



Questioning Aceh's Inevitability: A Story of Failed National Integration?

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Introduction

The proliferation of ethno-political² conflict in the post-Cold War era has lent support to the exemplary liberal doctrine stipulating that what is repressed by authoritarian structures will be unleashed once the lid is lifted, for example, by democratisation. This 'inevitability doctrine' is a prevalent liberal 'we told you so'-device for emphasising the dangers of authoritarian governance. It diagnoses that authoritarianism alone has caused the evils and that the 'burden of guilt'³ lies exclusively with central authority which has failed to complete the project of national integration. This study will by analysing the emergence⁴ of the separatist movement, GAM⁴, in Aceh, North Sumatra - Indonesia, question this liberal wisdom and argue that there is nothing inevitable about

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² Ted Robert Gurr, *People Versus States: Minorities at Risk in the New Century*, 2000. This term will consistently be employed to describe ethnic conflict since part of the enterprise here is to reject mono-causal explanations of conflict involving ethnicity in order to appreciate that ethnicity will not translate into conflict unless it is politicised and becomes part of a specific political rhetoric.

³ This phrase is used by Morris to distinguish between the 'national integration model' which places the 'burden of guilt for the existence of a problem between central authority and an ethnically distinct region' on the periphery and the 'internal colonialism model' which places the 'burden of guilt' on the centre. Eric Eugene Morris, *Islam and Politics in Aceh: A Study of Center-Periphery Relations in Indonesia*, 1983, p. 3-6. As this study will reveal, the explanatory utility of such distinction remains unconvincing. Obviously, the refusal here to place the 'burden of guilt' on neither the centre nor the periphery should not be interpreted as a positive appraisal of New Order policies, rather the opposite. However, the emergence of separatist ideology in Aceh is simply not explanatory only by considering the behaviour of the centre.

⁴ *Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* (The Free Aceh Movement) was established in 1976 and continues to fight for Acehnese independence with arms, allegedly with intensified strength.

contemporary level of separatist conflict and mass-mobilisation against Jakarta in Aceh.⁵ In essence, it will contest the historical determinism of the 'inevitability doctrine' and demonstrate that the course of Acehnese history has certainly not been unilinear.

Authoritarian governance, state policies and 'objective' circumstances⁶ are not explanations of separatism but sources of malleable identity indicators. This is not to say, that these factors *per se* have no relevance but for any 'objective' circumstance, be it ethnoreligious identity or relative economic deprivation, to matter in political life, they have to be made available and persuasive as identity indicators to the masses. This availability can only come about when agents articulate these 'objective' circumstances as defining features of the Acehnese situation. Hence, the analysis allows for revelation of the ways in which so-called 'objective' circumstances have been politicised in order to mobilise support for an evolving specific regional ideology, ethnic nationalism, which may or may not translate into separatist conflict.

It follows, that the question is not so much how does "identity, incentives and capacity translate into ethno-political action"⁷ but *who* translates these attributes into ethno-political action. In Aceh, the agents of the narratives, prior to the emergence of separatist ideology, have been contending elites producing contending Acehnese narratives motivated by a desire to secure their future position in Acehnese society. These narratives developed gradually as products of calculated political viability. Admittedly, the nature of post-colonial state policies and the responses they have generated among the elite in Aceh are very important variables. The responses in the periphery, however, do not serve to establish a deterministic relationship between state policies and separatism. Both variables originate in the incompatibility between the post-colonial Indonesian state-building project and regional ideology but separatism is certainly not an inevitable outcome of this vertical conflict.

⁵Robinson's analysis makes the same conclusion but cites different sources of inevitability. "... Violent conflict in Aceh after 1989 was not the inevitable consequence of primordial Acehnese sentiments, nor a manifestation of a venerable Acehnese tradition of resistance to outside authority or Islamic rectitude. ... it was the unintended, but largely inevitable, consequence of certain characteristic policies and practises of the New Order state itself." Geoffrey Robinson, "Rawan is as Rawan Does: The Origins of Disorder in New Order Aceh" in *Indonesia*, No. 66, Oct 1998, p. 153. My enterprise is to take the argumentation one step further and maintain that even in the face of New Order policies, there is nothing inevitable about Aceh. Robinson's conclusion of future prospects for resolution is therefore more optimistic than mine would be. His model of analysis produces a mono-causal explanation of separatism and therefore a mono-dimensional solution to contemporary conflict in Aceh. In other words, according to Robinson's argument, if policies are reversed and compensation is provided, the ethno-political conflict in Aceh will be resolved. The implication of this study is that resolution of conflict in Aceh will have to deal with the positions of aspiring elites (GAM), not only with the 'objective' sources of discontent.

⁶In the Acehnese case, the prevalent 'objective' circumstances are distinct ethnoreligious identity and relative economic deprivation.

⁷Gurr 2000, p. 79.

The narratives have served to alienate the Acehnese from 'the common Indonesian project'.⁸ Construction of an Acehnese regional identity as victims of the Indonesian project has been the concern of these narratives. Chronologically, the victimisation discourse told of the Acehnese first, as victims of marginalisation of their religious identity; secondly, as victims of relative economic deprivation; thirdly, as victims of neo-colonialism⁹; and finally, as victims of extensive human rights violations. Whereas the earlier narratives were formulated exclusively by elite groups, the latter has largely been articulated by popular forces operating as agents in a less co-opted and less repressed civil society. Recent moves towards democratisation have expanded the actors on the political scene and the potential formulators of the 'definition of the situation'.¹⁰

The basic finding of this study is that the likelihood of vertical conflict translating into separatism is highly contingent on the nature of the horizontal conflict within the region in question.¹¹ Vertical conflict between a region and a centre may be very real, but the way in which this conflict is politicised as a mobilisation factor is determined by the nature of elite struggle within the region. The narratives produced by this elite struggle are not a mere reflection of the political realities of the vertical conflict. They are also determined by calculation of political viability of the narrative. Political viability is dependent not only on vertical conflict, but also on popular sentiment and international stance. By rejecting, that the emergence of separatist ideology and activity in 1976 was determined solely by state policies, it is argued that there is nothing inevitable about Aceh. Surely, the level of mass-mobilisation witnessed today is largely contingent on Suharto's response to the resumption of separatist conflict in 1989. But without 1976 there would have been no 1989, and without 1989 there would have been no 1998.

The overall structure of this study will incorporate the complementarity of vertical and horizontal conflict rather than rigidly follow chronology of events. Thus, the origins of the 1989 rebellion will be traced by considering first, the nature of vertical conflict and then, the significance of horizontal conflict for the development of separatist ideology

⁸Cf. Anderson who maintains that "'Independent Aceh" or "Free Aceh" began to become suddenly popular in the late 1980s ... because more and more Acehnese were losing any hope and confidence that they had a share in a common Indonesian project." Benedict R. O'G. Anderson, "Indonesian Nationalism Today, and in the Future" in *Indonesia*, No. 67, Apr 1998, p. 4.

⁹Note that this study makes a distinction between internal colonialism and neo-colonialism and that relative economic deprivation therefore differs from the practise of neo-colonialism. See the discussion of GAM ideology below.

¹⁰Morris 1983.

¹¹Vertical conflict is a conflict which manifests itself between two hierarchically different actors. Vertical conflict, then, can be a conflict between different layers of society, or as in this case, a conflict between a region and central authority. Horizontal conflict, on the other hand, is a conflict which manifests itself between two hierarchically similar actors. Horizontal conflict, then, can be a conflict within the same layer of society as in this case, within the regional elite. Horizontal conflict is also used to describe the contemporary divisions within Acehnese civil society.

and rebellion. This chapter will demonstrate that there was nothing inevitable about the emergence of armed separatism in Aceh. The following two chapters on the resurgence of armed conflict in 1989 and 1998 follows chronological events and concludes that events in 1998 were largely contingent on events in 1989. The extent to which 1998 was determined by events originating in 1989 is largely explicable by the changed nature of the political environment. The current political environment is more conducive to popular action and less conducive to elite action and manipulation of 'objective' circumstances. But first, the theoretical assumptions of the national integration story will be elaborated on, as will considerations of the theoretical implications of the findings presented in this study.¹²

The Dubious Wisdom of the National Integration Story

The Indonesian experience of escalation of regionalist rebellion during democratic governance in the 1950's and more recently since 1998 raises the question of whether there is a link between democratisation and ethno-political conflict. In the 1950's, the period of parliamentary democracy ensuing independence was characterised by the challenging exercise of deciding with what to 'fill the glass'.¹³ Now, in the aftermath of Suharto's fall in 1998, Indonesia is again seen struggling with its immense ethnic diversity, and ethno-political violence is intensifying. Strangely unanimously Western and Asian leaders, the Indonesian ruling elite and most of the international press are now anxiously warning of 'Balkanisation'. The 'Balkanisation' scenario, however, is inextricably linked to the dubious wisdom of the 'artificial state thesis'. This thesis

¹²Two limitations of this study should be emphasised; firstly, the bias against consideration of how pre-colonial and colonial politics has shaped the post-colonial Indonesian state and secondly, the constrained availability of literature on the period from 1989-2001.

There is no doubt that the elite structure in Aceh owes much to the disruption of traditional social fabric caused by colonial policies. Due to restricted space, however, I have felt compelled to minimise consideration of how colonialism has shaped post-colonial Indonesian and Acehnese politics to simplified and summarative paragraphs. The appreciation of state policies has largely been confined to the moment of conception of the independent Indonesian state. In this way, the scope for explaining emergence of separatism in Aceh has been somehow compromised.

The documentation of developments in Aceh after 1989 is largely produced by NGOs and possess a clear advocacy element. In addition, I have had to rely on journalistic rather than academic analysis which may have biased the analysis as I have not had the possibility of doing any primary research. The lack of availability of translated literature on the position of the elites in Aceh during the 1990's have confined me to consider the widely publicised public outcry, the intensification of violence and clashes between GAM and Indonesian security forces after 1998 as the sole expressions of separatist and anti-Jakarta sentiment. On the other hand, the interplay between the elite and 'print-capitalism' in the process of mobilisation may not be very significant. In this way, the fact that I do not master the Indonesian language has clearly compromised my work.

¹³"We already have a glass, but this glass has yet to be filled; one person wants to fill it with milk, another with soda, and yet another with forbidden rice wine. In fact Sukarno has already filled the glass with rice wine, but this has to be thrown out because he did this without the agreement of the people who own the glass." Hasan Saleh, the military leader of *Darul Islam* in Aceh, op. cit. in Morris 1983, p. 172.

regards the incongruence between the nation and the state to be the main destabilising factor.

It maintains that the origins of secessionism are to be found in the arbitrariness of post-colonial geographical borders establishing artificial and highly heterogeneous state-nations¹⁴ and which are, therefore, inherently fragile. A slightly less simplistic variation of the 'artificial state thesis' is the 'national integration model'.¹⁵ This model focuses on the fact that these state-nations have rarely become the nation-states they aspired to be. On this account, the failed enterprise of post-colonial national integration - that is, replacement of traditional and primordial identities by a civic nationalist identity - renders heterogeneous states unstable. Following such analysis, the more salient question is not why armed separatism occurs but "why there is not more of it?"¹⁶

Disintegration, however, is not a consequence of a particular constellation of a political entity. Separatism in Aceh, and ethnopolitical violence elsewhere in Indonesia, is not the inevitable outcome of historical facts or authoritarian rule. The reason that Indonesia will not be subject to 'Balkanisation' is not that there are only a 'few potential 'Bruneis'' whereas there are 'many potential 'Ghanas' and 'Bangladeshes''.¹⁷ It is not only so that "ethnicity is not enough".¹⁸ Authoritarianism and colonialism before it; heterogeneity; failed national integration and marginalisation of regional identity; relative economic deprivation; disruption of existing social fabric; and unfulfilled promises of regional autonomy are also 'not enough'. Most of Indonesia's outer regions have experienced similar subordination to the Indonesian project but, although ethnopolitical violence is occurring elsewhere, only Aceh and West Papua have separatist movements.

