Managing Ethno-Nationalism within Special Territorial Autonomy Policy: Comparative Cases between Aceh and Papua

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ABSTRACT
The implementation of special autonomy regions is how the central government acknowledges the uniqueness and significant contributions of specific regions to Indonesia. The acknowledgment is then accommodated within special autonomy policies. Starting with Papua in 2001, there are eight provinces with special regions. Despite having a special autonomy status, those provinces may have more problems. The issues are mainly the historical root of integration with Indonesia, resource

Kata Kunci: status otonomi khusus, kebijakan otonomi khusus, desentralisasi, Aceh, Papua

ABSTRAK

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inequality, and the genuine representations of indigenous people as officeholders. These three issues have been common problems in Indonesia since the up-and-down relationship exists between the central government and those special autonomous regions. The unequal compensation in revenue transfer always becomes a hotbed that recalls the integration process with Indonesia long ago. In line with the previously mentioned problems, this paper aims to evaluate the policy performance of special autonomy policies in Aceh and Papua. Both regions are worth investigating because there are always disputed classical problems that disrupt national integrity. Most importantly, both regions have insurgency movements that force the central government to respond swiftly. Compared with other special autonomous regions, Aceh and Papua have been in a turbulent position with Jakarta for many decades. These fluctuating relationships show unresolved problems that are still ingrained in both regions. Following up on the mentioned problems briefly, this paper reveals that while special autonomy in Aceh technically has ended the long conflict, Papua still struggles with scattered conflict in some regions. These different results show the remaining challenges the special autonomy policy should deal with very soon.

Keywords: special autonomy status, special autonomy policy, decentralisation, Aceh, Papua

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has endorsed real territorial autonomy policies since 1999. It revised the previous decentralisation policies that were in favour of the central government position. Before decentralisation, subnational governments at provincial and regional/municipality levels were the subordinates of Jakarta, resulting in deep resentments that disrupted national-local relationships—concerning the potential breakup after the fallacy of an authoritarian regime. These decentralisation policies have included political devolution and financial distribution from central government to local governments. Both policy components allow local governments to regulate territorial matters except foreign affairs, religion, defence, monetary, and religious affairs.

Territorial autonomy policies had prevented Indonesia from balkanization after Suharto’s resignation in 1998. The enactment of new decentralisation policies that include special autonomous regions in Papua since 2001 and Aceh since 2006 is an attempt to keep Indonesia intact. Although Indonesian territory is consolidated, Aceh and Papua still have disputes with the central government due to significant separatism tendencies. Owing to the insurgency stories,
Jakarta granted special territorial autonomy policies for both regions. Papua and Aceh have been special autonomous regions since 2001 and 2006, respectively. While Aceh’s ethnic conflict has been resolved, Papua remains turbulent. These facts will be elaborated thoroughly in the following sections.

Ethnicity disputes in decentralised Indonesia are the focus here. It has been studied within recent literature, arguing that the special autonomy policy is the way for the central government to end the conflict. Some scholars have discussed the intersection between regional autonomy policies and ethnic conflict. More specifically, the decentralisation policy is a form of power-sharing in managing ethnic conflict at the subnational government level (Jati 2021). For example, Gerry van Klinken used a contentious political approach in his works. He argues that ethnic conflict results from dynamic relations between key local actors. The weak state condition allows more opportunity to gain power. Local elites often used political mobilisation to retain local power by mobilising “primordial sentiments” (Klinken 2007, 21–23). Accordingly, communal violence is the primary power mechanism to secure the state resources. In this sense, Klinken only pays attention to resource competition in intra-elite relations. He does not explain enough about the emergence of local sentiments. In brief, the stipulation of special autonomous regions aims to localise those primordial sentiments as local privileges. Basically, the government would like to curb any potential conflict that might be snowballing in other regions.

Another research used historical institutionalism approach to analyse Indonesia’s ethnic conflict. Ethnic conflict is resulted from unresolved national political problems that affect the local level (Bertrand 2008, 435–37). The main point is that the previous regime had critical junctures, which caused political uncertainties. The fallacy of Suharto was the leading national uncertainty because this implies elite mobilisation at the local level (Bertrand 2008, 440). His theory remains unclear in understanding conflict narration because he does not explain the main local discourse beyond elite mobilisation.
From Bertrand’s (2008) perspective, the special autonomous region is the way to acknowledge historical background, which causes disputes, especially regarding integration within Indonesia. Therefore, this strategy is how to find common ground between national and subnational levels.

