

Proliferation of Local Governments in Indonesia:

Identity Politics within a Troubled Nation State¹

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Abstract

This article aims to scrutinise the phenomenon of proliferation of local government units in Indonesia in order to understand how identity politics has evolved within and through the process of decentralization. In doing so, there are several points to make. The numbers of districts and municipalities in Indonesia have doubled within six years. Local governments have proliferated in the sense that the numbers of local government units have multiplied rapidly in such a short period. There were 'only' a little bit more than 200 units when Suharto stepped down in 1998, and that had more than doubled to 466 units in 2006. Interestingly, this took place in an absence of a definite plan, as the state showed its enthusiasm for decentralisation and a bottom-up process of decision-making.

First, the state can no longer maintain its hegemonic role. Under the regimes of Sukarno and Suharto, the state possessed relatively effective technocratic and bureaucratic apparatus that ensured effective control over its people and agenda. Through technocratically equipped bureaucracies the state mobilised certain kinds of discourses that, in turn, defined what was deemed

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proper under the banner of ethnic and religious solidarity. Second, local elites play critical roles in the process of proliferation. Moreover, in many cases their roles have reversed since the fall of the New Order. Previously, they were co-opted by the state but now, they are co-opting the state. Why is that so? The state is well aware of and even too sensitive to the potential of ethnic-based, race-motivated conflict, as well as secession (Wellman 2005). Indeed, conflicts did take place quite extensively in Indonesia for that reason. As a result, the state opts to accommodate the interests of local elites instead of confronting them. In other words, proliferation of local government serves as a strategy for preventing political disintegration. Local autonomy is currently the best available solution to ethnic conflict in Indonesia (Bertrand 2004).

Third, the proliferation of local governments confirms the importance of territoriality or territorial attachment (Kahler and Walter 2006). Territory serves as a basis for identity politics. By establishing a new set of local governments, the central government still retains territorial control and, at the same time, local activists also have an opportunity to do so.

Up until recently, the idea of nation state—namely one state containing one nationhood—was an intensely inspiring institutional design for states all over the world. The term ‘national’ typically implies coverage as extensive as the territory of a particular state. There are various kinds of nationalism: ethno-nationalism, religion-nationalism, and so on. Nonetheless, only one type of nationhood really fits the need of the state—that is the statewide nationhood. A miss-match of national sentiment toward the authority of state generates problems of either secession or demands for the integrating of partial territories of two separate states.

The salience of identity politics poses challenges in sustaining the idea of the nation state. Moreover, we can no longer expect states to keep trying to manage—if not manipulate—the changing dynamics of nationhood. A state is deemed necessary to engage in a process of self-transformation to contain the dynamics of identity politics. Despite this necessity, Indonesia is witnessing the proliferation of local governments in response to the rising demand for recognition of local interests and identities.

Prior to examine Indonesian case, it is important to note what is at stake here is the institutional design of a state. In order to avoid ill judgement on what is happening in Indonesia, it is worthwhile to take a closer look at the fundamental design of what a 'nation state' is. Uncovering the flaws of nation states first would lead to a careful analysis on Indonesian affairs.

Coming to terms with nation state

In order to proportionally comprehend the extent Indonesia is in trouble in its performance as a nation state, we need to set out a clear idea of the actual features of a nation state. There are two separate ideas we need to clarify, namely 'state' and 'nation'. Let's be clear what a state really means. Since agreement on exact definition of a state has not been possible,³ the easiest way to grasp the idea is by identifying formal characteristic intrinsic to the state. Andrew Vincent's description is worthy to quote despite its length. A state:

"...has a geographically identifiable territory with a body of citizens. It claims authority over all citizens and groups within its boundaries and embodies more comprehensive aims than other associations. The authority of the state is legal in character and is usually seen as the source of law. It is based on procedural rules which have more general recognition in society than other rules. The procedures of the state are operated by trained bureaucraies. The state also embodies the maximum control of resources and force within a territory. Its monopoly is not simply premised on force: most states try to claim legitimacy for such monopoly, namely, they seek recognition and acceptance from the population. In consequence, to be a member of state implies a civil disposition. Further, the state is seen as sovereign, both in internal sense within territory, and in an external sense, namely, the state is recognised by other states as an equal member of international society. It should be noted, however, that the idea of the state changes with a different sense of sovereignty. Finally, the state as a continuous public power is distinct from

³ Vincent, Andrew, 'Conceptions of the State' in Mary Hawkesworth and Maurice Kogan (eds.), 1992, *Encyclopedia of Government and Politics*, London: Routledge. See also Hoffman, John, 1995, *Beyond the State*, Oxford: Polity Press.

rulers and ruled.”⁴

In describing the state, Vincent has not implied nationhood or nationalism as a pre-requirement for the existence of a state. He, however, has mentioned citizens, population, groups, society, and other associations as the subjects of a state. How can we differentiate them from the state? The defining line between them is that the state has a legitimate monopoly in the use of force. What makes citizens, the population, groups, society or other associations unite together? There are many uniting factors at work that allow a state to be more comprehensive than any other association. They include the sets of procedures, law, bureaucracy, and so on.

What is a nation then? A nation is a kind of uniting sentiment. It could ‘merely’ be a shared imagination of community.⁵ The uniting capacity of nationhood could lead to various processes: territorial integration; freedom of political association; cultural survival; popular sovereignty under a liberal and democratic constitution; or even ethnic segregation.⁶ The idea of a nation does not presuppose the existence of a state. Max Weber, however, has suggested that the idea of nation tended to be associated with the idea of state. By quoting Weber, Gilber suggested that: “A nation is a community of sentiment which would adequately manifest itself in a state of its own: hence a nation is a community which normally tends to produce a state of its own”⁷. He even treated a nation “as a group of people wishing to associate *in the same state*”.⁸ The mobilisation of sentiment for enhancing nationhood is called nationalism.