There are no 'objective' circumstances which one can merely identify as present in separatist case-studies and attach mandatory, or even particularistic, explanatory value. It follows that the exercise of simply aggregating as many factors as can be identified is of little explanatory utility.¹⁹ Any explanation of separatism which

¹⁴Term borrowed from M.R. Sukhumband Paribatra and Chai-Anan Samudavanija, "Factors Behind Armed Separatism: A Framework for Analysis" in *Ethnicity and Nationalism* by Anthony D. Smith (ed.), 1992, p. 32.

¹⁵See Morris 1983, p. 2-5.

¹⁶Ruth McVey, "Separatism and the Paradoxes of the Nation-State Perspective" in *Armed Separatism in Southeast Asia* by Lim Joo-Lock and Vani S., 1984, p. 3.

¹⁷ICG (International Crisis Group), *Indonesia's Crisis: Chronic but not Acute*, ICG Indonesia Report No. 2, May 2000, p. 16. One must be cautious with stressing the economic rationale behind a separatist conflict as secessions are often demanded although the territory seceding is not a wealthy one.

¹⁸James Mayall and Mark Simpson, "Ethnicity is not Enough: Reflection on Protracted Secessionism in the Third World" in *Ethnicity and Nationalism* by Anthony D. Smith (ed.), 1992. Likewise, Horowitz ends his comprehensive study of ethnopolitical conflict with: "Even in the most severely divided society, ties of blood do not lead ineluctably to rivers of blood". Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, 1985, p. 684.

¹⁹David Brown, "From Peripheral Communities to Ethnic Nations: Separatism in Southeast Asia" in *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 61, No. 1, 1988, p. 53. Regrettably, Kell's, otherwise greatly informative account of *the Roots of the Acehese Rebellion*, is greatly biased towards the listing of state policies and their societal effect whereas

concludes with the listing of 'objective' circumstances, severely neglects the instrumentality of these same circumstances. "Ethnicity ... is not a constant"²⁰ and neither is, for example, relative economic deprivation just an available fact. Objective reality, in other words, can be real, but silent. Silent reality, no matter how real, does not mobilise support. All political narratives have dual mobilisation impact; the impact of construction and the impact of actual reality.

The impact of construction is generated by the politicisation of 'objective' realities but is nevertheless constrained by the fact that 'objective' circumstances cannot be entirely invented. The impact of construction is contingent on both the circulation of the narrative and the extent to which the narrative mirrors actual reality. The exact relationship between reality and construction is impossible to substantiate but it remains clear that reality as a political narrative, and hence as an identity indicator, is not available unless it is constructed as such.²¹ In effect, any plausible analysis of the causes of separatism must pay sufficient attention both to the malleability of 'objective' circumstances which may or may not be politicised, and to those agents of 'the definition of the situation' who define and articulate the Acehnese narrative.

The 'artificial state thesis' and the 'national integration model' share the enterprise of emphasising how primordial identities, which by suppression do not disappear but are merely left to simmer or may even be exacerbated, will translate into ethnopolitical conflict as they are allowed to re-emerge in a conducive political environment. A corollary may be that if the channels for articulation of grievances expected from democratisation are not effectively available to the masses, rebellion and armed conflict may replace protest.²² The task of rejecting the emphasis on the continuity of the primordial comprises an examination of the interplay between two contingent variables, the nature of state policies²³ and the responses they have generated among

recognition of the crucial role of the elite remains marginal. Tim Kell, *The Roots of the Acehnese Rebellion, 1989-1992*, 1995. Kell's book predominantly views Aceh as a story of failed national integration. Ron Witton, "The Roots of the Acehnese Rebellion", review article in *Inside Indonesia*, No. 43, 1995.

²⁰McVey 1984, p. 15.

²¹Some indication of the extent to which a political narrative needs reality may be, that some theorists of the end of the Cold War has argued that it can largely be explained by the increasing availability in the East of images of Western standards of living. These images facilitated a sense of relative deprivation in the East and caused disbelief in the Communist system.

²²Snyder is right to draw attention to the difference between well-institutionalised and non-institutionalised democratisation but he fails to acknowledge that there are two polar consequences of a low level of institutionalisation of democracy which have implications for the development of ethnopolitical conflict. He rightly notes the possibility that "in the absence of such institutions, the freedom of speech can create an opening for nationalist mythmakers to hijack public discourse" but pays no attention the effect that it may obstruct the facilitation of peaceful ethnopolitical action and hence translate into rebellion and violent conflict instead. Jack Snyder, *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict*, 2000, p. 269; Gurr 1999, p. 86-7. Snyder's arguments is extensively inspired by Huntington's formula of "getting the sequence right" (first economic development and then political liberalisation) and seems a little naive in prescribing the establishment of consolidated civic democratic institutions before the political opening to democratic participation. Men make institutions and who might these men be in authoritarian regimes?

²³Brown is correct to assign the 'character of the state' explanatory centrality in separatist analysis but he fails to equally mention that someone has to define and pronounce this 'character of the state' for it to have

those in the periphery who compete to provide the 'definition of the situation'. The approach presented here refuses to place the 'burden of guilt' for separatist conflict on either the centre or the periphery and maintains that state policies are also 'not enough'. To apportion blame to state policies with no consideration of the nature of elite competition in the periphery amounts to highly inadequate analysis. Both these variables originate in the incompatibility between post-colonial Indonesian nationalism and regional ideology of the Indonesian state.

Whereas the neo-patrimonial character of the Indonesian state has been plausibly emphasised to combat the 'inevitability argument'²⁴, this analysis contests the one-way determinism of such approach. The vertical conflict between regional and national elites is considered as is the horizontal conflict between contending regional elites. Explanation of vertical conflict, between a region and a centre, must incorporate recognition of how horizontal conflict influences the composition of narratives of the Acehese situation. Access to state resources (jobs and different kinds of favouritism) is not solely based on personal patronage but also on whether one supports the Acehese narrative favoured by the centre. Likewise, access to popular resources (popular support) is not solely dependent on objective gains (special autonomy and development funds) but also on whether the narrative constructed has resonance among the population. Narratives, also, need reality. In fact, the main objective of elite struggle is the resolution of the tension between state resources and popular resources. In authoritarian regimes, however, popular resources are less significant to the purpose of establishing elite authority.

The significance of democratisation then is not that it causes the re-emergence of primordial sentiments but rather that it expands the number of potential formulators of the situation and the opportunities available to articulate them. Now the Acehese situation is being re-defined as, not only a case of distinct ethnoreligious identity and regional economic exploitation, but also of mass victimisation due to the extensive human rights violations committed under military counterinsurgency operations.

What is currently happening in Aceh is not an 'ethnie'²⁵ arising from a century-long era of marginalisation and repression, but a mass-mobilisation which at first sight appears anything but sporadic²⁶, but which is really a veil for a highly divided regionalism where elite factions and agents of the 'definition of the situation' are in great

any relevance to separatist mobilisation. "Since ethnic separatist movements purports to be rebellions against the state, it should come as no surprise to find that the explanation for such separatism is indeed to be found in the character of the state". Brown 1988, p. 77.

²⁴David Brown, "Neo-Patrimonialism and National Integration in Indonesia" in *The State and Ethnic Politics in Southeast Asia*, 1994.

²⁵For definition of an 'ethnie' see Anthony D. Smith, "The Problem of National Identity: Ancient, Medieval and Modern?" in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 3, 1994, p. 383.

competition to secure their future positions in Acehnese society. The current Acehnese narrative, however, differs greatly from the earlier Acehnese narratives in that it is largely formulated by popular forces rather than by a more or less established elite. This different origin and the changed nature of the Acehnese narrative are the main mobilisation factors of the contemporary strong support for self-determination in Aceh because it has served to maximise dual mobilisation impact.

Hence the emergence of Acehnese regionalism is to be found in the existence of horizontal conflict, whereas contemporary mass-mobilisation is largely explained by the new origin of the narrative (popular forces), the nature of the narrative (human rights victimisation), and the momentum of democratisation.²⁷

The Origins of the 1989 Rebellion: Constructing the Acehnese Narratives

The most essential factor in explaining the emergence of regional ideology in Aceh is that the Indonesian state-building project denied the traditional religious authority, the *ulama*,²⁸ the possibility of re-establishing this authority in Acehnese society, despite their crucial role as leaders in the anti-colonial struggle.²⁹

The disruption of the traditional Acehnese social fabric began during the Acehnese-Dutch thirty-years war from 1873-1903. The ruling elite, the *uleebalang*, made concessions to the Dutch and began collaboration with the colonising power in attempt to retain their political influence. The *ulama*, on the contrary, continued to fight against Dutch occupation.³⁰ During colonialism, the Dutch nurtured the administrative authority of the *uleebalang* which occupied elite functions, and although the *ulama* was allowed continued enjoyment of societal and administrative benefits, they were largely

²⁶Note that almost half of the Acehnese population in November 1999 rallied for a referendum in Banda Aceh.

²⁷Apart from Jakarta's obvious reluctance, other obstacles include: the incoherence of the Acehnese self-determination movement and the disagreement on the nature of an independent Acehnese state; the instability of the current Wahid presidency which may cause Conservative elements and hard-liners to resume power; the political economy of the conflict which means that both TNI and GAM is suspected to economically greatly benefit from the conflict; the TNI-business complex which in face of lack of government funding gives the military great incentives to stay in business and avoid erosion of the territorial army structure to ensure off-budget funding which is estimated to constitute 2/3 of the military budget. See Lesley McCulloch, *Trifungsi: The Role of the Indonesian Military in Business*, 2000.

²⁸The *ulama* were highly respected as religious leaders in the Acehnese Sultanate led by the royal family and the *uleebalang*. Reid 1969, p. 251.

²⁹During the Acehnese pre-colonial Sultanate, the *ulama's* religious authority was not in direct competition with the secular administrative authority of the royal family and the aristocracy (*uleebalang*) but they enjoyed high societal respect. Reid 1969, p. 251. Furthermore, the *ulama* held important positions in the secular administration, for example in the Council of State which had the powers to dethrone and elect Sultans, and were certainly not excluded from political life. Hing 1995, p. 12.

³⁰Anthony Reid, *The Contest for North Sumatra: Atjeh, the Netherlands and Britain 1858-1898*, 1969, p. 278.

excluded from political life.³¹ The origins of the conflicting conceptions of the Indonesian state held by the Acehese *ulama* and by the Javanese lies in this history of alleged pre-colonial *uleebalang* treason against the Acehese State, and the subsequent colonial erosion of the *ulama's* political influence. Hence, the key to explaining the development of regionalist ideology lies in the colonial marginalisation of the *ulama* and the erosion of the *uleebalang's* power during the 'anti-feudal social revolution' which emanated from the independence struggle in Aceh.³²

The *ulama's* bid for post-colonial power was motivated, and maybe justified, by the fact that the traditional ruling elite, the *uleebalang*, had betrayed the Acehese. It also, however, coincided with the power-vacuum left by the post-colonial marginalisation of the *uleebalang*, hence the *ulama* quest for power was also a reflection of strategic calculation. In effect, Acehese regionalist ideology initially emerged as the product of a contest for power in Acehese society, and this was to become a defining feature of the future construction of contending Acehese narratives. This contest for power, however, was also largely defined by the nature of the post-colonial Indonesian state.³³

The *ulama's* expectation that they would occupy elite functions in post-independent Aceh, accounts for a great deal of their initial commitment to the Indonesian project. But this expectation conflicted with the Indonesian project of unifying an extremely diverse and enormous archipelago. It did so because the project was a purely political one and one which did not allow space for distinguished endorsement of religious identity, even if this identity was held by the majority.³⁴ The rationale for making Indonesian state-building a secular political and nationalist project was declared by Sukarno in 1953:

"If we establish a state based on Islam, many areas whose population is not Islamic, such as the Moluccas, Bali, Flores, Timor, the Kai Islands and Sulawesi, will secede. And West Irian, which has not yet become part of the territory of Indonesia will not want to be part of the Republic."³⁵

The response of the Acehese *Darul Islam* (House of Islam) rebels was:

³¹"... The local religious leaders were permitted freedom of activity on the condition that they did not become involved in politics." Clive J. Christie, *A Modern History of Southeast Asia: Decolonization, Nationalism and Separatism*, 1996, p. 143.

³²In contrast to other parts of the Indies, moreover, Aceh was never reoccupied by the Dutch or other Allied forces, so that the social revolution was never reversed, and the revolutionary forces were able to attain an unusual degree of political, economic and military autonomy". Robinson 1998, p. 129.