Following up on this scholarly debate, both scholars seem to focus only on the elite factor but not the ethnic localism discourse while social mobilisation and political opportunity factors were absent. Both factors will give a critical sense of political bargaining between regional and national actors in the Aceh and Papua cases. More importantly, this article uses ethnonationalism, focusing on the Aceh and Papua ethnic insurgencies and how the state accommodates their ethnic demands in the special autonomy law. This paper argues that various ethnic insurgency experiences and different governments’ political will have shaped different outcomes and challenges of special autonomy law in Aceh and Papua. Firstly, this essay elaborates briefly on ethnonationalism cases in Aceh and Papua, then explains the different ethnic-insurgency outcomes in both regions. Lastly, it will discuss special autonomy policy outcomes and their challenges.

Ethnonationalism has shaped why local identity sentiments matter in the modern period. The ethnonationalism sentiment is defined as traditional symbols, local institutional design, self-governing desires, and severe relationship to central government. Those elements shape discourse about why territorial autonomy succeeded in Aceh but not in Papua. Historically, ethnonationalism relates to the unfinished nation-building process after achieving independence (Gayatri 2010, 192). This argument conveys that there are several unassimilated local entities within the nation-building process. The first reason behind that is the different ethnic factors (Francis 1968, 344). The nation-building process in the post-colonial states was contested among ethnic groups. The emergence of a powerful single ethnic group may be possible because of relations between core-periphery at the societal level, for those minorities would be excluded from an unbalanced nation-building process.
Interestingly, Southeast Asian countries show heterogeneous cultural traditions. Therefore, ethnic diversity might threaten national unity because that would deteriorate social cohesion among citizens. The second reason is different religions. Some Southeast Asian countries, such as South Thailand, Mindanao, Aceh, and Papua, have suffered from religious conflict (Schefold 1998, 277). These regions indicate strong inward solidarity based on religious factors. Different ethnicities and religions are the sources of the current ethno-nationalism movement in modern times. Both components often stimulate minority grievances in many respects. Unequal resource distribution and unfair public services are the continuing grievances of minorities.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

*Ethno-Nationalism within State System: Comparative Theory*

Ethno-nationalism is derived from the word *ethno*, originally a shortened form of ethnicity and nationalism. The former word usually expresses the protection, safeguards, and even protection of the locals, commonly called *Bumiputera* or *Putra Daerah*, which translates into “the prince of the earth” or “sons of the soil.” Ethno-nationalism is a local response to the central government’s “nationalizing state” (Lawson 2016). The idea is to incorporate other ethnic minorities into the institutions, symbols, and regulations of the majoritarian powers. This view ensures political and security stability over the whole country. Historically, nationalizing state projects was the colonial policy by transmigrating the people and managing minorities directly under the government were the main things to do. In fact, both policies have been cultivating resentment at the minority level because they always feel being watched by the government and most migrant people while living in their traditional land. Special autonomy status does not make them “free” in many respects.

The primary source of ethno-nationalism is the one-sided rewriting of histories. These arguments show that both government and local challengers have their historical versions. The history is particularly
related to territoriality. The process of colonial states was indeed not in the integral condition. There were regions under direct colonial rule and sovereign regions under colonial suzerainty. Two different governing styles caused different meanings of nationalism after being independent. The unionists believed the successor states had the right to claim entire colonial regions, including the sovereign entities, which disregarded the primordialist group in former sovereign entities. This would be an ongoing dispute because the primordialists never talked with the unionists in the nation-building process. The primordialists still persistently believe they have been independent after the colonization era.

Indonesia and India are the plural nations. However, they often practiced uniform policies favouring majority ethnic and religions. Kashmir has been the subject of Indian Hinduisation because of the strong local separatism tendency. Papuans also have long “Indonesiaization” projects through transmigration and infrastructure projects. As big countries, India and Indonesia have been worrying about secession issues. For Indians, Kashmir is the head of Indian territorial unity. Losing Kashmir at the top would be delegitimizing India as the country. For Indonesians, the Papuan has been metaphorically part of Indonesia because of one of the patriotic national songs and was part of the Tidore Sultanate. Therefore, Indonesians unanimously believe Papua is Indonesia’s integral territory. Those assertions give long mandates for the Indian and Indonesian governments to deploy military forces to secure Kashmir and Papua from “security disturbance movements.” This label directly refers to local insurgent groups in Kashmir and Papua. They do not consider those groups to be advocates who would like to have dialogues with the central governments.

