual absence of such a mobilization amongst the GAM leaders, defies the framework of the primordial approaches. To the primordialists, ethno-nationalist mobilizations have been associated with common social and political profiles, most importantly with specific agendas to establish a state with its ethnic boundaries and a belief in a common cultural identity driving the ethnic-state's politics (Smith, 1987). At that point, the cultural approach fails to explain the different political consequences of particular ethno-nationalist groups.

Historical institutionalism provides a more illuminating explanation in regards to the contrast between two different phases of rebellion in the Aceh case. The proponents of institutionalism believe that institutions are relatively autonomous of social actors and are important actors in political life. P.A. Hall has argued that institutions are "influencing an actor's definition of his own interest, by establishing his institutional responsibilities and relationship to other actors' as well as structuring power relations among actors and therefore policy outcomes" (Hall, 196:937). Similarly, Steinmo *et al.* (1992) argued that institutions shape the goals of political actors.

As the case of Acehnese rebellion, two aspects of Indonesian institutional history explain the variations between the Islamic character of rebellion in the 1950s and the ethnic appeals in the late 1980s. The first involves attempts at state policies and penetration of regional territories, especially in the post-revolutionary Indonesia, to weaken the traditional structure of ethnic-regional communities. The elites' attempts of maintaining their legitimacy coincide with the search at the popular level for a response to the state's institutional penetration. In regards to Aceh, this in turn engendered feelings of insecurity out of which a new basis for communal identity was beginning to develop. The Acehnese joined the Indonesian Republic from a point where they had formed a unique sense of community through their past glory

as a regional power, their resistance to the Dutch, and their strong ties with the ulama.

The Darul Islam rebellion contested the Indonesian state's decision to discard the Islamic option in favour of a nationalist-secularist concept. The subsequent autonomy and special status of Aceh were sufficient for Jakarta to bring back the elite to their socio-political position. This political development, however, stabilized the Aceh-Jakarta relations until the next institutional juncture when, under the Suharto New Order regime, a more centralist, repressive, and exploitative form of the state institution was implemented.

Under the New Order, the Aceh-Jakarta relations under-went an unintended transformation accompanying the second aspect of the state's institutional development favouring an authoritarian path to establish order and stability: control through military actions. Suharto's repression of Aceh regional demands, especially severe and brutal suppression of any secessionist aspirations during the 1970's and 1980's, and subsequent political accommodation among the newly emerging Acehnese elites through state bureaucracy and co-opted Islamic party, PPP, led the Acehnese to conflate the ideas of an ethnic-based rebellion against the central government. Consequently, the use of force during Suharto's authoritarian institution unintentionally narrowed the ability to convince the Acehnese population of the benefits of New Order's institutional building. Such violence had created the political opportunities for marginalized ethnic-elites within the GAM to mobilize the population by perceiving the Indonesian nation as exploitative and destructive for the Acehnese. All of this was largely responsible for broadening and deepening the GAM secession struggle, especially during the particularly repressive decade of the 1990s.

In summary, the insights provided by historical institu-tionalism as an approach to ethno-nationalist movement lies in its ability to explain variations and irregularities in its mobili-zation outcomes. This makes it a particularly challenging approach to primordialist account, because one of the noticeable features of cultural identities is their contingency. They appear only within some groups whose political claims only appear in certain

occasions. The nature and intensity of these claims fluctuate, and vary from one movement group to another. The contextual character of ethnic identities and their political consequences suggest that ethno-regional identity does not emerge sponta-neously from distinct ethnic markers, since it serves only as a point of departure. Rather, it is shaped by institutional design. Institu-tions, therefore, are a central point for an analysis to illuminate the processes of identity creation, transformation, and mobilization that lie at the heart of politics of ethno-nationalism.

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