The ‘nation state’, essentially, is the meeting point between nationhood and statehood. The idea of the nation state implies optimism that they are both compatible and even mutually

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 44.

⁵ See Anderson, B.R.O.G., 1991, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso

⁶ Gilbert, Paul, 1998, *The Philosophy of Nationalism*, Boulder Colorado: Westview Press, p. 8.

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 14-15. See also Reis, Elisa P., “The Lasting Marriage Between Nation and State Despite Globalization” in *International Political Science Review* (2004), Vol 25, No. 3, 251-257, p. 252. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1601666>, downloaded, 18/03/2011 17:08

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 90. Italic from its original.

enforcing. Nationalism, for those who are sympathetic to the nation state, would enhance state building. The idea of nation state implies that the state is the best setup for containing nationhood. It even makes nationhood functional by the way easing state in performing its normative duties, for example in mobilizing obedience from its subjects it is easier for the state to invoke the romantic sentiment of its subjects as member of a single nation and the state as its ultimate representation. Unfortunately, this is not always the case.

In some other cases, the nation state is an awkward mix. Its existence and the functioning entail a number of prerequisites. Its existence is supported by both a strong sense of citizenship and effective state control. By this strong sense of citizenship, the author refers to, respectively, the commonly shared perception of belonging to the same community of nation among the citizens of that given nation state and the state as the political manifestation of this common sense of belonging. This common sense of belonging and perception over the state as its manifestation entails certain expectations among this group of people. This leads to what the author here refers to the notion of effective state control that is the ability of the correlated state, on the one hand, to fulfill this expectation and, on the other hand, to structure what its public expect from it. In this article, this process is perceived as a continuous and dynamic process.

The state is an institutional setup within which daily politics is shaped. As an institutional setup, the idea of the national state has not been easily institutionalised. This implies that decision making and institutional building within the country is bound to fail as its foundation—the idea of nation state—happened to be on shaky ground and remains a slippery concept. Indonesia as a nation state is in trouble because of the difficulties it faces in—if it was serious enough—bringing it about the projected idea of nation–state into living institutions. The unfinished process of nation building, namely the process of creating new and uniting various facets of collective identities, exacerbates problem sharing and distributive justice.

How the forementioned process takes place and the form of nation–state institution it produces vary in different times and places.

6 In Indonesian case, it is important to note that despite the diversity of the meanings for democracy, Indonesia is bound to follow an institutional arrangement set by its colonial state predecessor—liberal democracy.⁹ The nation state, within the framework of liberal democracy, presupposes the existence of citizens with a strong sense of citizenship. Its colonial history has also been proven to be a critical factor that structures Indonesia's trajectory as a modern state, as its nationalist and territorial claims are based on the common history of living under foreign colonial rule and common willingness to break away from it as an independent nation on the exactly same territory.¹⁰

This obsession to transform Indonesia into a modern nation–state entails some pre-requirements to be fulfilled namely the formation of strong sense of citizenship and effective state. These are necessary requirements for a nation–state to perform its normative role, namely to allocate value before its people in an authoritative way.¹¹ This has been proven a challenge due to the broad diversity of Indonesian society, not only along the cleavages of political ideologies and socio–economic classes but also with the overlapping ethnic and religious lines. Each of them has different projection about what Indonesia is and what Indonesia should be. In order to suture these diverse elements into a single society of nation within a single polity of a state, it is necessary to arrange those diverse elements into certain

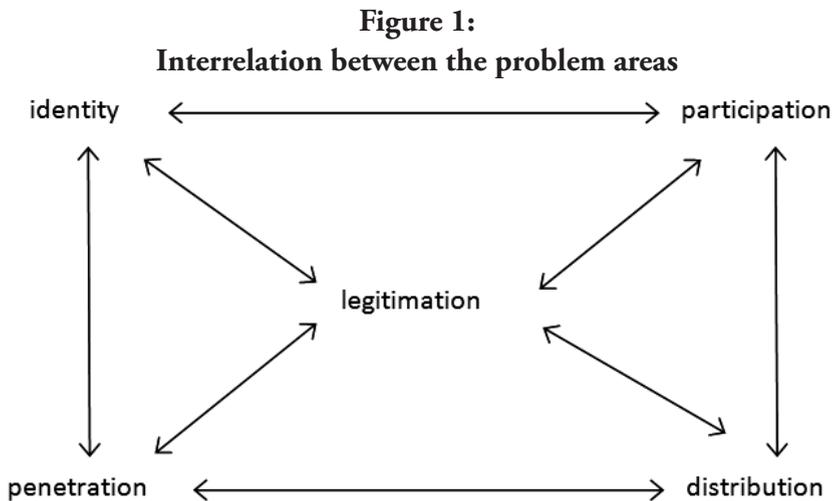
⁹ Immediately after its independence, Indonesia engaged in an experiment to put the idea of liberal democracy into practice. Unable to take this seriously, President Sukarno decided to replace with the so-called Guided Democracy. Suharto's regime of the New Order retained the underpinning idea of Guided Democracy—that is the centrality and totality of the state as the representation of Indonesian nationalism. The basic idea was that the president holds full control of the political process and even the political system. Even though the term Guided Democracy was invented by Sukarno, it was President Suharto who managed to fully practise it. Unlike Sukarno who had very limited room for asserting leadership, Suharto enjoyed much more room for establishing control. Why was that so? Sukarno was stuck in between, and hence bound to balance the two opposing major forces—the communists and the military. Suharto secured effective control because he succeeded in eradicating the communists as an effective political power in Indonesia.