Although the Kashmir and Papua cases share a similar view that they were independent entities, the ethno-nationalism cases in Kashmir and Papua differ. Kashmiri people believe Kashmir is not an integral part of India due to the different religions of most Indians. They believe India should allow Kashmir to have self-governing rights as a nation. Under British rule, Kashmiri enjoyed the great autonomous status
enacted under Article 370 of the Indian constitution. Nevertheless, the problem is that the Kashmiri problem never finished, even after the Indian government changed the autonomous regions to become federal subjects. In this sense, the problem root is that the Indian government is half-hearted in guarding Kashmiri’s internal sovereignty. Hostilities and disbelief views on the Indian government’s side treat Kashmiri would cause more ethno-nationalism sentiments.

In the same vein, Papuans feel they are more likely Melanesian than Malay-Mongoloid, like most Indonesians (Isaacs and Polese 2015). These different races cause entrenched conflict between Papuans and Indonesians. Papuans believe Indonesia was the aggressor state after 1969. Indonesia realizes that hostile view by keeping Papua in captivity. Implementing special autonomy status under Law No.21 of 2001 is how Indonesians maintain Papua’s freedom but not independence in the view of most Papuans. As a result of the unequal budget distribution, which was only enjoyed by a few elites, Papuans polarized.

Both cases show us that special autonomous status is not merely about budget distribution but also about acknowledging traditional symbols. Respecting the predominant Muslim-majority region in India by relinquishing the Pakistani suspicious view of Kashmir ethnonationalism is necessary for the Indian government, as the Indonesian government should do for Papua.

METHODS

This research used desk research further to analyse the decentralisation outcomes in Aceh and Papua. Desk research enables the researchers to find the gap between previous and existing research on the same topic. It compiled several valuable sources such as books, journals, policy briefs, and other documents that might be relevant to this research. Analysing the advantages and disadvantages of special autonomy is relevant because implementing the policy always results in pros and cons.

After compiling that relevant information, the next step is to sort out the information based on the priority scale. Researchers filter the
information by following essential key points like historical analysis, institutionalism building, and policy consequences, leading researchers to arrange and structure the arguments.

RESULTS

Pro and Cons of Special Autonomous Region Policies within Decentralised Indonesia

The special autonomy policy is the way to find common ground between the national government and subnational entities. It shows that the demand for locality protection and social-political preservation are the main components behind this policy, which should be granted in a particular region. In general, this kind of policy has caused political discontent among provinces in Indonesia since the decentralisation law treats all provinces equally. However, this issue was not going further, especially since the national government attempted to centralise several authorities at the provincial level.

The expression of ethnonationalism in both Aceh and Papua is a product of the colonialism legacy that continues in both regions. More specifically, Aceh and Papua are the latest regions incorporated with Indonesia in the early and mid-20s. Indeed, this late incorporation brings consequences, especially the dual sense of belonging between being Indonesian on one side and Acehnese and Papuans on the other side. This ambivalence makes ethnonationalism continue to exist in local society. Regarding ethnonationalism, debate has arisen between national and local governments on this matter; the national government sees the expression of ethno-nationalism as a separatist movement. It eventually encourages the government to watch the implementation of special autonomy policies in designated regions thoroughly. Through extra funding, the national government hopes that the expression of secession can be localised by giving more political privileges to the heads of local governments. Given that the extra funding would benefit curbing ethnonationalism, recent cases show how the revenue transfer is not distributed widely and equally to the people, then becomes a prolonged problem.
For the local government, ethnonationalism does not lead to the expression of insurgency. It is the way local people acknowledge and celebrate their identities and upbringing. Furthermore, it also means symbolic dignity for some local people. Despite their ancestral land already being incorporated with Indonesia, preserving their local identity is still essential until now. The special autonomy regions would undoubtedly preserve these sentiments because it is also part of human rights protection. Given that, ethno-nationalism is only a matter of acknowledgement, but, in some cases, it showed how ethno-nationalism has developed into exclusive identities based on religion or ethnicity. It results in a “state within state” condition in a decentralisation context. Following up on the above-mentioned brief explanations, managing ethnonationalism within special autonomy policies in Indonesia is challenging. As previously mentioned, the potential insurgency and state-within-state expression are the major problems in Indonesia. Some say that insurgency in Aceh and Papua would be under control since both regions are still loyal to Indonesia. However, for the future’s sake, special autonomy should be evaluated periodically (Jati 2012). Another problem state within-state expression refers to how special autonomous region status can protect their ancestral status from external intervention; however, since Indonesia adopted this unitary system, that concern should be resolved.