³³Hence the stated approach of examining two contingent variables, namely, the nature of state policies and the responses they generated among those in the periphery who competed to provide the 'definition of the situation'.

³⁴Whereas the Dutch may not have invented 'Indonesia', they surely defined its territorial extent and consequently the necessity of making Indonesia a purely political project from its very beginning.

³⁵Brown 1994, p. 123.

"Sukarno declared he is afraid that if the State is based on religion, those who do not want religion to be the basis of the State will secede from it. Very well: Then we shall therefore be the ones to secede from a state that is based upon nationalism."³⁶

Indonesia is a clear example of the process by which a state has failed to become a nation. After the dissolution of the common purpose of independence and consequently of anti-colonial, inclusive nationalism, the artificiality of the Indonesian construct called for a nationalism which could unify the Indonesians in their commitment to the Indonesian state. The *Darul Islam* rebellion in the 1950's, however, was initially not concerned with a fragmentation of the Dutch East Indies territory but with, with what 'to fill the class' of the Indonesian state.³⁷

The persistent resistance to Jakarta present in Aceh was a reflection of a continued reluctance to acknowledge the non-Islamic character of the Old and the New Order state. In this resistance, the *ulama* played the central role as an agent of the 'definition of the situation'. As a countervailing force, the New Order state nurtured the emergence of a secular, well-educated technocratic elite which provided a different definition. Against all intentions, the latter definition became the one employed by the separatist GAM. GAM ideology combined primordial rhetoric emphasising the genealogy of Acehese identity and the 'objective' circumstance of relative economic deprivation to constitute its approximation of the 'internal colonialism model'.³⁸

After identifying the project of unitary Indonesia and its effects, each contending elites and its impact on politicisation of Acehese identity shall be considered in turn.

Contending Visions of the Indonesian State - Vertical Conflict

The appreciation of state policies originates in the acknowledgement that 'objective' circumstances cannot be entirely created.³⁹ The modernist project will fail without the primordial, just as the subjective project (the narrative) will fail without the objective (the circumstances). The primordial and the 'objective' circumstances, however, can be manipulated and instrumentally employed to generate mobilisation for political goals. Such goals can often be quite distinct from the redress of the injustices reflected by the 'objective' circumstances. They can provide genuine incentives for elite or popular action but they can also provide momentum by which elites seek to secure authority.

³⁶Op. cit. in Christie 1996, p. 225. The Manifesto of the Acehese Rebels was issued in 1953.

³⁷Morris 1983, p. 215; Christie 1996, p. 150-152. McVey provides an appropriate characterisation of the *Darul Islam* rebellion as "a quarrel among aspiring elites". McVey 1984, p. 9.

³⁸Morris 1983, p. 6-8. Elaboration on why this was only an approximation is provided in the section in "The Emergence of GAM".

³⁹Gurr 1999, p. 79.

The project of *Bhineka Tunggal Ika* (unity in diversity) emerged as the federalist structure of the immediate independent Indonesian state collapsed in August 1950. It did so under pressure from Republicans who feared the dissolution of newly established Indonesia. Subsequently, it was replaced by the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia.⁴⁰ Post-colonial Indonesian nationalism was then based on the principle of 'unity in diversity' but became increasingly exclusive as it was perceived to be threatening to unity to accommodate regional ideology which was largely religiously based. Not everyone within the Dutch East Indies territory were Islamic, and secularisation was a way of accommodating those who were not. Of course, accommodation of one group resulted in assimilation of another group.

The following process by which Acehnese identity was made deviant generally corresponded to the national strategy of de-politicisation, but intense Acehnese resistance endured. That, the violent parliamentary democracy and the following turbulent period of Sukarno's Guided Democracy led to the establishment of military-led authoritarian governance, did little to enhance the prospects of regional autonomy. Consequently, the *Daerah Istimewa* status (special region) granted to Aceh in 1959 as a resolution to the *Darul Islam* rebellion⁴¹ remained unfulfilled.

New Order ideology was enunciated in the continuation of an adapted version of Sukarno's *Pancasila* ideology which consisted of five pillars, of which religion was only one.⁴² *Pancasila* was the ultimate exclusive formula in that, in practise, it prioritised unity and stability above religion, thus rendering integrative and accommodationist measures redundant. New Order rule employed *Pancasila* as an instrument of creating a national sense of unity, 'brotherhood', through assimilation and Suharto even went as far as to, in 1982, declare that *Pancasila* had to be the 'sole foundation' of political parties.⁴³

A policy of assimilation, which theoretically should grant minorities entry into the majority, de-ethnicise the population and hence secure minorities the same rights as the majority, may seem as a feasible way of solving the 'unity in diversity' paradox.⁴⁴ However, when cultural assimilation is combined with transmigration policies exporting educated Javanese to take over regional administration, assimilation may begin to appear significantly different from 'brotherhood'. The increasing mono-ethnic character of the Indonesian state may have been a necessary legacy of discriminatory colonial

⁴⁰Audrey Kahin, *Rebellion to Integration: West Sumatra and the Indonesian Polity*, 1999, p. 166.

⁴¹Morris 1983, p. 235.

⁴²The five *Pancasila* principles were: Belief in one supreme God; justice and civility among peoples; the unity of Indonesia; democracy through deliberation and consensus among representatives; social justice for all. Op. cit. in Adam Schwarz, *A Nation in Waiting: Indonesia's Search for Stability*, 1999, p. 10.

⁴³Kahin 1999, p. 257. Law No.3/1985 required that "all parties adopt Pancasila as their sole ideology" and prohibited any "party based on Islam or an Ideology other than Pancasila". Kell 1995, p. 42.

⁴⁴McVey 1984, p. 15.

education policies favouring Javanese who generally had better access to Dutch education. It nevertheless facilitated state penetration of the periphery and quickly came to resemble Dutch colonial policies. Transmigration policies continued throughout the New Order era and were even supported by the World Bank. The aim was to alleviate Javanese poverty which emanated partly from a high degree of population density. The ideological rationale continued to be the need for nation-building:

"With transmigration we are implementing what we have promised: to gather and to unite all ethnic groups into a single people, the people of Indonesia. The different ethnicities will gradually disappear and at the end there will be only one type of people."⁴⁵

Transmigration policies, which de-Acehnised regional institutions, and manipulation of the social fabric in Aceh were to become persistent strategies to counteract regional ideology. Nevertheless, state penetration of Acehnese society also increased elite incentives to compete for access to state resources and the vigour of regional ideology was intensified rather than abated.

As noted, the initial grievance expressed by Acehnese leaders was the marginalisation of Islam. The secularisation of Indonesian politics continued under Suharto and was in strong opposition to Acehnese *ulama's* hopes for a *Negara Islam Indonesia* (Islamic State of Indonesia). In marginalising the very essence of Acehnese identity, Islam, the foundation was laid for a 'definition of the situation' which proclaimed that the loyalty the Acehnese had shown in the struggle for independence remained unappreciated. The alienation process continued.

The containment policy targeted at political Islam was part of a wider strategy of de-politicisation. The initial targeting of the secular Communists was welcomed by Acehnese leaders, and the Acehnese *permuda* (youth) was a central agent of the process of eliminating the Communist threat. The pacification of Communist forces was followed by targeting of ethnic Chinese and the Indonesian Nationalist Party which was associated with Sukarno's Guided Democracy. Whereas the marginalisation of Islam was rarely overtly violent but rather institutional in nature, the containment of Islam during the New Order was largely facilitated by the increasing institutionalisation of army control. As the revival of the Acehnese rebellion in 1998 clearly demonstrates, military repression can be expected to cause further popular alienation. Such direct measures, employed against Islamic leaders, were regarded as problematic and ultimately, the Indonesian nationalist project did not attempt to eliminate Islamic

⁴⁵The Indonesian Minister of Transmigration, Martono in *The Ecologist*, Mar 2, 1986. Op. cit. in Paul Barber (ed.), *Aceh - the Untold Story*, 2000, p. 25.

identity but only to pacify political Islam. Overt repression, therefore, was accompanied by severe institutional control. This consisted among other measures of the banning in 1960 of the traditional Islamic party *Masjumi* and the establishment of the government controlled United Development Party (*Partai Persutaun Pembangunan*, PPP) which was essentially a Java-based party⁴⁶; the establishment in 1962 of Suyiah Kuala University in Banda Aceh; consistent favouritisation of secular education over the traditional *madrasah* (Islamic primary school)⁴⁷; and the establishment in 1975 of a national council of *ulama*, the MUI, to counterweight the Acehese PUSA - the All Aceh Ulama Union.⁴⁸

Thus the policy of pacifying political Islam was a consistent strategy of the post-colonial Indonesian state. This policy, however, provoked factionalism within the *ulama* ranks. Ultimately, this factionalism resulted in regionalisation of Acehese nationalism. Regionalism then was an outcome of elite struggle which had its roots in the contending visions of the Indonesian state. This elite struggle, however, could also have resulted in successful co-optation of the *ulama*. In addition, the establishment of the Suyiah Kuala University is particularly relevant because it facilitated the breed of an Acehese secular elite which was to provide the Acehese with a different 'definition of the situation' than that articulated by the reformist *ulama*. This secular elite, the technocrats, provided politicisation of the economic circumstance of relative deprivation which was to become a defining feature of separatist ideology.

Contending Elites in Aceh - Horizontal Conflict

In fact, the *ulama* and their organisation PUSA did actually have their expectations fulfilled and did obtain elite control after independence.⁴⁹ The Indonesian nationalist project, however, quickly began to undermine it. In attempt to restore lost political influence the *ulama* formulated the Acehese situation by emphasising the unappreciative approach by the central government to the distinct Acehese Islamic identity. Indeed, the factionalism which occurred within the *ulama* ranks serves to substantiate that the formulators of regional identity have been pragmatists. As will be illustrated below, the Acehese people as well as the elite have acted both as pragmatists and opportunists.⁵⁰

⁴⁶Kell 1995, p. 43.

⁴⁷See Morris 1983, p. 277-81, for elaboration on the struggle between the madrasah and the general primary schools (*sekolah dasar*).

⁴⁸Kell 1995, p. 50.

⁴⁹Kell 1995, p. 9.

⁵⁰As opposed to an idealist, a pragmatist will consider circumstances (for example, content of state policies) and assess how realistically his goal can be achieved and alter his ideology accordingly. A pragmatist will often take a utilitarian approach and considers the end to justify the means. The opportunist will alter his goal (and ideology), not according to whether his goal is realisable, but according to an assessment of whether he will personally gain from changing his strategy. I.e. the following student statement during the

It has been suggested that the interpretation of elite factionalism as being a competition between the reformist *ulama* and a New Order promoted technocratic and secular elite, the '*new uleebalang*'⁵¹, for regional power is no longer applicable.⁵² This may be so, but the increased co-optation of Islamic leaders has affected disunity within the reformist *ulama* rather than disappearance of the respective 'definitions of the situation'. Rather, GAM ideology emerging at the end of the 1970's has fused these definitions. Today, GAM, NGOs and the broader civil society have largely taken over the role of formulating the Acehese narrative. The high degree of mobilisation of civil society in Aceh, however, remains a divided one.⁵³

Two different horizontal conflicts will be considered before turning to the emergence of the separatist movement, GAM: first, the factionalism within the rebellious reformist *ulama* group between the *Darul Islam* political leader, Teungku M. Daud Beureueh, and *Darul Islam* military leader, Hasan Saleh, during and after the *Darul Islam* rebellion; and secondly, the state-nurtured elite competition between the reformist *ulama* and the '*new uleebalang*' in the 1970's. The former horizontal conflict generated regionalisation of Acehese nationalism whereas the latter generated politicisation of the economic circumstance which laid the foundation for separatist ideology.

Teungku M. Daud Beureueh vs. Hasan Saleh: Regionalisation of Acehese Nationalism.

The significance of the split between Saleh and Beureueh is that it was during this period of factionalism that the Acehese narrative was initially regionalised. The Acehese support for the Unitary State of Indonesia depended on the realisation of an Islamic Indonesian state, not a regional state. The final settlement of this factionalism within the *ulama* ranks confirms the belief that the formulation of the Acehese narrative has depended on the perceived access to resources.⁵⁴ Ultimately, it was this regionalisation of the vertical conflict about with what to 'fill' the Indonesian 'glass' which caused the first distinct Acehese narrative to emerge.