¹⁰ Therefore Indonesia's territory nowadays includes the southern half of Borneo or Kalimantan and the western half of Papua. The Indonesian claims over these areas are based on the fact that they were part of the Netherland Indies colonial state.

¹¹ Easton, David, 1965, *Framework for Political Analysis*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Clift, New Jersey, 1965.

place that, on the one hand, enable them to channel their particular expression and aspirations while, on the other hand, ensure that their particular expressions and aspirations would not endanger the broader society of nation as a whole.

Considering the dynamic and fluid nature of those diverse elements of Indonesian society and also their respective projections about what Indonesia is, what Indonesia should be, and their positions and other elements within these projections of Indonesia, we may perceive the attempt to arrange these diverse elements into relatively stable positions within the framework of Indonesia nation state as a hegemonic intervention.¹² This proposition implies that any notion of Indonesian nation–state should be able to stand across and above those diverse social cleavages.



Source: Paddison, 1983

The very idea of a state implies the operation of four vital issue—monopoly, legitimacy, territory and force. These, as Hoffman has suggested, entailed serious tension, if not contradiction, among themselves.¹³ Establishing hegemony is actually finding the correct

¹² Jorgensen, Mariane and Louise Philips, 2002, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, London: Sage Publications, p. 48

¹³ Hoffman, *op.cit.*

8 balance among these issues in a correct time as they are actually dynamic forces. In a slightly different tone, Paddison (by referring to Binder et.al.) has identified five problem areas common to almost every single state. They are: 1) identity; 2) legitimacy; 3) participation; 4) penetration; 5) distribution. They are interrelated, as Figure 1 shows, but the core of the problem is legitimacy.¹⁴

For Paddison, identity has been viewed as a matter of mutual sentiment among members of a given territorial group towards government. There are national as well as sub-national identities. The existence of a nation state creates a problem of national identity and how this national identity relates to other sub-national identities. It is problematic when a sub-national identity serves more as a competitor rather than as complementing the national identity. It would be very likely to negatively affect that given state's legitimacy as, in such situation, the citizens of this given country who belong to the sub-national group in question would tend to question or even resist the state's policy. For Paddison, legitimacy referred to a matter of acceptance of government decisions because of the 'rightness' by which they were derived. The state's legitimacy would, therefore, be low if the rightness of its decisions was constantly questioned by its subjects. Participation refers to who contribute to the decision-making process. The absence of participation would make decisions either inaccurate and unacceptable. The other problem, namely penetration, referred to the effectiveness of government control. And lastly, the problem of distribution. For Paddison, it was about the extent of decisions to distribute/redistribute material benefits within society.¹⁵

While Paddison has recognised the rightness of state decisions and distribution/redistribution of material benefits among members of the society as determining factors for a state's legitimacy, other scholars have offered other dimensions worthy analysing. In this regard, Stephan Leibfried and Michael Zürn proposed an interesting idea. They identified four dimensions which, together, represent the

¹⁴ Paddison, Ronan, 1983, *The Fragmented State: The Political Geography of Power*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell

¹⁵ Paddison, *op.cit.*, p. 9.

essentials of a state. Those four are: resource; legality; legitimacy; and welfare. The salience of resource dimension resulted in the construction of a modern territorial state. The question on legality of the state has raised the issues related to law and sovereignty, while the type of legitimacy has been anchored by the idea of a nation state being democratic. Lastly, the quest for welfare has contributed to debate on whether the state should be interventionist or leave matters to the market. The manifestation of these four dimensions has brought to the fore four inter-related issues: territorial state; rule of law, democracy; and state intervention. They have put the four issues into a simple abbreviation—TRUDI.¹⁶ Through analysis of those issues, the dynamic of a state's reform would be detectable in the way it deals with territorial issue, rule of law, democracy, and state intervention. The combination of the dimension points to eight potential directions for change: 1) localisation; 2) liberalisation (deregulation); 3) transnationalisation; 4) regionalisation; 5) internationalisation; 6) fragmentation; 7) socialisation; 8) supranationalisation.

Table 1: Change in TRUDI

<i>Subnationalisation</i>		TERRITORIAL CHANGE		
		<i>Status quo ante</i>	<i>Internationalisation</i>	
ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE	<i>Privatisation</i>	Localisation	Liberalisation (deregulation)	Transnationalisation
	<i>Status quo ante</i>	Regionalisation	STATUS QUO ANTE	Internationalisation
	<i>State expansion</i>	Fragmentation	Socialisation (nationalisation)	Supranationalisation

Source: Stephan Leibfried and Michael Zürn, 2005.

Where does state transformation in Indonesia lead? Analytical tools developed by Leibfried and Zürn would be useful in uncovering what has been happening. Unlike the reform in OECD countries

¹⁶ Stephan Leibfried and Michael Zürn (eds.), 2005, *Transformation of the State?*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

which have been outward looking, the transformation process in Indonesia has basically been inward looking. Wherever the change has led it would neither be considered transnationalisation, internationalisation, nor supranationalisation. Special attention to the dynamics at the sub-national level would direct us to identifying either localisation, regionalisation, or fragmentation.