In a nutshell, these problems show the pros and cons of implementing special autonomy status in Indonesia. The idea of special autonomy status likely contradicts the unitary system. Owing to the vulnerabilities of identity insurgency, the national government permits the expressions of local privilege to be accommodated through a special autonomy policy.

**Historical Background of Incorporation Aceh and Papua to Indonesia**

The main things in managing ethnonationalism within special autonomous regions are historical reconciliation and acknowledging indigenous people’s existence. These two played pivotal roles in incorporating Aceh and Papua into Indonesia. However, it is also
important to note that those two factors have indirectly impacted ethnic insurgencies in Aceh and Papua. Furthermore, different historical roots and ethnic insurgencies institutionalism have different impacts, particularly in the decentralised Indonesia case.

Aceh and Papua are unique cases in the Indonesian nation-building process. Both regions were defeated by the Netherlands East Indies government in the early 20th century, while Indonesia grew as a national identity. The Indonesian model showed that the process of post-colonial states was surely not in the integral condition. There were regions under direct colonial rule and sovereign regions under colonial suzerainty. Two different governing styles caused different interpretations of nationalism after achieving independence. The nationalists group believed Indonesia was righteous to claim entire colonial regions, including the sovereign entities. This one-sided claim certainly raised discontent from Acehnese and Papuan. This historical discontent is worth to investigate deeply, especially since Aceh was an independent state, whereas Papua was under a different colonial administration.

Aceh was an independent entity famous for the tremendous Islamic kingdom near the Strait of Malacca. It also was prominent as the centre of Islamic learning and trade in the Muslim world (Aspinall 2007, 248). From this historical stance, Aceh has a stronger sense of Islamic religiosity than other Indonesian provinces. Both reasons give Aceh a distinctive region within the Indonesian province. The ethnic factors came lately because of unequal oil and gas revenue redistribution from the central government. It is important to note that ethnicity is the second factor after religion because many ethnicities live there. After all, this became consolidated after the wave of transmigrant from Java Island that eventually dominated the Aceh economy. These disillusionments stimulate great resentment feeling among Acehnese. Javanese colonialism was the colloquial term to describe the source of Aceh ethno-nationalism (Tiro 1984). As a result, the Aceh conflict started in 1976, and ended in 2006 after the Indonesian government and the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka or GAM)
signed a peace treaty that underlaid the special autonomy region status for Aceh.

Compared with Aceh, Papua is different. Before 1969, Papua was a Dutch colony, namely Netherlands New Guinea. These different colonial experiences gave a strong tendency that Papua is not an Indonesian territory. This claim subsequently becomes the source of ethnonationalism for some Papua people. However, this claim could be debated since the Papua Island had been in extended contact with Ternate and Tidore Sultanate, who possessed power in Papua. Another factor is the different ethnic groups, which Papuan is more akin to Melanesian than Malay-Mongoloid. These different racial sentiments have sparked the debate recently. Both components then generated entrenched ethnonationalism among Papuans until now. The religious factor is not the determinant factor because most Eastern Indonesians are Christian followers. Jakarta incorporated Papua in two ways – diplomatic and military campaigns. The military deployment also contributes to why ethnonationalism has grown significantly. The latter factor is why armed militia groups are still apparent there. This brief explanation shows that ethnonationalism is not consolidated as Aceh did. Due to having more ethnic groups, the expression of ethnonationalism has always fluctuated in Papua. When it comes to inequality and injustice, it will soar up, then vague away.

In line with above explanation, the first factor, ethnonationalism itself remains to be rebellious source to fight due to identities bounding. This emotional factor generally draws out separation narration or local privilege from the Indonesia due to distinctive identity background (Barter and Wangge 2022; Lele 2023). As such, Papua and Aceh were proto-state entities (Sidel 2012). Both regions had their flag, coat of army, constitution, and national anthem. These components were the strategic way for Papua and Aceh separatists to convince the international, saying they were ready to become independent from Indonesia.

Second, both regions have leading insurgency groups, such as the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka or GAM) and Free Papua
Movement (Organisasi Papua Merdeka or OPM). Both organisations also have military wing to launch guerrilla warfare, namely Tentara Pembebasan Nasional Papua Barat (TPNPB for OPM) and Tentara Neugara Aceh (TNA) for GAM. Both armed wing is could be designated to be a ethic armed organisation since they used ethnicity factors such Papuans and Acehnese (Supriatma 2013; Schulze 2006). Although these two terms arguably is an umbrella term since Aceh and Papua have heterogenous background with multiple sub-ethnic identities, both insurgent organisations could be able to unify all those subethnic people under that umbrella term. More especially, by representing one solid ethnicity, they can fuel up the resistance against the central government. They always use anti-Indonesia and violent sentiments to wage war with Indonesian armed forces. Aceh was the former military operation territory due to high conflict intensity while Papua remains the main army deployment region and a restrictive area for foreign journalists.