The resignation to fight for a *Negara Islam Indonesia*, expressed in the Manifesto of the Atjeh Rebels already in 1953⁵⁵, did not amount to a regionalisation of Acehese demands or pure Acehnisation of the rebellion. Rather, the Acehese rebels joined the

1989 rebellion: "If I can't get a good job as a government official I'm going to Libya to train as a terrorist". To him, support for the separatist cause depended on what the Indonesian state could offer him in terms of personal security. Leon Jones, "Aceh's Year of Living Dangerously", in *Inside Indonesia*, No. 49.

⁵¹Brown 1994, p. 147.

⁵²Bahreïn T. Sugihen, op. cit. in Kell 1995, p. 49.

⁵³This contention will be elaborated on in chapter 3.

⁵⁴"So long as the PUSA elite believed that an independent Indonesia would recognize their positions as Acehese leaders. so that they could promote their communal goal of an Islamic Aceh, they had an interest in commitment to the Indonesian Republic rather than rebellion against it". Brown 1994.

⁵⁵"If we now establish a State, this does not mean that we shall be setting up a state within a state, because in our hearts and souls we have always regarded the State of the Republic of Indonesia as but a golden bridge leading to the creation of the state for which we have long been yearning. But this golden bridge no

Darul Islam movement active throughout Indonesia, but mainly in West Sumatra and North Sulawesi. In 1957, the Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia (*Pemerintah Revolusioner Republik Indonesia*, PRRI) was established by a coalition of dissident regional army officers and reformist *Masjumi* leaders. PRRI appealed to the alliance of *Darul Islam* forces and promoted two courses of action; continuation of war or negotiation. Thus, although the PRRI was short-lived, it served to provoke the factionalism between Hasan Saleh and Teungku M. Daud Beureueh.⁵⁶

The disagreement between Saleh and Beureueh was about whether the goal of an Islamic Indonesian state was possible. Beureueh, the long-term religious leader in Aceh and the political leader of the *Darul Islam* rebellion, placed no faith in the prospects of a peaceful solution and refused to negotiate with the Indonesian government.⁵⁷ He continually maintained that the only acceptable solution was an Islamic Indonesian state. Saleh, however, was first to recognise that this goal was unachievable and initiated regionalisation of the Acehnese demands.

He maintained that negotiation, not violence, was the means to secure Aceh's Islamic status and disassociated himself from the commitment to establish an Islamic Indonesian state. In 1959, he established, as a political vehicle for negotiation, the Revolutionary Council (*Dewan Repolusi*), without the involvement of Beureueh who was subsequently relieved of his political leadership by Saleh. The pro-negotiation leaders considered it "suicidal to begin fighting again" whereas Beureueh maintained that the actions of the Revolutionary Council equalled committing 'treason'.⁵⁸ The Council conclusively agreed to the formula *Daerah Istimewa* (special region) which granted Aceh 'extensive' autonomy in religion, education and customary law. Beureueh, however, did not see this as a guarantee of the implementation of Islamic law in Aceh. Nevertheless, two years after the *Daerah Istimewa* agreement, Beureueh returned 'honourably' from the mountains.⁵⁹

longer appears as a means of getting where we want but as an obstacle, especially since our sense of loyalty to a Republic based upon nationalism no longer exists." Op. cit. in Christie 1996, p. 226.

⁵⁶Morris 1983, p. 225-226.

⁵⁷Today, exactly the same motivation for factionalism is said to be occurring within GAM and a pro-negotiation break-away GAM member, Teungku Zulfahri, was killed on 1st of June 2000. Rebels in Aceh blame it on the military but the Minister for Human Rights Hasballah Saad, himself an Acehnese, have suggested that another faction within GAM may have ordered the assassination. Barber 2000, p. 115-6. Teungku Zulfahri was the supposed leader of MP GAM (*Majelis Pemerintahan Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* - the Executive Council of the Free Aceh Movement) whereas the MP GAM Europe is allegedly led directly by Teungku Hasan di Tiro from Sweden. Gerry van Klinken, "What is the Free Aceh Movement?" in *Inside Indonesia, Digest 75*, 1999. GAM itself (that is MP GAM Europe), of course, denies any such factionalism and claims that "the Acehnese are united and solid as ever". Yusuf Daud, *Re: What is the Free Aceh Movement*, Nov 28, 1999. Teungku Zulfahri, however, was shortly before his death quoted for stating that "Aceh no longer depends on Hasan di Tiro to cultivate independence". Barber 2000, p. 116.

⁵⁸Morris 1983, p. 227 and 231.

⁵⁹Christie 1996, p. 156. A *Darul Islam* leader who sided with Beureueh until his final concession described the return in the following way. "We were greeted with great rejoicing. Colonel Jasin had forbidden the word 'surrender' to be used. We were simply 'returning' it was said, but in our hearts we knew we had surrendered." op. cit. in Morris 1983, p. 243.

To explain Beureueh's final concession in terms of that "the shift from national integration to national disintegration occurred only when the alliance strategies of the central and regional elites ceased to coincide"⁶⁰ is too narrow. Rather, it was a pragmatic compromise reflecting that "Beureueh had succeeded in impressing upon the center the distinctive aspirations of the Acehnese, but he had not realized his hope of changing the nature of central authority".⁶¹ As Beureueh realised that the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia would not be an Islamic state, he agreed to the concession that his vision of an Islamic entity could only be realised at the regional level with the implementation of Islamic law in Aceh. Considering that three-fourths of *Darul Islam* forces allied with the Revolutionary Council⁶², and that Beureueh was basically being bypassed, it can convincingly be argued that his concession was a result of pragmatic calculation of personal gain. Basically, he needed to estimate what position of authority he could expect from either fighting or conceding.⁶³ Likewise, Saleh's Revolutionary Council plausibly expected to be the ruling in elite in the 'special region' of Aceh.

Hence the regionalisation process generated two kinds of Acehnese communalism.⁶⁴ The first gave Acehnese communalism a regional position in the centre-periphery relationship and saw the granting of special autonomy within the centre-periphery framework as an acceptable solution; the second based Acehnese communalism on religion and saw only the implementation of Islamic law as an acceptable solution. On this account, the regionalisation itself came about because elites saw it politically viable to change strategies as a means of retaining influence in the future Aceh.

The Reformist Ulama vs. the 'New Uleebalangs': Politicisation of the Economic Circumstance. The significance of elite factionalism between the reformist *ulama* and the 'new uleebalang' is that it generated politicisation of the economic circumstance which was to become a crucial part of separatist ideology. The GAM's 'neo-colonialism' model, elaborated upon below, would not have had the same appeal among the population, had the 'objective' circumstance of economic exploitation not been politicised prior to the movement's emergence. Hence, in nurturing the 'new uleebalang' as Aceh's new administrative elite, the New Order regime's committed its first major strategic mistake.⁶⁵

⁶⁰Brown 1994, p. 143.

⁶¹Morris 1983, p. 243.

⁶²Ibid, p. 230.

⁶³Note that after the emergence of the GAM, Beureueh was said to support the separatist cause but he rejected the secular nature of GAM ideology and hence refused to all upon his followers to back the GAM. Nazaruddin Sjamsuddin, "Issues and Politics of Regionalism in Indonesia: Evaluating the Acehnese Experience", in *Armed Separatism in Southeast Asia* by Lim Joo-Jock and Vani S. (eds.), 1984, p. 125.

⁶⁴See Brown 1994, p. 145.

⁶⁵The second one being the extensive counterinsurgency campaign launched in response to the 1989 rebellion.

The reformist *ulama* rejoined forces and continued their struggle to give actual substance to the 'special region' status and the granting of implementation of Islamic law in Aceh. This struggle was never to achieve its goal.⁶⁶ As noted, rather than actually fulfilling the formal promise of Acehnese autonomy in religion, various institutionalised constraints were imposed on the authority of the *ulama* in attempt to erode their societal influence. In addition to these, the national government deemed it necessary to counteract the *ulama's* position as hegemonic formulators of regional ideology by nurturing a different 'definition of the situation'.⁶⁷

The nurturing of a secular technocratic elite which, along with the military, came to dominate regional government was facilitated by the establishment of the Suyiah Kuala University in Banda Aceh.⁶⁸ Furthermore, it coincided with a transformation of the Acehnese economy prompted by the economic potentials engendered by the discovery made by Mobil Oil Indonesia of large gas reserves in the region in 1971.⁶⁹ The technocratic ideology was based on perceptions of regional marginality and distorted development. The technocrats were supposed to be the centre's agents of change and remedy, and hence reflect that the centre did care about Aceh. Thus, ironically, the politicisation of the regional economic circumstance was initiated by the centre itself.⁷⁰

The incentive for the Acehnese technocrats to ally with the national government was clearly to gain access to state resources, possibly for regional as well as personal gain.⁷¹ From the perspective of the national government, a secular civil service was essential to rule along the lines of the state ideology, *Pancasila*. Nevertheless, this strategy much resembled the Dutch colonial policies of *uleebalang* favouritism. An interesting question is why the post-colonial administration had not learnt about the potential backfiring of social fabric manipulation from the social revolution in which the marginalised authority, the *ulama*, successfully replaced the *uleebalang* as the ruling elite.

The technocrat's definition of the Acehnese as a "disadvantaged and marginal ethnic minority in need of capital and expertise for development"⁷² provided the Acehnese with an apparently more politically viable narrative than that of the *ulama*. Whereas the Islamic narrative was rigorously opposed by central authority, the technocrat's

⁶⁶As late as in 1991, the Indonesian minister of interior, General Rudini, confirmed this by stating that "Aceh remained "special" in name only, and kept the title because of the respect the government had for the province as a result of its role in the struggle for independence." Kell 1995, p. 31.

⁶⁷"Much as the Dutch, following the Aceh war, had found it necessary to create a native ruling elite class from *uleebalangs*, the New Order center moved, under the rubric of development, to buttress the technocrats against the *ulamas*." Morris 1983, p. 258.

⁶⁸Brown 1994, p. 149.

⁶⁹The gas in question was LNG (liquefied natural gas). Kell 1995, p. 13.

⁷⁰Morris 1983, p. 307.

⁷¹This interpretation combines the pragmatist and the opportunist profile of agents outlined above.

⁷²*Ibid*, p. 260.

narrative was acceptable to central authority and had resonance among the Acehnese population. When development funding did not increase satisfactorily⁷³, the alliance with the centre, however, seemed increasingly as a pragmatic personal strategy than as a pragmatic regional strategy, and the technocrat's popular support decreased proportionately. Their elite position, however, was not based on popular support but on government patronage. As admitted by one technocrat: "We are the new uleebalangs".⁷⁴

The state-sponsored promotion of the secular technocrats resulted in an increased sense of regional alienation from the centre and their agents in Aceh. Hence, the technocrats' formulation of their development ideology backfired as the failure to achieve its objectives was considered obvious. Securing Aceh more development funds was their sole source of legitimacy in Acehnese society but despite the technocrat's efforts Aceh did not receive more funds than did other regions.⁷⁵

In fact, the technocrats' narrative of exceptional economic exploitation is contestable. Although, contemporary figures do suggest that Acehnese exports constitute a large proportion of total Indonesian exports whereas little revenue is retrieved by Aceh⁷⁶, it has been argued that in the 1970's Aceh was not particularly worse off than other regions.⁷⁷ This could obviously be illuminating because it was exactly in the 1970's that the economic circumstance was actually politicised. Nevertheless, the defining characteristic that differed Aceh from other outlying regions in Indonesia was not that it was poor and subject to economic extraction. Rather it was that due to the vast natural resource base discovered in the 1970's, Aceh could have experienced a much higher level of economic and social development than it did.

Ultimately then, the result of state policies was that, by providing the Acehnese with the incentives to turn against it, the national government played into the hands of a faction of the technocrats. These 'alienated professionals' began to question whether the alliance with the national government was a suitable means of achieving development in Aceh.⁷⁸ Under the leadership of Teungku Hasan Muhammad di Tiro⁷⁹,

⁷³It is true that development funding did increase significantly from 1969/70 to 1976/77 but this increase was a reflection of a general rise in development funds made available to all Indonesian regions rather than a spectacular accomplishment by the Acehnese technocrats. Ibid, p. 265.