States, as member of international community, are proliferating in response to structural changes. It is therefore not so surprising to see that local government are also proliferating. At issue here is how this comes about. If we agreed Leibfried and Zürn, proliferation would certainly be because of the problems of resources, legality, legitimacy and welfare.¹⁷ For Paddison, it would be a matter of identity, participation, legitimacy, penetration and distribution. For Hoffman, meanwhile, it would be a matter of monopoly, legitimacy, territory, and force. These ideas basically refer to the same thing: the state as an organised power. They all emphasise the importance of securing legitimacy. This section makes best use of those ideas in uncovering how the proliferation of local governments has occurred in Indonesia.

Identity Politics under the Hegemony of ‘Guided Democracy’ and ‘New Order’ Indonesia

Initially, the political discourse in Indonesia equalized this strong sense of citizenship and nationalism even to some extreme sense during the period of Indonesian War of Independence (1945–1949). In some areas, the manifestations of these two notions came not only as struggle against the attempt from the Dutch to reestablish the Netherland–Indie colonial state after the Second World War but also against the previously existing social system such as feudalism.¹⁸

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ See Said, H. Mohammed, Benedict Anderson, and Toenggoel Siagian, “What was the ‘Social Revolution of 1946’ in East Sumatera”, in *Indonesia*, No. 15 (April 1973), pp. 144–186; downloaded from http://cip.cornell.edu/DPubS?service=Repository&version=1.0&verb=Disseminate&view=body&content-type=pdf_1&handle=seap.indo/1107128621#, 27 May 2013; ; See Lucas, Anton, 1991, *One Soul One Struggle: Region and Revolution in Indonesia*, Asian Studies Association of Australia; see also Cribb, Robert, 2009, *Gangsters and Revolutionaries: The Jakarta People’s Militia and the Indonesian Revolution 1945–1949*, Equinox Publishing, first published in 1991 by Allen & Unwin

The nationalist and revolutionaries' fervor at that time envisioned an imagination of society based on a mixed notion of equality, either based on the idea of socialism/Marxism or socialist-leaning-religious interpretation, across ethnic boundaries. However, these movements ended up to collide with the values formally the newly born Indonesian state intended to endorse and the ways it intended how these values should be enforced. In dominant Indonesian historical discourse, most of those cases of social revolutions are considered as somehow abrupt moments when chaos emerged during the vacuum of power. Some of these movements are also directly or indirectly associated with the cursed Communist movement in Indonesia.

Besides the political cleavage along ideological lines, there has always been contention over the issue of relationship between Java and the outer islands within this Indonesia nation–state. This has been an object of contention because there has been an ever present anxiety, even among the Indonesian nationalists in the outer island, over the potential of Java domination in the emerging Indonesian state. In the 1950s, this tension erupted into armed rebellions in many areas in Indonesia as also found in the 2000s in Aceh and Papua.

The regimes that have managed to establish their rules in Indonesia were all aware of the ever present potentials of different and even conflicting expectations and projections about Indonesia nation–state. This is particularly obvious when we take closer look on the two authoritarian regimes, Sukarno's Guided Democracy and Suharto's New Order, prior to the (re)introduction of liberal democracy in post–1998 Indonesia. After nearly a decade experiment with liberal–parliamentary model of democracy, claimed to be a failure, Sukarno came up with a "Guided Democracy" promised to be an alternative more suitable with Indonesian context and better to lead Indonesia into a modern nation–state than the Western model of liberal democracy. The same tone, especially against Western model of liberal democracy, was also sounded throughout the period of Suharto's New Order rule.

These two regimes were relatively successful to manage the potentials clashes of various projections of Indonesia through

12 hegemonic interventions. The hegemonies produced by these two regimes involved creation and continuous re-production of certain myths regarding Indonesia as a nation–state. These myths are mixtures of various claims from various sources ranging from some ancient fairy tales to the most modern scientific–sound ones. Those myths were reproduced systematically through the education system, through the state bureaucratic machinery, and even through the very social fabrics coopted by the state.¹⁹

Through these hegemonic interventions, those two regimes construct Indonesia nation–state as a totalitarian polity. Indonesia was projected as a total polity, where the state; and even further; the personal leaders of the respective regimes, was perceived as the embodiment of the Indonesian nation’s collective will. This ‘collective will’ here refers not to the sum aggregation of the will of individual Indonesians, but as Indonesian as a collectivity, as a nation attainable only for the state and through the state.

These regimes maintained some of the diverse elements and arrange them around the myths as the centers of the hegemony, rearticulated those elements and gave them certain meanings within the existing hegemonic structures. By doing so, those regimes established themselves across and above the existing political ideologies; social cleavages; and divisions. Sukarno’s Guided Democracy rallied those elements around his notions of Indonesian Revolution while Suharto’s New Order used national economic development as its myth.

Under Sukarno’s Guided Democracy and later more systematically furthered under Suharto’s New Order regime, the cultural groups which comprise Indonesia and actually may make their justifiable claim of their own nation - hood were positioned as “*suku*”. The parallel term in English for this “*suku*” is tribe, but in the discourses of Indonesia under those two regimes this “*suku*” refers to different thing in comparison with “English” tribe. Sukarno

¹⁹ See McVey, Ruth T., “The Beamtenstaat in Indonesia” in Anderson, B.R.O.G. and Audrey Kahin (eds.), 2010, *Interpreting Indonesian Politics: Thirteen Contributions to the Debate*, Singapore: Equinox Publishing PTE. Ltd

used the allegory of “centipede” to describe these various “*suku*”s with Indonesia nation. Indonesia is the body while these “*suku*”s are the legs. He came to this interpretation as “*suku*” means leg in refined Javanese language. Sukarno acknowledged that these ‘*suku*’s might have made justifiable claim of nation-hood, but since there had been a consent for these ‘*suku*’s to live together as a single nation of Indonesia, referring to the mythical consent among various groups to live as one nation during the event of Youth Pledge in 1928, they cease as nations and become ‘*suku*’s within this one new nation.²⁰

This discourse was also incorporated under Suharto’s New Order regime. Various elements of Indonesian society were incorporated as elements of the state forming the so called ‘state–corporatism.’²¹ This included the socio–political groups based on ethno–religious notions.²² Under these regimes we saw the formation of various state–sponsored social organizations based on religious and ethnic identities. Within the hegemonic structure of the New Order these organizations systematically served as channels for those members of those groups to express their aspirations, including access over resources, as well as means of control for the regime so those aspirations would not threaten its hegemonic position.