The third factor is anti-Javanese sentiment. Transmigration and military deployment are the primary sources of ethnic resentment. In general, the central government had intention to unify Indonesia-ness feelings by migrating Javanese people around the archipelago since Java Island would be denser in the foreseeable future. By contrast, the emergence of Javanese migrants disrupted the social local system in the eye of locals. More importantly, the transmigration policy that moved Javanese people to Aceh in mid 1980 – 1990s had profound impact on this sentiment. According to consensus literatures, the first Javanese migration wave took place in 1983 under Presidential Decree No. 7 of 1978. In general, this Javanese transmigration was aimed to carry out state plantation program (Perkebunan Inti Rakyat) in Aceh. The Javanese migrants scattered around Aceh, for example 300 families went to Northern Aceh, 250 families went to Eastern Aceh (Sumiyati, Sulistiyono, and Rochwulaningsih 2021). This migrant Javanese people deployment was a way to open forest becoming farming land. Once they settled down with families, these Javanese group of people chose to live permanently in Aceh. In the end, the population of Javanese
people and its descendants in Aceh in total is roughly 10,000 million
people (Nurasiah et al. 2022).

Meanwhile for Papuan side, the Indonesiaization occurred by
bringing Javanese migrant into the bureaucracy postings, commercial
and industrial activities (Mulberry 2014). Most importantly, those in
power in this republic have tried as best they could to make “Papuans
talk, think, look and behave like Javanese (or Sumatrans), and that goes
against the order of God’s creation. That is where the conflict comes
from” (Giay 2007). This statement surely showed how anti-Javanese
sentiment begun from the central government’s mindset. This resulted
in the relentless violence. Although the current special autonomy
status grants Papuans to be more roles in their lands, the past legacies
have profound impact on current Papuan people (Barter and Wangge
2022).

When it comes to locals especially indigenous people (Orang
Asli Papua / OAP) within local assemblies, it seems that non-Papua
still dominated rather than locals itself. the Table 1 below shows the
representation disparities that might go to ethnicity sentiment.

Table 1. Comparative Representation at Local Parliament between Papuans and
Non-Papuans based on 2019 Legislative Election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Assemblies per each Regions</th>
<th>Indigenous / OAP</th>
<th>Non-OAP</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jayapura Municipality</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jayapura Regency</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarmi Regency</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boven Digoel Regency</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merauke Regency</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keerom</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Setiawan, Hendy, and Choirunnisa Choirunnisa (2023).

As stated within table 1 above, this current unequal representation is
the result of past legacies that likely favoured of migrants. Consequently,
they still predominantly in local legislatives. Surely, these unequal feelings eventually made the ethnicity sentiments in the public space.

The fourth factor is unequal resource distribution (Tadjoeddin 2011, 317–18). Aceh and Papua have been the home of important sources for many years. However, the revenue sharing is small compared to the tremendous national budget contribution. These are significant obstacles in negotiating special autonomous regions for Aceh and Papua. Some recent cases show how the abundant revenue transfer is not sufficient to leverage the living conditions of the Papua and Aceh people. For Acehnese side, it was claimed by the late Hasan Di Tiro that argued Aceh contributed 15 billion dollars yearly to state revenue who entirely spent for Javanese development sake (Ross 2005). The unequal recourses distribution gradually being curbed by the central government to ensure fair distribution especially at the district level. As table 2 shows, the shared revenue oil and gas sharing for locals always fluctuated in the last decade. This surely show how inequality sentiment still imminent.

This problem actually was solved by asymmetric arrangement for Aceh and Papua in 2006 and 2001, respectively. For example, Aceh received 70 percent of shared oil and gas revenue for the first nine years.
of autonomy, whereas Papua receives the same portion as Aceh did for the first 25 years. In reality, such abundant revenue does not directly curb impoverished condition in both regions. One current reason why inequality still present is the local government tends to increase fixed assets rather than routine spending for public service improvement (Setiawan and Choirunnisa 2023, 414). This misunderstanding resulted in the remaining backwardness for Papuans in the rural and remote areas. Eventually, they ended up in conclusion that unequal wealth income between migrants and locals’ narration. This sentiment eventually made the insurgent armed forces still influential.