⁷⁴Ibid, p. 259.

⁷⁵Ibid, p. 265.

⁷⁶Tapol estimates that during the New Order Aceh's "natural resources [supplied] 20% of Indonesia's annual budget, with only 1% reinvested directly or indirectly in the province". Tapol - the Indonesia Human Rights Campaign, *Crisis in Aceh Threatens Indonesian Unity*, Nov 28, 1999. GAM suggests that "in the last 54 years, all profits made by oil, gas, gold and forestry industries, estimated at equitable US\$2.1 billion annually from gas alone, have gone straight to Jakarta, with a tiny 1.6% returned to Aceh". Dr. Husaini Hasan, *The Future Integration of Indonesia: Focus on Aceh*, 1999.

⁷⁷Morris 1983, p. 252.

⁷⁸Brown 1994, p. 154.

⁷⁹Teungku Hasan Muhammad di Tiro was the son of leader of the Acehnese *ulama* in their resistance to Dutch occupation during the 30-years war, Teungku Chik di Tiro. For this reason, Hasan di Tiro may be said

these professionals formed a separatist movement, GAM, and produced an appealing narrative with emphasis on the peculiar constellation of a rich Aceh inhabited by poor Acehnese. The difference between this narrative and the 'development ideology' formulated by the technocrats is, that the GAM narrative was not articulated within the framework of a simple model of centre-periphery relations. On the contrary, GAM claimed that Aceh was subject to neo-colonialism and had a historic right to secede.

The Emergence of the GAM: Construction of the Neo-Colonialist Narrative

The GAM officially emerged on the 4th of December 1976 with the issuing of The Declaration of Independence of Aceh - Sumatra which proclaims Aceh as a sovereign state. This page-long Independence Declaration identifies Aceh as the 'fatherland' eight times, and the Javanese are similarly announced as '(neo-)colonialists' eight times. The Acehnese tradition of resistance to 'colonising' powers, which is regularly cited as one of the causes of the separatist rebellion, was pronounced as a legacy of continuity which provided the Acehnese with a 'historic right' to self-determination.⁸⁰ GAM ideology has two essential components. Firstly, the Dutch Roundtable agreement in 1949 is deemed illegal and the Acehnese are claimed to be wrongly "denominated 'Indonesians'".⁸¹ Secondly, it is argued that the Indonesian state has practised neo-colonialism and has advanced the interests of one ethnic group, the Javanese, at the expense of another, the Acehnese.

The ideology of GAM is often characterised as an 'internal colonialism' model⁸² but this is in fact an inaccurate classification. As has been argued above, the 'neo-colonialism' model originates in the 'internal colonialism' model and was advanced by the conceptualisation of centre-periphery relations formulated by the technocrats. The 'neo-colonialism' model, however, differs from the 'internal colonialism' model in that it denies that integration of Aceh into the Republic of Indonesia was legitimate in the first place. Therefore, Aceh is not seen as a case of a centre exploiting a region but as a case of an alien power occupying and exploiting another territory illegally. The struggle of Aceh therefore corresponded to the Indonesian anti-colonialist struggle in which so

to some extent to enjoy the same ancestral leverage with the Acehnese as Megawati Sukarnoputri has been said to enjoy in her status as the daughter of the former leader of the independence struggle, Sukarno. The comparison between Hasan di Tiro and his father nevertheless ends with GAM's secular ideology since Teungku Chik di Tiro "was more than any other responsible for portraying the resistance as a *perang abil* (holy war)". Reid 1969, p. 204.

⁸⁰Hasan M. di Tiro, *Declaration of Independence of Aceh-Sumatra*, 1976.

⁸¹Hasan M. di Tiro, *The New Colonialism; Denominated "Indonesians!"*, 1995. "If the concept of "decolonization a la Indonesia" would have been applied to all other colonial territories in the world, there would have been only 7 instead of 51 new states established in Africa after World War II, namely, one for each of the foreign colonies of Britain, France, Portugal, Belgium, Italy, Spain, and Germany." Hasan M. di Tiro, *The Price of Freedom: The Unfinished Diary*, 1985.

many of the *ulama* had fought. Hence, the Indonesian nationalist myth was appropriated to be turned against the unity of Indonesia.

In a sense, GAM ideology fused the 'definitions of the situation' provided by first the reformist *ulama* and then the secular technocratic elite. The belief that Aceh experienced relative economic deprivation was based on exaggerated figures for Aceh's natural wealth.⁸³ It is nevertheless the case, that Aceh's proportion of total Indonesian GDP was significantly increasing⁸⁴ but it has in fact been repudiated that an independent Aceh will be a rich Aceh.⁸⁵ The ethnic distinctness, however, was not defined along religious lines but along historical lines because Hasan di Tiro suspected religious bias to impede international sympathy for the GAM's cause.⁸⁶

The illegality of the Dutch Roundtable agreement in 1949 was based on the fact that the Dutch did not return to gain *de facto* control over Aceh after the Japanese surrender at the end of the Second World War. Having established that "in truth, 'Indonesia' is a nation that never was"⁸⁷, the Acehnese were identified as a nation with a distinct tradition of resisting central authority and the Acehnese were encouraged to "memorize [their] history!".⁸⁸ This continuity was based on the fact that the Acehnese fought a bloody, thirty-year long war against the Dutch from 1873 to 1903 where the Dutch could finally declare control over Aceh⁸⁹, the extensive Acehnese involvement in first the anti-colonial, national independence movement and then the *Darul Islam* rebellion. Whereas this emphasis on the continuity of Acehnese resistance clearly had some resonance among the Acehnese population, "the limits of tradition"⁹⁰ should be recognised.⁹¹

⁸²See Morris 1983, p. 6-7; Brown 1994, p. 155.

⁸³In 1999, Aceh is said to account for 38% of the world's gas production. GAM (MP GAM), *Why Aceh Wants Independence From the Colonialism of the Republic of Indonesia*, 1999. See footnote no. 56 for elaboration of the difference between GAM and MP GAM.

⁸⁴In 1971, Aceh's per capita income was Rp.28,000 whereas it in 1983 had grown to Rp.1,220,000. Robinson 1998, p. 135.

⁸⁵"The notion of an independent Aceh operating as a resource rich state should be dismissed as both politically and economically unviable. Aceh's gas reserves are insufficient to maintain a state economy. Nor are they sustainable." Barber 2000, p. 132.

⁸⁶Sjamsuddin 1984, p. 125.

⁸⁷Tiro 1995.

⁸⁸Tiro 1985.

⁸⁹Anthony Reid, *The Blood of the People: Revolution and the End of Traditional Rule in Northern Sumatra*, 1979, p. 7. Note that Christie stressed that the duration of the war was 'officially' from 1873-1903. Christie 1996, p. 142.

⁹⁰Robinson 1998, p. 132. The use of this phrase may have been employed to repudiate Hobsbawm's claim that "both nations and nationalism are products of 'social engineering'" and is the outcome of a process by which 'tradition' is 'invented'. Op. cit. in Umut Özkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction*, 2000, p. 116.

⁹¹A related point is made by Robinson who denies that what is currently happening in Aceh is just an expression of continuity of Acehnese resistance to central authority by asserting that "the description of the recent troubles in Aceh as a mere extension of a tradition of resistance and Islamic militancy arguably obscures as much as it reveals". He supports this argument by emphasising that the nature of Acehnese resistance and the ideology behind it has been not been consistent at all over the last 150 years. Robinson 1998, p. 132-3.

The genealogy of Acehese identity was traced back to a lost majestic past. An era of focus was between 1607-36 where Aceh was a dominating and expansionist Sultanate under the 'brilliant' Sultan Iskander Muda.⁹² Of the Acehese Sultans, Iskander Muda is said to be 'the most celebrated'.⁹³ The significance of this period for the perception Acehese identity has been suggested to be fundamental:

"The tradition that Sultan Iskandar Muda harmonized local customs (*adat*) with Islamic law during his reign sums up, perhaps, the inextricable relationship in Acehese self-identity between the Sultanate, Acehese society and Islam, coupled with the historic memory of Acehese greatness."⁹⁴

For reasons of strengthening the political viability of the narrative, however, di Tiro left Islam out of the equation. Both the Acehese anti-colonial war against the Dutch from 1873-1903 and the *Darul Islam* rebellion had been declared as *jihad* (holy war)⁹⁵, but now the Acehese war was secularised. As mentioned, di Tiro suspected that religious bias would deter international support for the separatist cause. Subsequently, the identity project of the Acehese was altered from being one of religious distinctiveness to one of historical continuity and primordial allegiance.

Nevertheless, the appeal of GAM ideology was two-fold. It allowed expression of grievances derived from decreasing standards of living and, although secular in its advocacy, it also revived the *ulamas'* hope for a truly Islamic Aceh by radically employing a historic argument to justify secession.⁹⁶ On the other hand, the independent state suggested by the GAM was of a secular nature which did not correspond to the vision of independent Aceh held by the *ulamas*.⁹⁷ Little, however, is known about popular support for GAM.⁹⁸

It is generally argued that core group of the GAM comprised of intellectuals educated at Suyiah Kuala University⁹⁹ and a few young and, especially, old *ulama* who had been involved in the *Darul Islam* rebellion.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, GAM enjoyed the support of Acehese businessmen who felt they were being bypassed by foreign investors and Hasan di Tiro himself, was, not surprisingly, one of them. In fact, Hasan di Tiro is said to have been bypassed in his bid to build a pipeline for Mobile Oil by a US company in

⁹²Dr. Lukman Thaib, *National Integration in Indonesia: The Aceh's Experience*, year not known. Dr. Thaib is an academic at the University of Kebangsaan in Malaysia and is a well-known supporter of GAM.

⁹³Lee Kam Hing, *The Sultanate of Aceh: Relations with the British 1760-1824*, 1995, p. 14.

⁹⁴Christie 1996, p. 141.

⁹⁵Christie 1996, p. 143 and 157.

⁹⁶Note that as mentioned in foot-note above, Beureueh is said to have initially supported the cause of the GAM.

⁹⁷Barber 2000, p. 30.

⁹⁸See footnote no. 131 for elaboration on the difficulties of determining extent of popular support for GAM.

⁹⁹Ibid, p. 28.

¹⁰⁰The failure to adopt Islam as a fundamental constituent of GAM ideology led to reluctance on part of the *ulama* to openly support GAM.

1974.¹⁰¹ It is quite likely that this played a role in the timing of di Tiro's launching of GAM but it should not detract from other motivating factors that were without doubt present.¹⁰²

It is, however, illuminating that the GAM's founder himself supported the short-lived federalist structure of the newly-independent Indonesia when the *ulama* was still expected to reclaim authority in post-colonial Aceh.¹⁰³ It is also illuminating that di Tiro, who was the former *Darul Islam* movement ambassador to United Nations¹⁰⁴, was to be the founder of a highly secular separatist ideology. These inconsistencies offer exemplification of how 'definitions of the situation' change according to the expected opportunity to gain access to state resources or the perceived impossibility of succeeding in doing so. Thus, the fact that the Acehnese narrative offered by di Tiro in late 1970's is so fundamentally different than the one he previously endorsed lends support to the argument that 'objective' circumstances are not just available facts.

The number of rebels in 1976 has been estimated to be only about two-hundred.¹⁰⁵ The pragmatism of launching a separatist rebellion with only about two-hundred men may seem debatable, nevertheless, di Tiro expected to mobilise extensive support for the separatist cause by appealing to the widespread sense of economic deprivation initially voiced by the technocrats. Certainly, it is plausible to suggest that "when ethnic divisions overlap with inequalities of allocation of economic benefits, then ethnicity can be exploited as a rather powerful instrument of social mobilization".¹⁰⁶

Whereas di Tiro's movement from a federalist to a separatist solution has been interpreted to simply reflect a disappointment with the unfulfilled promise of the 'special region' status granted to Aceh¹⁰⁷, it remains unexplained why he resorted to a legal argument about the historic right to self-determination. One explanation may be that the emphasis on the legal, historic right to independence complements the declared naturalness of di Tiro becoming the new Sultan of Sovereign Aceh.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, involving international law and invoking principles of decolonisation, di Tiro hoped to foster international support.