Under both regimes, certain manifestations of identity politics were relatively successfully managed. Sukarno’s hegemony utilized the myth of national unity in the context of struggle against colonialism remarkably well to ensure the loyalty of certain vital elements to the cause of independence like in the case of the grant of special autonomous status to the provinces of Aceh and Yogyakarta and the formation of the province of Central Kalimantan for the Dayaks.²³ One of the formally expressed arguments for these policies

²⁰ See Sukarno, *Bapperki Supaya Menjadi Sumbangan Besar Terhadap Revolusi Indonesia—For Bapperki to Significantly Contribute for Indonesian Revolution*, Speech in the VIII Bapperki Congress, Gelora Bung Karno Sport Hall, 14 Maret 1963, <http://www.munindo.brd.de/artikel/artbapperki4.html>

²¹ McIntyre, Andrew, 1994, *Organising Interest: Corporatism in Indonesian Politics*, Working Paper No.43, Asia Research Center, Murdoch University, Australia; downloaded from <http://www.warc.murdoch.edu.au/publications/wp/WP43.pdf>; 27 May 2013.

²² McIntyre, *op.cit.*, pp. 6–7.

²³ By 1957, precisely during the 17th anniversary of Indonesia’s independence,

has been because the people in these regions have shown their loyalty and supports for the cause of independence during the Indonesian war of independence. By doing so Sukarno has simultaneously, first, maintained and ensured the loyalty of the public in these regions to the central government in Jakarta by allowing them to find their particular expression within the broader framework of Indonesian nation–state. Second, he also institutionalized the myth of national unity in the struggle against colonialism and imperialism as the moral beacon to which the whole national potential energy should be directed, including the expression of particular identities.

Under Suharto's New Order Regime, different myths were introduced. However, the operating mechanism was pretty similar, even more systematic due to the heavier obsession this regime had to modernity. Economic development replaced the struggle against colonialism and imperialism and became the defining criteria for particular expression of identity politics to earn its place within the hegemonic structure. Particular elements were governed through more systematic structure of corporatism.²⁴

Despite the differences in myths and operating mechanism of these two regimes, there are startling similarities on how they operated in managing the emerging identity politics during their rules. There are certain common features and elements of the strategic games played by these two regimes to attain and maintain their hegemonic positions. *First*, both regimes utilized the state with more authority to intervene into public life, including the market. This was only possible as they were able to secure their claim of the inseparability between the regime and state. The state was presented as the ultimate embodiment of the general public will in both regimes. Thus, the state/regime stood across political ideologies and social cleavages. By doing so, those regimes also put their claimed monopoly the identity of Indonesia as nation of collective whole, of its representation,

President Sukarno proclaimed Central Kalimantan as the 17th province. A number of provinces were established in the 1950s. The establishment of these new provinces is also related to a number of local-level rebellions that took place within the same period. See Tirtosudarmo, Riwanto, 2007, *Mencari Indonesia: Demografi–Politik Pasca-Suharto*, Jakarta: YOI.

²⁴ McIntyre, *op.cit.*

of its state bureaucratic machineries; civil and military, and of the possession of the whole national territory and resources and the authority to distribute them.²⁵

Second, both regimes enjoyed hegemonic position since they were able to define the authoritative moral standards through which the expressions of particular identity politics were governed. In other word, these two regimes were able to earn the legitimacy for their rule. Those regimes earned and reproduced their legitimacy through strategic games of identification, participation, distribution, and penetration among various elements that comprised Indonesian society. Both regimes engaged in continuous struggle to maintain and reproduce the legitimacy they earned through monolithic interpretation of the myths they created to govern the multitude of Indonesian society. Sukarno came up with his *Panca Azimat Revolusi* (Five Heirlooms of the Revolution) and *Nasakom* (Nasionalis, Agama, Komunis or Nationalist, Religion, and Communist) while Suharto with *Pancasila* (Five Principles) and the *Pedoman Penghayatan dan Pengamalan Pancasila* (Guidance for Understanding and Implementing Pancasila). Both were enforced with the ever present potential use of coercive means monopolized by the state.²⁶

This however does not mean that through the state both regimes were able to suture Indonesian society as a final totality. Both regimes faced the perennial challenges of the lack of state penetration capacity. Both regimes were hardly able to engage Indonesian public individually and directly, especially over the issue of social and economic welfare. This situation has two implications. *First*, there is always economic gap among regions in Indonesia and among groups within the society. *Second*, most Indonesians live their daily life more as members of their particular social formations and hardly as citizens. In fact, most of them owe their political, economic, and social well-being through their

²⁵ This refers to the Article 33 of the 1945 Constitution of Indonesia, stating “The earth, the water, the air and the whole embedded natural resources are owned by the state and used for the maximum welfare of the society”

²⁶ The use of coercive means, both actually and potentially, were never absent during for both regimes to establish their hegemonies. Under the Sukarno’s “Guided Democracy” and Suharto’s “New Order” there were certain social elements branded as dissidents and banned and their proponents were persecuted.