As mentioned, these diverse factors determine the different outcomes in both regions. The main characteristic of Aceh’s ethnic insurgency was well-organised separatist movement. GAM utilised both diplomatic and guerrilla military wing. Few diaspora Acehnese elites organised the Aceh government in exile while living abroad. In this context, Hasan Di Tiro played a vital role in reminiscing the Acehnese people about the greatness of the Aceh sultanate in the past (Tiro 1984). Therefore, GAM depicted itself as the extended version of the Aceh Sultanate. Most Acehnese males and females served as combatants in some battlefields throughout Aceh province.

Moreover, Aceh as the largest ethnic group in the province, contributed to solidifying the insurgency. Despite the central government enacting Aceh as a military operation region (known as DOM or Daerah Operasi Militer), GAM could exist until 2004. GAM successfully maintained the discourse on ethnic grievances by combining religion, ethnicity, and economic factors. These factors explain why GAM can resist so long against the central government. The extended influence of GAM within local Aceh politics has made up majoritarian political power in Aceh, especially the Party of Aceh as the successor of GAM, which still becomes the major powerhouse in some provincial and regional governments in Aceh.

In contrast, Papua does not have a well-organised group like GAM. Papua separatist movements are fragmented into several regional parts in Papua. This less-organised secessionist pattern caused an unstable
Papuan insurgency movement (Chauvel 2004, 44). They sometimes are resentful; otherwise, they remain silent. The main reason is that Papua ethnonationalism is based on issues, which differ from most Acehnese people who stick to ethno-religiosity issues. Papuan separatists have two movement organisations: the Free Papua Movement and United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULMWP). The former tends to struggle with physical actions, while the latter tends to negotiate through diplomatic forums. However, neither organisation cooperated closely on Papuan issues. In addition, there are some small ethnic rebel groups throughout Papua. The heterogeneity of Papua resulted in fragmented and scattered insurgent movements and organisations. In addition, Papua does not have charismatic leaders to unify people for one goal. Therefore, Papuan identity is split into two groups, the Indonesian government supporters, and rebel sympathisers.

The implementation of special autonomy under unconsolidated conditions leads to turbulency and issues. The pros and cons of accepting Papua’s special autonomy status are still debated. Some argue that implementing this policy will make the Papuan people more prosperous, while others believe that the policy is insufficient to resolve the problem between Papua and Jakarta in the past. This condition, consequently, has made the relationship between Jakarta and Papua uneasy until now.

The remaining reasons why Papuan rebels still exist are violent histories and racialism. Both reasons often reshape freedom for Papua discourse. Some educated Papuan people, particularly students, are the main actors. The growing sentiment of racialism shows unfinished acceptance of the Papuan being Indonesian (Gannon 2014, 361). Series of crackdowns orchestrated by military force also exacerbate racialism feeling. This complex actor involvement shows that Papua Independence discourse is showing complex interests. In short, the different ethnic-insurgency conditions of Papua and Aceh eventually shape the result of autonomy policies. Although the special autonomy has granted the freedom of expression, there is a problem, especially at the grassroots level.
Ethnic-insurgency characteristics have given different autonomy outcomes and challenges among the Aceh and Papua people. The 2004 tsunami incident was the reason for GAM to surrender and accept autonomy policies, while Papua did not have a decisive factor as Aceh did. Therefore, some Papua people still object to autonomy policies. Another challenge of special autonomy in Aceh and Papua is the lack of transparency and accountability. Accordingly, inequality is still visible, and both regions become dependent on more fiscal allocation due to elite corruption (McCarthy 2007, 319). Provoking ethical sentiments occasionally occurs if Jakarta does not supply enough fiscal transfers in the regions.

Lastly, the national government is inconsistent in implementing complete policies based on two recent Aceh and Papua autonomy laws, explaining why specific issues remain unresolved. Some articles in the law are not implemented. The special autonomy law for Aceh and Papua states that both provinces are righteous to have local or provincial flags as a medium to acknowledge the traditions and reveal the historical truth. Ideally, Jakarta should obey the law; however, pragmatically, Jakarta narrows down the laws by giving self-governing rights, such as ethnic-based law and ethnic-based institutions, in their regions. As a result, Aceh and mostly Papua still maintain an inharmonious relationship with Jakarta. In short, incomplete adoption to incorporate ethnonationalism sentiments has caused potential ethnic conflict. Both cases for Aceh and Papua will be elaborated further.