Furthermore, the modernist instrumentality of articulating the primordial, the lost majestic past, is a well-know process by which to generate ethnic identity. Whereas it is widely held that di Tiro's historic right to independence is dependent on a distorted

¹⁰¹Robinson 1998, p. 137.

¹⁰²Moreover, the timing of the emergence of GAM has been said to be connected to the opening of the major LNG extraction and processing facility, PT Arun in 1977. Ibid, p. 138.

¹⁰³Barber 2000, p. 30.

¹⁰⁴Sjamsuddin 1984, p. 112.

¹⁰⁵Ibid, p. 112; Amnesty International, "*Shock Therapy*": Restoring Order in Aceh 1989-1993, 1993, p. 5.

¹⁰⁶Sjamsuddin 1984, p. 121.

¹⁰⁷Ibid, p. 115.

¹⁰⁸His claim to this title is widely disputed in Aceh. Barber 2000, p. 41.

version of Acehnese history, the contention, that nations needs myths to live by, but that these cannot be entirely invented, remains valid. Nationalism, in other words, cannot invent nations where nations do not exist¹⁰⁹ and "nations may not be immemorial, nor is nationalism perennial".¹¹⁰ The contending regionalist narratives about Aceh, that were formulated by the elite, all demonstrate that ethno-political nationalism and mobilisation often owe its emergence and reinforcement to the pragmatics dictated by the situation rather than to the mere presence of 'objective' circumstances. This situation encompasses both vertical and horizontal conflict.

The rebellion was easily quelled by Indonesian security forces. Di Tiro was forced to flee and consequently sought exile in Sweden. The 1976 launching of the GAM remained a minor problem to the national government until its re-emergence in 1989.

Suharto's Counterinsurgency Strategy: Weaving the Fabric of Revived Rebellion

The exact causes for the timing of the resumption of separatist violence in 1989 remain undetermined but certainly GAM had used the preceding decade to expand its support base and recruit more soldiers. In 1989, the number of rebels has been estimated to be approximately 750¹¹¹ and the measures employed by the Suharto regime corresponded, however disproportionately, to this increase in active rebels. It was still to be established, however, that the New Order regime itself was about to commit its second major strategic mistake. By responding to the insurgency with oppressive and extensive military deployment, the New Order regime provided the Acehnese with the current Acehnese narrative about human rights victimisation which has proved to have such extensive popular appeal. The revival of this rebellion in 1998 can be explained by both the fact that the counterinsurgency policies pursued by Suharto led to widespread victimisation of civilians, and by the increased popular expectations to the newly-established 'democratic' regime.

By 1989, the recruitment circles for GAM had expanded to retired or dissenting ABRI soldiers and unemployed young men.¹¹² Intellectuals and the *ulama* still composed the

¹⁰⁹Note Gellner who claims that "nationalism ... invents nations where nations do not exist." Op. cit. in Smith 1994, p. 381. Gellner is the extreme modernist and also states that: "Nations as natural, God-given way of classifying men, as an inherent though long-delayed political destiny, are a myth; nationalism, which sometimes takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them, and often obliterates pre-existing cultures: that is a reality, and in general an inescapable one." Op. cit. in Özkirimili 2000, p.118.

¹¹⁰Smith 1994, p. 394.

¹¹¹Barber 2000, p. 31.

¹¹²Barber 2000, p. 31.

core of the movement. In 1991, probably as an attempt to mobilise additional *ulama* and popular support for GAM's cause, Hasan di Tiro announced that:

"Acheh will be an Islamic State because the people of Acheh will want it so. If the world wants to see this confirmed by referendum, I have no objection to such a referendum, because I know my people will want an Islamic State."¹¹³

The GAM narrative, however, was later to be adapted to the new circumstances generated by Suharto's counterinsurgency operations and incorporate human rights rhetoric. Rather than exemplifying the malleability of 'objective' circumstances, this signifies that historicity matters too. Narratives are not simply constructions, neither are they pure objective realities.

In 1990, *Operasi Jaring Merah* was launched and militarisation of Aceh began. To combat approximately 750 rebels, the New Order regime found it necessary to station 11-12,000 troops in Aceh¹¹⁴. The rebels were referred to as *Gerakan Pengacau Keamanan* (GPK, gangs of security disrupters) and labelled as terrorists rather than separatists. As to justify the Indonesian army's omnipresence in Aceh, Major General H. R. Pramono, the regional ABRI commander, maintained that the rebels were ""everywhere" among the people" and estimated that the core group of GAM probably consisted of "hundreds" whereas with their supporters they could be "hundreds of thousands".¹¹⁵ Subsequently, Aceh was designated as *Daerah Operasi Militer* (DOM, military operations area) in 1991.¹¹⁶ The ensuing ten years of DOM resulted in extensive state violence and victimisation of civilians.¹¹⁷ Suharto himself provided the following rationale for the harsh measures:

¹¹³Hasan M. di Tiro, "From Now On, It Is Not Just Free Acheh But Free Sumatra" in *NRC Handelsblad*, 1991.

¹¹⁴Robinson 1998, p. 131 (11,000); Barber 2000, p. 32 (12,000). Today the number is between 30,000 and 35,000.

¹¹⁵Kell 1995, p. 66-67.

¹¹⁶Tapol, "Aceh Emerges from Years of State Terror" in *Tapol Bulletin*, No. 148, Sep 1998. It has been argued that as a legal doctrine DOM never actually existed and that "improper identification of military structures and activities will facilitate evasion and denial on the part of those responsible". Bambang Widjajanto and Douglas Kammen, "The Structure of Military Abuse" in *Inside Indonesia*, No. 62, Apr/Jun 1999. It seems, however, that for any other purpose than petty-interpretation of Indonesian law, the actual employment of DOM as a legal military doctrine in Aceh is not very crucial. Officers and soldiers are not put on trial for DOM in itself, but for human rights violations.

¹¹⁷For documentation of human rights violations committed during and after DOM see Tapol and Amnesty International material. Amnesty has estimated that in the first four years of DOM more than 2,000 civilians were killed by ABRI, more than 1,000 were unlawfully detained while an unknown number of cases of torture was committed. Amnesty International 1993, p. 17 and 27. Despite an agreement on a Humanitarian Pause (cease-fire) between GAM and the Indonesian government (TNI), the conflict has already claimed more than 300 lives in 2001 alone. See "Fresh Violence in Aceh Leaves Six People Dead" in *Jakarta Post*, April 16, 2001. With the National Police, on 25th of April 2001, disclosing that 298 people were killed from 12th of March to 12th of April 2001, this number is likely to be considerably higher. "Police: Aceh Violence Kills 298 in Thirty Days" in *Indonesian Observer*, Apr 25, 2001. A very alarming phenomenon in the contemporary conflict is that human rights activists who advocate for a political and not an armed solution have become victims of abduction, murder and torture. Amnesty International, *Activists at Risk*, Nov 23, 2000. The co-ordinator of Kontras Aceh (Commission for Disappearances and Victims of Violence in Aceh), Aguswandi, is one such human rights activist but on 18 May 1999, the military issued an official statement declaring him an enemy of the state. Curriculum vitae information sheet produced by Amnesty International, handed out at

"The peace had been disturbed ... Of course we had to take drastic action and give [the suspected criminals] treatment commensurate with their conduct ... Those who resisted, yes, they were shot ... Some of the bodies were just left where they had been shot. This was meant as shock therapy so that people could realise that loathsome acts would meet with strong action."¹¹⁸

The public display of corpses was likewise defended by a military officer in Aceh who stated that "the rebels use terrorist strategies so we are forced to use anti-terrorist strategies".¹¹⁹ It seems evident that such intimidation tactics were employed as state-sponsored terrorism to prevent people from joining or even sympathising with GAM.

Apart from these violent tactics, the New Order regime also exercised institutional control. This facilitated the co-optation of the *ulama* through operations in the MUI and they were "drawn into the counterinsurgency campaign as spokesperson[s] for the government".¹²⁰ This may have effected that the Islamic Acehese narrative was marginalised, but more plausibly, this was because the human rights victimisation narrative became a better political tool and made the Islamic narrative redundant.

The political viability of the human rights victimisation narrative had three sources. Firstly, human rights violations is an international crime and is likely to generate international sympathy. Secondly, it is a crime which Indonesia as a new 'democratic' country is expected to deal with. Thirdly, due to the enhanced dual mobilisation impact of the narrative, it is the one Acehese narrative which has generated most popular support.

The political viability of the human rights victimisation narrative may not have been proved yet, but it clearly has more appeal with the international community than GAM's 'neo-colonialism' narrative, or any Islamic founded narrative.¹²¹ As noted, GAM's narrative is widely regarded as being based on a twisted account of history and a dubious interpretation of international law. Human rights violations, on the other hand, are an acknowledged crime under international law. Given these changed 'objective' circumstances, the altering of GAM ideology made sense. It was a strategic ideological shift aimed at increasing the political viability of the GAM narrative.

Aguswandi's talk at SOAS, Mar 15, 2001. He has experienced attempt of abduction and continuously receives anonymous death threats. Interview with Aguswandi in London, Mar 17, 2001.

¹¹⁸Op. cit. from Suharto's memoirs, published in 1998, in Schwarz 1999, p. 249.

¹¹⁹Op. cit. in Robinson 1998, p. 142.

¹²⁰Barber 2000, p. 36.

¹²¹Aguswandi, co-ordinator of Kontras Aceh, contends that a central cause for the lack of Western attention is that the Acehese suffer under the bad image of Islam. He insists that the Indonesian government at home criticises the Acehese for being too secular and bad Muslims whereas it to the world portrays the Acehese as fundamentalists. "Islam in Aceh is culture, not politics". He also maintains that Islam in Aceh is democratic and insists on equality between the sexes. Interview with Aguswandi in London, Mar 17, 2001. Although Islam does not have a direct role in the contemporary conflict, it seems untenable to suggest that the fact that virtually all Acehese are Muslim has no impact on international opinion about the crisis.

Possibly the most illustrative rephrasing of GAM rhetoric is the questioning of whether territorial integrity should take precedence over human rights violations in international law.¹²² After all, international practice has shown that in fact, sovereignty and its corollaries have been infringed upon with human rights violations as the justification.¹²³ GAM does not abandon the historical argument about Aceh's right to secede but references are frequently made to human rights atrocities. Following the claim that the Acehnese are of distinct ethnicity, the period of DOM, 1989-1998, has been labelled as "the genocide in Aceh".¹²⁴ Likewise, the secretary-general of MP GAM Europe has stated that "today, to describe what ABRI is doing in Aceh, is to describe a genocide in progress".¹²⁵

In this manner, GAM continues to follow the familiar pattern of an aspiring elite constructing an appealing narrative. The narrative is altered when it is politically viable to do so, and the instrumentality of 'objective' circumstances remains obvious. The nature of mass-mobilisation in 1998, however, is largely explicable by the fact that the democratising nature of the contemporary Indonesian polity has allowed less elitist and more popular forces to become formulators of the 'definition of the situation'.

The 1998 Revival of the 1989 Rebellion: Unfulfilled Expectations, Again!

In the late 1990's Aceh's 'untold story'¹²⁶ became public. Tapol did not receive news from Aceh for years until 1997¹²⁷ but the secrecy surrounding the DOM period was

¹²²"Is territorial integrity so sacrosanct it legitimizes the use of force against innocent civilians in order to prevent a territory from breaking away?" Yusuf Daud, "Who Says Aceh is Integral to RI?" in *Jakarta Post*, Nov 28, 1999.