16 memberships in these particular social formations.²⁷ These potential problems did not emerge to the surface while there was strong regime that had the capacity to keep them checked. But once such regime collapses it is like hell breaks loose.

The following part will discuss how the democratic regime in Indonesia fails to attain hegemonic position and how this situation contributes to the emergence of identity politics leading to the proliferation of local governments in Indonesia.

The Failure of Democratic Regime to Become Hegemony in Post 1998 Indonesia

The introduction of democratic principles and values after the collapse of Suharto's 'New Order' implies major institutional change over relationship between the state and its public in Indonesia. The collapse of New Order regime in 1998 took place almost simultaneously with every symbol and value associated with this regime, like centralism, monolithic interpretation, authoritarianism, state-corporatism, etc. Authoritarian and centralised rule has been blamed for numerous and massive violent conflicts in some parts of the country, as well as the potential dissolution of the state.²⁸ Repressive rule by the corrupt state has basically been a reflection of its weakness in governing its huge and diverse community.²⁹ Amidst this dire situation, there was strong hope that despite numerous obstacles it could bring up a decentralised system of government would prevent the state from breaking up.³⁰

²⁷ This marks another loophole in the, either 'Guided Democracy' or 'New Order' regime as the state corporatism coexisted with patron-client relationship and somehow enjoyed some mutual benefits from each other. McIntyre, op.cit., pp. 3-4.

²⁸ Syamsul Hadi et. al. (eds.), *Disintegrasi Pasca Orde Baru: Negara, Konflik Lokal dan Dinamika Internasional*, Centre for International Relation Studies (CIReS) FISIP UI in cooperation with Yayasan Obor Indonesia, Jakarta 2007.

²⁹ Nono Anwar Makarim, 'Pemerintahan yang Lemah dan Konflik', in Dewi Fortuna Anwer et. al. (eds.), 2005, *Konflik Kekerasan Internal: Tinjauan Sejarah, Ekonomi-Politik, dan Kebijakan di Asia Pasifik*, Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia, LIPI. LASEMA-CNRS, KITLV-Jakarta.

³⁰ Indra J. Piliang et. al (eds.), 2003, *Otonomi Daerah: Evaluasi & Proyeksi*, Jakarta: Yayasan Harkat Bangsa bekerjasama dengan Partnership for Governance Reform in Indonesia. See also series of Indonesia Rapid Decentralization Appraisal conducted by The Asia Foundation since 2001.

The Indonesian nation–state as a polity also underwent institutional transformation in this new democratic regime. In contrast to the previous regime, the state no longer enjoys central privileged position in the public policy process. Though the state still perform vital roles in the new regime, it becomes only one among many stakeholders whose consents are necessary in for every decision the state makes. Unfortunately, through out this institutional transformation, the new democratic regime has been unable to construct new hegemonic structure to replace the previous one. This renders the state as a hollow or merely empty arena for political contestation and neglecting its normative role, namely to allocate value before its people in an authoritative way.³¹ In this situation the state has been conquered by its people in the name of democracy, and severely obstructed in performing the policy-making process in the name of representing collective identity.

This design of decentralizing the authority and reducing the authority of the state has been largely reflection of the experience with the previous authoritarian and centralized regime, where the state power is prone to abuse. However, by doing so, this design neglect one crucial role the state had been carrying that is to govern the diversity of Indonesian society. The design of minimal state in the democratic regime in Indonesia presupposes that the individual citizens act as active and rational citizens in their engagements in the market economy and liberal political processes. However, this has been hardly the case with the Indonesian citizens.

Up until the collapse of the New Order regime, the state evolves in such a way to resemble Lijphart's idea of consociational politics. As an illustration, primordial affiliation has never been officially declared as a basis for political recruitment, yet bureaucracy and the military have been informally used for maintaining ethnic distribution within it. Distribution of cabinet seats always, no matter who president is, consider ethnic and religious distribution seriously to ensure that every ethnic and religious groups represented in the cabinet proportionally.

³¹ Easton, David, 1965, *Framework for Political Analysis*, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Englewood Clift.

18 This practice has become some sort of convention in order to further reduce the potential of both vertical and horizontal conflict.

If bureaucracy serves a representative mission, what happens with political parties? The power basis of each political party resembles primordial affiations conjoined with spatial distributions. Each political party has its own regional bases or strongholds. For example, Abdulrahman Wahid's party, namely Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa (PKB), would always win in east Java, and Amien Rais's party Partai Amanat Nasional (PAN)—would always win in the area where the urban-based Islamic organisation Muhammadiyah hold local influence. This political party has limited support from the Balinese, who are mostly Hindus. Obviously, Indonesia has no political party as a medium for the people's representation as citizens *per se*. Yet, political party affiliation is neither based on a party's platform or its commitments. Affiliation, instead, is dependant on the party's identification to certain notion of primordial identity. Observers of Indonesian politics call this phenomena *politik aliran*, suggesting that political behaviour is set by affiliation to a particular grouping.³²

Such anecdotal evidence is sufficient to suggest that apart from national nationalism, there are sub-national nationalisms. The uniting power of the sub-national nationalism can include territorial attachment, ethnic grouping, or religious affiliation. This level of nationalism unites less than the total of the Indonesian population. It nonetheless is more authentic or natural than the national-wide, or the 'wider', nationalism project. The latter, in essence, is constructed by the state within its desperate attempt to unite the entire population into a new collective identity resembling the idea of civic nationalism. The newly constructed collective identity so far has not been able replace the authentic or natural types of nationalism. People could be nationalist according the state's term and, at the same time, also be considerate of ethnic or religious nationalism.