*The Policy Evaluation of Ongoing Special Autonomous Region Status in Aceh and Papua*

Indonesia has given special autonomous status to Aceh according to Law No.11/2006. This law was the MoU results based on the Helsinki agreement between the Indonesian government and GAM. Previously, Aceh had special region status according to Law 44/1999. However, the defunct law only regulates formalistic and symbolic matters such as Sharia law and strengthens the ulama (Islamic priest) role in
government. Both components were not sufficient to accommodate the Acehnese ethnic identities. In this regard, as the local sovereign entity, Acehnese should have privilege rights. These rights include ethnonationalism provisions such as own legislative design, own local constitution, and even local security police apparatus. It is also important to note that the role of the interlocutor was crucial in mediating GAM and Indonesia. The post-tsunami situation allowed both actors to conclude peace agreement points in 2005.

Law 11/2006 encapsulated the requirement of ethnic-nationalism components such as sharia law, flag, ulama, traditional ethnic council, Muslim council, local parties, and Sharia policies. In addition, it also instructs 80 percent revenue sharing from local oil and gas for the Acehnese government and requires the Aceh government’s consent in oil and gas exploration. Former GAM leaders are given offices as top executives in several public positions, such as governors and regents. The peace condition has backed up again since then.

Although Aceh’s insurgency had officially ended, implementing special autonomy policies remains controversial. The flag is a debatable point. The current Acehnese government wants to adopt the former GAM flag, “Red Star and Crescent,” as an official local flag. This issue remains unresolved between the Aceh and central governments (McGibbon 2006, 70). GAM, who represents the Aceh people, says that the flag has been part of the Helsinki MoU, while the Indonesian government argues it represents separatism. In this regard, the flag symbolises the true identities of all Acehnese people. It would be better if the central government allowed “Red Star and Crescent” waves alongside the “Red and White” flag. Otherwise, Aceh’s ethnic conflict could potentially emerge later due to this matter (Jati 2021).

Like Aceh law, the Papua government had the privilege of managing ethnicity necessities through Law 21/2001. Papua has legislative bodies, political parties, local constitutions, and security force recruitment. However, Papua has unique rights in its special autonomy design, namely acknowledging indigenous communities and historical reconciliation. In chapters 9 to 11, the central government
grants special treatment to indigenous communities. The government acknowledges their forests, tribal laws, and rules. In chapter 12, articles 45 to 46, human rights and reopening truly historical data about Papua’s integration into Indonesia. The Wahid government initiated these two actions in the Papuan special autonomy design (McGibbon 2004, 38–40). Unfortunately, until now, neither initiative has been conducted. Discussing the Papuan is sensitive because it would escalate latent conflict and tension there. This obscurity led to the ongoing Papuan’s anger toward Jakarta. The rest of the Indonesians also do not know the facts about Papua.

When it comes to the fiscal redistribution, it seems generally has shown increasing transfer of shared revenue from central government to both Aceh and Papua before and after the autonomy. As shown in table 3 below, prior to be fully special autonomous regions, Aceh only received money transfer that might be little compared with current condition.

Figure 3: Money Transfer Before and After Decentralisation (2008 – 2020)

These two graphs basically show how money transfer have increased after the special autonomy. Prior to special autonomy money transfer that started in 2008, Aceh’ GDP was 503 million rupiah in 1995, and then 1,443 million rupiah in 2000, and then 7,978 million in 2005. Meanwhile, Papua’s GDP was 714 million rupiah in 1995, and then 1,755 million rupiah in 2000 before the implementation of special autonomous policy in 2001 (Harmadi and Adji 2020).

Although these two regions receive abundant money transfer, in reality does not directly to make locals in prosperous condition. Both region faced accountability and financial management to manage money transfer and also have yet to achieve basic needs for public especially health and education sectors (Fadhila, Ubaidullah, and Ahmady 2023).

The central government is not managing Papuan ethno-nationalism in the special autonomy design. The method that the
government used was only by allocating huge fiscal distribution and massive infrastructure projects. These two top-down methods have been polarising the Papuan people. As argued before, there are rebel sympathisers and republican supporters in the divided Papua society. For the rebellion side, their ethnic anger was due to land grabbing for business, targeted military deployment, and Javanese transmigration. Jokowi administration has abolished the late policy already. These ingrained resentments eventually led to Melanesian solidarity discourse. Therefore, West Papua’s independence has become the central discourse if any inconvenient incident occurs. For the republican side, Papuan elites are the loyal supporters, primarily working in public service sectors. Papuan elites have also served as chiefs in many tribal communities. This patronage structure enables pro-Indonesian sides among tribal communities” members. Local elections in 2021 will be a critical event for the Papua government when the central government terminates special autonomy funding (Provinsi Papua, n.d.). As a result, it stimulates various speculations related to Papua’s future.