¹²³It is, of course, nothing new that sovereignty is infringed upon and the rhetoric of justification does not necessarily reveal the motives, be they economic or political. However, the rhetoric of justification in the 1990's has to an increasingly significant degree included reference to human rights violations. Nevertheless, continued reluctance to intervene in the internal matters of sovereign states is obviously still prevalent. In replying to a communication from Lord Avebury about the deteriorating security situation in Aceh, Minister of State John Battle stated that "we have to choose our ground carefully before intervening on particular issues. Any other approach would look like trying to micro manage events, which could be counter productive". Letter to Lord Avebury from Minister of State John Battle, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, March 2, 2001. Moreover, the tension between territorial integrity and the right to self-determination in international law is a well-known one. On international law on territorial integrity see the UN Charter. Article 2 stipulates that "all members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state", and hence endorses a principle of sovereignty based on territorial integrity. Ian Brownlie, *Basic Documents on Human Rights*, 1992, p. 4. Moreover, the principle of non-intervention has been prevailing international practise for centuries and although it is gradually receding, a principle for humanitarian intervention has certainly not fully matured in international customary law. The Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples does not, as it is argued by GAM, necessarily conflict with the principle of non-intervention which is seen as a guarantee of territorial sovereignty. On the right to self-determination see international humanitarian law on right to self-determination (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, art 1.1; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, art. 1.1; The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, art. 20). All in Brownlie 1992.

¹²⁴Dr. Husaini Hasan, *To the People of Australia*, year not known.

¹²⁵Yusuf Daud, *Re: What is the Free Aceh Movement*, Feb 27, 1999. See footnote no. 56 for elaboration on factionalism within GAM.

¹²⁶Barber 2000.

finally terminated by the fall of Suharto in May 1998 and NGOs began "exposing the silent tragedy of Aceh"¹²⁸. The number of Acehese casualties remains unclarified exactly because Aceh was so isolated during DOM.¹²⁹ The degree of mobilisation against Jakarta is now extraordinarily high. On 8th of November 1999, between 500,000 and 1.5 million Acehese gathered in the capital Banda Aceh to rally for a referendum of self-determination which includes both the option of special autonomy and the option of independence.¹³⁰ The attempt to organise a similar rally, as an anniversary for the first one, was obstructed by TNI and Brimob (police elite mobile brigade) but hundreds of thousands are still reported to have attended the rally.¹³¹ These rallies were organised by civil society and public display of allegiance with GAM was discouraged.¹³² Whatever the exact overt participation in articulating the political demand for a referendum, there is no doubt that Acehese mobilisation against Jakarta has reached unprecedented levels. In fact, it has been reported that 2000 was the bloodiest year in Aceh since 1989.¹³³

There seems to be two crucial factors which explain this. Firstly, the changed nature and indeed origin of the Acehese narrative combined with the changed political environment it is articulated in, has allowed for it to considerably enhance its dual

¹²⁷Tapol, "Aceh Emerges from Years of State Terror" in *Tapol Bulletin*, No. 148, Sep 1998.

¹²⁸AHRC (Asian Human Rights Commission), "Exposing the Silent Tragedy of Aceh" in *Human Rights Solidarity*, Vol. 9, No. 9, Sep 1999.

¹²⁹"It is still unclear how many people were killed or disappeared as part of the government's policy in Aceh. In 1994, Amnesty International estimated that at least 2,000 people had been killed between 1989-1991. In 1998, Maimul Fidar of the local NGO, *Forum LSM Aceh* (Aceh NGO Forum) suggested that there were as many as 39,000 widows living in Aceh. The truth no doubt lies somewhere in between." Tapol, *A Reign of Terror: Human Rights Violations in Aceh 1998-2000*, Mar 2000.

¹³⁰Barber 2000, p. 91. The number of participants is sometimes set as high as 2 million which amounts to half of Aceh's population. Aguswandi (Kontras Aceh, Co-ordinator of the Commission for Disappearances and Victims of Violence in Aceh), *Aceh: Confronting the Past, Determining the Future*, p. 2. Copy of this paper is acquired from Aguswandi himself and is available on request.

¹³¹Tapol, "Tens of Thousands Rally for Peace in Aceh" in *Tapol Bulletin*, No. 160, Nov/Dec 2000; "Aceh: Thousands Rally for Independence" in *Green Left Review*, No. 428, Nov 15, 2000. Moreover, in November 2000, a local NGO conducted a poll resulting in 92% voting for independence, 0.13% voting for continued unity with Indonesia with 7.8% abstaining. 2,750,000 ballot papers were printed. Tapol, "Tens of Thousands Rally for Peace in Aceh" in *Tapol Bulletin*, No. 160, Nov/Dec 2000. It is questionable, however, what should be made of this as the methodology in which the poll was conducted is flawed at best.

¹³²Barber 2000, p. 127. To measure the extent to which GAM has actual popular support is impossible. Certainly, silence or no overt activity can not be taken to equal absence of affiliation or even allegiance. Kell 1995, p. 70. The intimidation tactics pursued by Suharto during DOM renders silence a survival strategy. Speculating about the identity of 'provocateurs' who have served as agents of intensification of violence and direct armed confrontation between GAM and TNI, it has even been suggested that military and police wears civilian clothes "as a self-preservation strategy to avoid being targeted as security personnel." Barber 2000, p. 60. Although GAM are now recognised as separatists rather than terrorists and simple criminals, affiliation with GAM still endangers lives. It is true that changing the label of GAM from GPK (*Gerakan Pengacau Keamanan*, security disruptor gangs) to GPL (*Gerakan Pangacau Liar*, wild disruptor gangs) makes little than rhetorical difference. Tapol, "Aceh Emerges from Years of State Terror" in *Tapol Bulletin*, No. 148, Sep 1998. Nevertheless, the government's treatment of GAM as a political negotiation partner under the mediation of the Henry Dunant Centre signifies that GAM is now, maybe regrettably for the democratic process, acknowledged as separatists. The negotiations have resulted in an ineffective cease-fire, referred to as the Humanitarian Pause, and extensions of this to a 'moratorium on violence'. Human rights groups have continuously argued that these negotiations have served to marginalised the role of civil society and hence alienate the Acehese further.

¹³³Indonesian Commission on Human Rights, op. cit. in Lesley McCulloch, "Big Trouble in Little Aceh" in *Asian Wall Street Journal*, Feb 8, 2001.

mobilisation impact. This dual mobilisation impact consist of the impact of construction and the impact of actual reality. Secondly, the scope for addressing the expressed grievances is limited in a un-consolidated democracy and that the Acehnese expectations of the Indonesian experiment with democracy have greatly exceeded actual outcomes. Hence, whereas one factor attributes mobilisation to the formulation of a particular narrative facilitated by democratisation, the other stresses the significance of unconsolidated democratic systems. The tension seems to be one between too much democracy and too little democracy at once. Each factor will be considered in turn.

The human rights victimisation narrative is largely formulated by international and local NGOs. International NGOs such as Tapol, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have long been concerned with documenting the atrocities committed in Aceh but, as mentioned, this task was severely inhibited by the isolation of Aceh. The proliferation of local NGOs came about as a result of democratisation and information about Aceh became more readily available.

The nature of the impact of construction performed by the human rights victimisation narrative remains the same. The widespread publication of the 'untold story', however, has increased its availability as a identity indicator. To function as a mobilisation vehicle, any narrative will be contingent on its circulation. An important observation about the discursive impact of human rights is, that human rights are not 'given', they are 'taken'.¹³⁴ In the same way, the popular impact of the Acehnese human rights victimisation narrative is contingent on its circulation. The move towards democratisation has undoubtedly enhanced the circulation of this narrative and the impact of construction is likely to be much higher in a democratising environment where the press is increasingly gaining autonomy. This is a point which has received much, and maybe too much, appreciation by modernist theorists of nationalism.¹³⁵ Naturally, the impact of construction will be somewhat limited if the narrative does not have obvious experienced evidence available to back it up. The human rights victimisation narrative, however, has strong resonance among the Acehnese because the New Order responded to the separatist activity with such militant fierceness and omnipresence that most Acehnese were somehow affected by the decade-long period of DOM. Furthermore, the shocking nature of the human rights violations *per se* is very likely to generate widespread sympathy because it encroaches so fundamentally upon the physical security of the civilian population. In effect, the human rights victimisation

¹³⁴Scoble op. cit. in Claude E. Welch, "The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights: A Five-Year Report and Assessment" in *Human Rights Quarterly*, Vol. 14, 1992, p. 56.

¹³⁵I.e. Anderson's concept of 'print-capitalism'.

narratives unifies the best conditions of circulation so far and the widespread actual experience of a recent past reality.

In combination, the impact of construction and the impact of actual reality has been maximised in the human rights narrative and this partly accounts for the current level of mobilisation against Jakarta. This observation obviously owes something to the contention that 'print-capitalism' assists nation-building because it facilitates the imagination process by which nations, or 'imagined communities', come about.¹³⁶

However, the current Acehese narrative is not one where perennial and modern identities clash or are constructed. This may be a minor component, but solidarity is nurtured by the experience of the last decade, and not by primordial myths. Components of earlier narratives are still present in Acehese society but now implementation of Islamic law (the *ulama* narrative) and economic restructuring (the technocrat narrative) are not regarded as sufficient responses. For example, a recent offer of implementation of Islamic law was rejected by the Acehese.

Immediately after the fall of Suharto, the Acehese expectations of their newly established democracy were very high. The organisational capacity of civil society was remarkably enhanced by the new political environment and NGOs, often student-led, proliferated. The historic arguments of GAM ideology were largely marginalised and replaced by calls for substantive democracy, redress of human rights violations, and economic restructuring.

The Acehese self-determination movement, however, is also factionalised. Some want autonomy within a democratic Indonesian framework. Some want independence through a referendum and the establishment of an Islamic democratic state. GAM wants to obtain independence by armed struggle and the establishment of a Sultanate with di Tiro as the Sultan. There is substantial disagreement within the Acehese self-determination movement about the nature of an independent Acehese state. A consensus, however, is developing around the notion that the autonomy option is not a plausible framework for meeting the Acehese demands of substantive democracy, redress of human rights violations and economic restructuring. As noted by Aguswandi, the co-ordinator of Kontras Aceh (Commission for Disappearances and Victims of Violence in Aceh):

"It is easy to understand why we Acehese have lost faith in the Indonesian government. Sukarno promised us autonomy, Suharto promised us prosperity, Habibie promised us justice, and each time we were exploited and violated."¹³⁷

¹³⁶Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 1991, p. 44-45.

¹³⁷Op. cit. in Tapol, *Crisis in Aceh Threatens Indonesian Unity*, Nov 28, 1999

More importantly, people are increasingly being drawn towards GAM because they feel that their non-violent protest calling for an referendum is not being heard.¹³⁸

At the time of writing, an autonomy bill is waiting to be adopted in the Indonesian parliament. Simultaneously, troop numbers are being increased in Aceh and there are now more than 30,000 troops stationed there. That is one soldier for almost every hundred inhabitant.¹³⁹ As the Acehnese see their political leaders being imprisoned¹⁴⁰ and their human rights activists murdered¹⁴¹, they begin to perceive that they are facing intensified military repression. They have become severely disillusioned with Indonesian democracy. Therefore, because the Acehnese have no faith in the Indonesian government and because they are politically pragmatic, realisation of the Acehnese demands has come to equal secession.

This situation of failed confidence building has largely come about as a result of the limited scope of governmental action in a democratising polity whose transition is from military rule to democracy. De-militarisation of politics in any such polity will be extremely difficult because the military has been so entrenched in politics. The Indonesian military (ABRI, now TNI)¹⁴² has had a constitutional dual function (*dwifungsi*) of maintaining both international security and internal order. Institutionalisation of *dwifungsi* has allowed the military to perform a socio-political role because it effected imposition of a territorial structure of military command. The territorial structure facilitated the military to establish pervasive presence throughout Indonesia but is also a somewhat contradictory component of the Indonesian centralised rule. The territorial structure has largely facilitated the military to develop its own agenda and this is apparent both in the political and the economic sphere. Therefore, making the military 'return to the barracks' faces a combination of political and economic obstacles.¹⁴³ Effective reform of the military is a precondition for the

¹³⁸Interview with Aguswandi, co-ordinator of KontraS Aceh, in London, Apr 21, 2001.

¹³⁹Number of troops is estimated to between 30,000 and 35,000. According to Jakarta Post the population of Aceh is 4 million. Jakarta Post, *Facts and Figures: Aceh*.