The principles, values, and mechanism of democracy are expected to serve as the new myth to construct new hegemonic structure in Indonesia. However, the process taking place so far shows that

³² See Geertz, C., 1976, *The Religion of Java*, University of Chicago Press

democracy is practiced only merely as formal institutions, procedures, and mechanisms.³³ This proves to be leading to ungovernable situation both for decentralization and democratization process in Indonesia since there is almost no control over the substances of the issues brought forward through the democratic institutions, mechanisms, and procedures. The previous regimes used their hegemonic position to govern the substance of the expressions and aspirations of particular groups in Indonesian society. The current democratic regime lacks such capacity to construct hegemonic structure. It relies on the formal institutions, procedures, and mechanisms assuming that once set in motion they will simultaneously work to produce democratic substances.

Amidst the problem of the absence of active citizenship, strong particular social formation and identities based on ethnic and religious cleavages exacerbated by acute economic gap among these groups and the necessity to get state's authorization for access to resources, identity politics become one of the most viable and feasible instruments for most Indonesians for their political, economic, and social survival. The institutions, mechanisms and procedures provided by the democratic regime further facilitate this process. Thus, it is not a surprise to see the discourses of identity politics though it has strong discriminative and exclusive tones also invoke principles and values associated with democracy like equal recognition of one's cultural expression, indigenous rights, and even right for self - determination.

The following part will discuss how identity politics gain prominence in post-1998 political discourse and lead to the proliferation of local governments in Indonesia. The discussion will also include how political elites, both at national and local levels, contribute to the production and reproduction of this identity politics.

³³ Harris, John; Kristian Stokke; and Olle Törnquist (eds.), 2005, *Politicising Democracy: the New Local Politics of Democratisation*, Palgrave Macmillan.

20 **Identity politics and Proliferation of Local Governments**

The previous section revealed the setting in which proliferation of local government in post-1998 Indonesia takes place. This section offers an interpretation as to why it happens in the way it does. The first part will identify the changing nature of the opportunity structure within which proliferation of local governments appears to be favourable (although, not the best option). The second part describes typical ways and the strategies employed by the involved parties to gain a new entity at the local government level. The preference for the proliferation of local governments and the way to gain the preference are, to some extent, framed by the prevalence of identity politics within the country.

The changing of the opportunity structure

The description in the previous section indicated that the growth of local government entities intended to equip the state with an instrument to better govern and serve its subjects. Establishment of new local governments in Indonesia, indeed, has been taking place from time to time not only during the Post-1998 context. However, in Post-1998 Indonesia this phenomenon has taken place in greater magnitude than ever before.³⁴ This change of pace is supposedly structured by the change of opportunities due to the new dynamic within state-society relationship. The root of the structural change was due to the changed nature and character of governance—in particularly, the way the state corresponded with society.

The case of Aceh clearly demonstrate that developing an entity of local government is linked with issues of local identity. This was particularly so in the case of West Papua or Irian Jaya. The point here is that each local government serves as an anchor for the existing social grouping to articulate their particular identity. In other words, given the fact that organisationally speaking the state sets itself up in several layers, this grouping confronts several choices—and as many as the state. The layers of government relevant in this analysis,

³⁴ Furthermore, this analysis is not to question the total number of local governments, despite the fact it raises public concerns already.

however, is the one which granted autonomy. Why is that so? Anchoring a collective identity of the 'local' is not merely a matter of differentiating a collectivity from the other, but also a matter of making it functional. Only local governments which are granted autonomy are relevant for making the collectivity functional. There has been no or only very minimum demand for having more sub-district governments, despite the fact that this layer of government is granted with a particular territory and the head of sub-district is responsible for coordinating various sectoral agencies.

The proliferation of local government here is seen to be the political expression of certain identities demanding political recognition. It demands the central government to recognize their political expression by granting an autonomous local government so the associated group of people has opportunity to administer their local affairs, including access to resource and their usage.

The proliferation of local governments signifies the participatory nature of policy making in Indonesia. Participatory policy making takes place not merely on every issue, but also on deciding the fate of the state. When we talk about participation, we usually mean that the state is no longer in a position to decide on policy as it pleases. We are now witnessing a participatory process in which the state is a subject matter to be decided. The fate of the state, whether to be proliferated or not, is decided by the central government but the initiative mainly comes from the below. Obviously, the policy making at issue here is quite important since it, in turn, affects the fate of participation itself. The proliferation of local governments in Indonesia represents the reversal of the political game in response to the crisis of legitimacy in the central government for performing centralised policy making.

This situation opens up opportunity for many groups based their social formation combination of ethnic, cultural, and religious sentiments to demand political recognition from the central government. Some common features in the narratives of their demand for their own local government are that they need their own local government so they can have better access to state public

services and economic development; they have been set aside in the public service provision and development process by their current local government—usually claimed to be dominated by other social groups in that region; and the demand for a separate local government usually further justified by arguments that the related social group has justifiable historical and cultural claims over the related territory.³⁵

This process has also been proven to be elite captured. During the feasibility research in Adonara; East Flores, the author found out that the main proponents for the formation of new district in this region were mixture of local elites who were engaged in politics at central government and local elites who resides in that particular region. The elites who engage in politics at the central government served to link and bring the initiative from the local level into central government agenda. Simultaneously, the elites who engaged in politics at local level mobilize local public opinion to give leverage for their cause at the central government.