Obviously, these two groups have different stances about the implementation of special autonomy in Indonesia. The funding allocation scheme is the hot point between the two groups because the rebel groups often argue that special autonomy only benefits the elites and their close chiefs. Moreover, special autonomy is more likely to cause ghettoization for the Papua people. Although the Papua government is an autonomous region, it is not. The special autonomy justifies Papua under restrictive treatment. For example, waving the “Morning Star” flag (Bintang Kejora flag) and singing the local anthem are restricted, which leads to several forms of violence addressed to identities. When funding goes to the elites, it seems they only put Papuan ethnic identity embodied into the local assembly. The unionists often argue that special autonomy has dignified results, such as numerous infrastructures and improved public services. Both policies have gradually reduced the gap between Java and Papua.

While the central government attempt to redistribute massive fiscal distribution, West Papuan independence has been inevitable as
it grows more and more. In general, implementing special autonomy has improved standard life and infrastructures, but this policy does not address the issue of managing ethnonationalism respectfully. The existing Papuan People Assembly (“Majelis Rakyat Papua” or MRP) is not sufficient to represent all indigenous Papuan identities. Compared with Aceh, the central government does not fully consider establishing other local councils because Papua’s ethnic groups are diverse and scattered. From the central government’s perspective, they want to avoid another “East Timor” occurring in Papua (McGibbon 2006, 70). Therefore, there are two Papuan provinces on the island. This territorial reform policy ensured that the Papuan independence movement remained ununited. Especially, the recent racial statement that shouted intentionally by law enforcement officers when they confronted with Papuan students, it has been reuniting ethnonationalism identity among Papuans (Lane 2020). There were massive demonstrations by bringing morning star flags in several Indonesian cities whose Papua student populations. Consequently, it makes up Papuan independence movements are kept afloat.

In this context, implementing Papua’s special autonomy seems impossible if the government is still half-hearted in implementing the law comprehensively. Reconciliation and reopening the histories are the primary keys to solving the ethnic conflict. Moreover, the intensive bilateral dialogue between Jakarta and Papua is also the best thing to do, which is not addressed in the special autonomy policies. Compared with Aceh, Papua’s special autonomy is illiberal—the top-down supervision puts Papua in a subordinate position. Papua also does not have top speakers to negotiate with the central government. Consequently, the ethnic aspirations are not fully delivered to the central government.

The national government has enacted Law 2/2021 as the second amendment to Law Number 21/2001 on Special Autonomy for the Province of Papua. It has two main things: 1) the establishment of four new provinces, namely South Papua, Central Papua, Highland Papua, and Southwest Papua, and 2) the new institution, namely
Steering Committee for the Acceleration of Development of Special Autonomy for Papua (BP3OKP). Regarding these two points, there has been a debate underway among academia. Some argued that this is a way for the government to curb potential insurgent groups scattered around the island. Moreover, the government wants to de-escalate the conflict at the local level through new provinces. On the other hand, some also argued that the new Papua law is a method to ramp up local prosperity through development. Regarding these two views, the new law intends to balance ethnonationalism expression and socio-economic improvement.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, managing ethnonationalism in Indonesia needs to be main attention for the central government. Basically, the expression of ethnonationalism itself is the way to fight back the so-called unequal and injustice narration by highlighting distinctive identities background. The Indonesian case showed how power sharing policy under special autonomous regions have profound impact on Aceh and Papua. While Aceh’s ethnonationalism can be localized through self-governing administration that in line with sharia law, Papua’s ethnonationalism remains fluctuating depending on the issues. These differences show special autonomy needs to be reevaluated on regular basis.

This discussion also has addressed important issues in managing ethnonationalism sentiments within special autonomy cases in Papua and Aceh. Different internal factors mainly caused Aceh’s case to succeed but failed in Papua’s case. Although special autonomy policies regulate ethnic symbols such as symbolic flags and traditional rights within the law, the central government has diverted sensitive issues into pragmatic issues. Therefore, this sudden move creates much of Acehnese and Papua’s displeasure to the central government. Decentralized Indonesia’s condition shows that ethnic sentiments are still ingrained even when Papua and Aceh have been autonomous regions. Acknowledging the existing local entities is the best way to design fair special autonomy in both regions, including respecting
the local symbols and people. This essay certainly has limitations in figuring out deep resentment locally. Acehnese and Papua have fluctuating anger trends toward the central government so far.

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