¹⁴⁰The head of SIRA (the Information Centre for Aceh Referendum), Muhammadiyah Nazar, whose organisation has arranged both referendum rallies and the poll, was on detained on 20th of November 2000. He is held under the *Haatzai* law, Anti-Subversion Law, which cover offences of treason against the Indonesian state. His crime was to raise a banner that demanded withdrawal of Indonesian troops from Aceh on 16th of August 2000. Chris McCall, "The Making of a Martyr in Aceh" in *The South China Morning Post*, Dec 23, 2000. The Anti-Subversion Law dates from 1963 and was widely used during the New Order to contain dissidence. "... Carrying a maximum penalty of death, the law makes it a crime to engage in acts which 'distort, undermine or deviate from' the state ideology of Pancasila, or which arouse hostility towards the government." Op. cit. in Schwarz 1999, p. 249.

¹⁴¹See Amnesty International, *Activists at Risk*, Nov 2000

¹⁴²ABRI (*Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia*) was renamed to TNI (*Tentara Nasional Indonesia*) when the police force came under civilian control in 1999. McCulloch 2000.

¹⁴³One obstacle is that the military is severely involved in business and that in fact the *dwifungsi* role (socio-pol) is in fact a *trifungsi* role (socio-econ-pol). McCulloch 2000. It has been estimated that off-budget financing through business activities (illegal and legal) constitutes 2/3 of the army's budget. Therefore, an obstacle to effective erosion of the *dwifungsi* role is that the Indonesian military is in reality severely under-financed by the official defence budget. McCulloch seminar at SOAS, "Business and Military - an Obstacle to Peace in Aceh: the Need for Military Reform in Indonesia", Mar 22, 2001

consolidation of democratic institutions but Indonesian democracy has yet to convincingly demonstrate civilian supremacy.

Thus, whereas democracy has expanded the number of agents of the 'definition of the situation' and increased the accessibility of channels of articulation, it has largely failed to effectively address the Acehese grievances. Improvement in several areas has been accomplished but troops still flock to Aceh. Part of the reason is that Conservatives in Jakarta and military hard-liners still see the military as part of the solution and not part of the problem. Moreover, institutionalisation of Indonesian democracy is far from achieved.

In fact, the move towards democratisation has served to intensify the ethno-political conflict in Aceh in two ways. Firstly, it has enhanced the dual mobilisation impact of the Acehese narrative. Secondly, it has obstructed expected facilitation of peaceful ethno-political action. The link between democratisation and ethno-political conflict cannot be explained simply by referring to primordial or authoritarian legacy. What is emerging is not popular expression of pre-colonial ethno-political tensions in artificial nations, nor is it ethno-political tensions which are created by authoritarianism in artificial nations. Both scenarios have explanatory utility but on their own they do not explain why violent separatism occurs in some parts of Indonesia whereas in others, it does not. The origins of separatism in Aceh are explicable in terms of elite struggle as responses to state policies, not in terms of state policies on their own. The current mass-mobilisation may have been largely determined by structural changes but the emergence of separatist violence was not inevitable.

The security situation is now worse than ever and it seems that ethno-political protest is not far from translating into a mass-mobilised rebellion. However, it still remains to be established whether the autonomy bill will be too little too late. As for the potential success of the Acehese self-determination movement, its own incoherence and inconsistency is one of the obstacles. As noted GAM's visions of independent Aceh are not democratic and the history of a fragile nationalist alliance against a common enemy seems likely to be repeated. If independence is achieved, the Acehese themselves will be faced with the difficult task of with what 'to fill the glass'. The internal politics in Aceh may well suffer the same ideological struggle as the post-colonial politics of Indonesia did. Thus, the complementarity of vertical and horizontal conflict continues to steer the battle.

Conclusion

The story of Aceh is not a story of failed national integration. That Indonesia is a highly heterogeneous country, and that it is a prime example of an artificial colonial construct

are indisputable facts. However, to attribute the current ethnopolitical violence to these circumstances is to highly simplify complex matters. There is no doubt that these circumstances contributed to the focus of Indonesian nationalism on 'unity in diversity'. There is also no doubt that they have contributed to the real discrepancy between Indonesian nationalist ideology and the regional vision of the Indonesian state. But the project of Indonesia remained a common one as long as the ideological struggle was unsettled. The story of failed national integration is rejected on the basis of the fact that the Acehese narratives constructed by the elites were largely, but not entirely, governed by pragmatism and political viability and not by the mere presence of natural, inevitable or 'objective' circumstances. For circumstances to translate into grievances and political action they must be articulated.

Only, when regional formulators of *Negara Islam Indonesia* realised that their goal was unattainable, did regional ideology actually regionalise. Only, when Indonesian nationalism failed to accommodate the Acehese elite's nationalism, did their narrative transform into a distinct Acehese nationalism. This came about through the process of settling elite factionalism between Teungku M. Daud Beureueh and Hasan Saleh. The Acehese 'definition of the situation' subsequently became distinctively Acehese. This definition came to include that the Acehese's loyalty to the Indonesian project had been betrayed by the central authority. Saleh conceded to the central authority whereas Beureueh did not until he had formulated Acehese nationalism in regional terms. The surrender of Beureueh under the promise of implementation of Islamic law in Aceh exemplifies how the agents of the 'definition of the situation' adapt to new circumstances and often act according to calculations of political viability. The story of Aceh, then, began as a story of failed elite accommodation. Therefore, however tempting, it cannot end as a story of failed national integration.

Once Acehese nationalism was regionalised, Indonesian nationalism plausibly had to change from being integrative and accommodating to being exclusive and assimilating. Policies originating from this were policies of de-politicisation, containment, assimilation and transmigration. In the Acehese context, the significant target was Islam. Islamic identity was to be tolerated, after all Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world, but political Islam had to be pacified in the name of 'unity'. One way of secularising politics was to nurture a secular administrative elite in Aceh. These technocrats became the '*new uleebalang*'. The *ulama*, however, remained a societal force and although, politically marginalised, they still enjoyed traditional religious authority. Their hegemonic 'definition of the situation' was nevertheless challenged by the countervailing secular technocrats who defined Aceh as "a disadvantaged and marginal ethnic minority in need of capital and expertise for

development". Consequently, the Acehese narrative came to be composed by a development ideology which was politicising the 'objective' circumstance of relative economic deprivation. Hence, against all intentions central authority provided the Acehese with the fabric of a separatist ideology and thereby committed its first major strategic mistake.

GAM ideology defined Aceh as a victim of 'neo-colonialism'. This articulated the economic circumstance as an essential component of the Acehese situation but significantly departed from the 'development ideology' in that it did not operate within a framework of centre-periphery relations. Rather it claimed that Aceh had a historic right to self-determination and that the Javanese were an alien power occupying Acehese territory. As a means of increasing political viability of the GAM narrative, the aspirations to an Islamic Aceh were quelled. Later, this narrative adapted to new circumstances and adopted human rights rhetoric.

The significance of GAM for the current situation is twofold. Firstly, GAM is providing the Acehese with an armed alternative to their ineffective peaceful protest. Secondly, Suharto responded to the resumption of separatist violence in 1989 with such harsh military measures, that the current Acehese narrative about human rights victimisation, has extensive appeal among the Acehese civilian population. Hence, the New Order regime committed its second major strategic mistake and provided the Acehese formulators of the situation with the fabric of an Acehese narrative with considerably enhanced dual mobilisation impact.

The implications of newly established democratic rule for the level of ethnopolitical conflict in Aceh are significant. First of all, the double mobilisation impact thrives in an environment where the press is gaining autonomy. The imagination process by which solidarity and commonness is nurtured needs channels for articulation and the accessibility to such channels has improved with moves towards democratisation. Moreover, availability of repressive instruments for quelling popular protest have diminished. Hence, the Acehese identity project grows in fertile soil. Secondly, democratisation has generated raised expectations of justice on behalf of the Acehese. The politics of transition, however, has not allowed for these expectations to be fulfilled and the result has been clumsy and inconsistent conflict management. Disappointment with the Indonesian democracy experiment has prompted increased mobilisation for GAM and violent conflict is intensifying. However, what has been unleashed is not re-assertions of primordial Acehese identity but expressions of human rights victimisation. Whereas the Acehese are surely aware of other genealogical common characteristics, the shared experience of human rights violations during the last decade has become their main identity indicator.

All this denies that there is something inevitable about Aceh. The implication of the outlined development of contending Acehnese narratives is that yes, heritage of heterogeneity and incongruence between the state and the nation and the state policies, it generates, do matter. These conditions of state-building, however, do not translate into regionalised ethnopolitical nationalism unless 'objective' circumstances are available to politicise and unless elites in the region concerned has incentives to do so.

The logic of the employed model of analysis is that 'objective' circumstances are not constant but malleable. This does not amount to saying that 'the primordial' is dismissed as a mobilisation factor, rather 'the primordial' is one such 'objective' circumstance. These circumstances, however, are only significant when they are politicised and employed as political tools to increase political viability of a particular 'definition of the situation'. These narratives - not heritage of heterogeneity, incongruence between the state and the nation, and state policies - mobilise political action. They have come about as reactions to both these factors, the vertical conflict, but also as responses to the particular composition of elite structure which in the face of national integrative measures experienced continuous factional disunity, the horizontal conflict.

Having identified two major strategic mistakes committed by the New Order regime does not amount to giving state policy predominant explanatory value. Rather it has been demonstrated how these particular mistakes were utilised to define the Acehnese situation. Others could probably list a thousand other strategic mistakes but that only proves that is it decided by the agent, how to define a mistake. The central distinct feature of Aceh is, not that particular state policies were pursued, or that 'objective' circumstances were present, but that the nature of elite factionalism produced contending Acehnese narratives. These narratives utilised the state policies and 'objective' circumstances and transformed them into available facts and identity indicators for the Acehnese. The political viability of these narratives largely determines both their content and their appeal. The interaction between political realities and elite pragmatism, rather than political realities on their own, caused emergence of separatist ideology. Today, interaction between political realities and popular pragmatism has to operate in a political environment where peaceful protest is disregarded and armed separatism begins to appear as a viable alternative.

The exercise of this study has been to reject theories of separatism which focus on the presence of 'objective' circumstances but fail to take into account the nature of elite competition. Of course, 'objective' circumstances comprise part of the explanation of the rise of separatist movements, but one must also examine the process by which a

particular vertical conflict becomes distinctively regionalised. Furthermore, these circumstances are not just available facts and any analysis of separatism must appreciate how and why a these circumstances become politicised. The suggestion that some countries are inherently fragile due exclusively to their ethnic composition is a thorough simplification of complex matters. There is no ethnopolitical conflict without mobilisation, and mobilisation does not come about just because specific 'objective' circumstances are present. Mobilisation needs both narratives and leaders.

It follows that vertical conflict is not always 'enough'. It also follows that state policies which arbitrarily pursue national integration are not 'enough' either. Violent vertical conflict can be solved by political means as long as the regional mobilisers see it politically viable to do so. If, however, these political means are not employed or arrangements made are not adhered to, the likelihood that violence will re-emerge is high. The emergence of regional ethnopolitical nationalism, GAM's separatist 'neo-colonialism' being only one version, comes about as a product of the interaction between vertical conflict and horizontal conflict. Horizontal conflict is likely to reinforce the importance of vertical conflict.

The link between political opening and resumption of conflict seems well-established, as does the link between incomplete democratisation and intensification of conflict. If political channels for articulation and resolution are not entirely open to regional mobilisers, they have strong incentives for abandoning the negotiation option. Likewise, the population of the region can easier be mobilised if they witness that democratic channels, expected to be open to peaceful protest, are in fact inefficient. The analysis of the chronological formulation of narratives lends support to the contention that the primordial, although not entirely constructed, has limited effects on mobilisation. Not until the narrative was formulated by popular forces, and not just elites, did mobilisation reach substantive levels.

No, the story of Aceh is not a story of failed national integration. Rather, it is a story of failed elite accommodation which came about as a result of a particular composition of elite structure. In the face of national integrative measures, this structure was dominated by continuous factional disunity and elite competition. It was the centre's conscious manipulation of the Acehnese social fabric which provoked this disunity and which led to the articulation of contending narratives about the Acehnese 'situation', one of which eventually told the 'neo-colonialism' story and did so with arms.

Contemporary Acehnese mass-mobilisation is not a product of failed national integration, neither is it an expression of primordial identity which has been unleashed by democratisation. Aceh's war is no longer a war of identity or *jihad*. The current Acehnese narrative is a story of a population subjected to violence. The question of

whether this population is also a people is less important than the national integration story would have us believe.

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