In that case of Adonara, the author found out that these elites expected some concessions once the formation of new district was authorized by the central government. In one particular opportunity, it was revealed that one of the most prominent proponents for the establishment of new district in that region was owner of a construction company. He expected that construction projects following the establishment of new district in that region would be granted to his company. These findings confirm the studies compiled in the book edited by Nordholet and van Klinken that conclude decentralization and democratization in Indonesia has become elite captured.³⁶

This does not mean that the central government authorizes every single demand for proliferation of local government. The central government has its own measurement instrument of minimal

³⁵ See for example Santoso, Purwo and Wawan Mas'udi (eds.), 2009, *Banyak Jalan Menuju Roma: Pengembangan Adonara*, Kabupaten Flores Timur, Department of Government Politics, Gadjah Mada University and the District Government of East Flores.

³⁶ See Nordholt, Henk Schulte and Garry van Klinken (eds.), 2007, *Politik Lokal di Indonesia* (trans. *Renegotiating boundaries local politics in post-Suharto Indonesia* by Bernard Hidayat), Jakarta: KITLV and YOI

conditions for establishment of new local government.³⁷ However, once again, the lack of legitimacy of the central government has been an obstruction to enforce this measure more effectively and strategically for broader national interest.

Proliferation of local government has become an issue more dominated by stakeholders at local level rather than the central government. The main consideration for the decision whether to proliferate the local government or not has also been more dictated by the public at the local level rather than the interest of the central government. In one sense, this may be a good sign of the growing prominence of the public voice in the policy decision making process. However, with no control over the substance of the voice that seemingly bring forward democratically, it turns out to have some unintended consequences when this bottom up policy making process occurs simultaneously with the phenomena of hardening identity politics and elite captured democracy.

Transforming nation-state

The notion of nation-state thus implies that the state not only is capable of, but also legitimately, serves as a collective identity of its citizens. Despite the fact that nation-state is a problematic notion, it was so powerful in blending diverse identity of its individual citizens. It even claims to serve and be capable of gaining legitimacy to act as an instrument to serve the public interest.

Initially, democratization and decentralization in Indonesia was expected to ensure that the state performs this role to serve the public interest effectively. However, it turns out that these processes in Indonesia rather further consolidate more particular collective identities than the national identities. The proliferation of local governments may signify the expansion of the state purportedly to enhance its capacity to deliver public service provision. However, the way this process has been carried on in Indonesia has bent this process to produce somehow fragmented society, referring to Leibfried and Zürn.

³⁷ PP 78 Tahun 2007 tentang Tata Cara Pembentukan, Penghapusan, dan Penggabungan Daerah.

The configuration of local governments in Indonesia is becoming more and more like mosaic where each local government represents certain ethnic groups. It goes into the direction where we have multiple states and multiple nations within a single overarching nation–state. Unfortunately, there have been only minimal attempts to construct this string of mosaic into a new broader framework of nation state. Simultaneously, at the local level this situation has not been perceived as an opportunity to further institutionalize democracy at local level and becomes further drawn into elite captured and dominated.³⁸

The central government lacks the legitimacy to impose some kind of order to govern the too enthusiastic interpretation of freedom and liberty provided by the democratic regime. The most frequent responds tend to resort back to the monolithic style of governance similar to one assumed by the centralistic regime of ‘Guided Democracy’ and especially ‘New Order’.

The proliferation of local governments unfortunately has been also failing to keep up with its initial claimed goals of deepening democracy at local level and enhancing state’s public service delivery. The introduction of democratic procedures and mechanisms at the local level seem to be anachronistic as the public at this level recognize their being rather as part of a collectivity based on the ethnic/religious identity instead of an active citizen. This further specify the fragmented character of Indonesian multiple nations–states each ruled by their own oligarchs.³⁹

This situation is in contrast with the experience in the European countries that have been undergoing more outward looking state institutional transformation. The deep–rooted and well institutionalized principles and values of liberal democracy, despite some variations among those countries these common principles and values to great extent may serve as the unifying bases for supra–national institutional arrangement like European Union.

38 See Törnquist, Olle; Stanley Adi Prasetyo; Teresa Birks (eds.), 2010, *Aceh: The Role of Democracy for Peace and Reconstruction*, PCD Press

39 For the reconsolidation of oligarchies under post–1998 democratic regime in Indonesia see Robison, Richard and Vedi Hadiz, 2004, *Reorganizing Power in Indonesia: The Politics of Oligarchy in the Age of Market*, Routledge

Conclusion

The nature of the problem is set by the acceptance of the incoming wave of democratisation which, in fact, operationalises the principal of liberal governance.⁴⁰ Democratisation has been top place on the reform agenda. But in this regard, there is one thing to bear in mind, the adopted model of democracy actually refers to the idea of liberal democracy. The fact that the reform was possible only during the state of crisis, and that the main spirit driving the reform was to see the end of authoritarian rule, would indicate that the state was actually left bound to the whatever decision that won public support.

The granting of autonomy to district level government and establishment new units of this autonomous local government has been diffusely articulated. The policy to establish new autonomous local government has been articulated in the one hand to enhance the state's capacity to deliver public service to its citizens and on the other hand as an anchor for the predominant social groups in the respected region to articulate their particular identity. Both narratives have been put into arguments that favor democratization and decentralization policies in Indonesia that is to reorient the state operation more toward the welfare of its citizens and make the governance process more participatory, transparent, and accountable. These arguments are also oftenly accompanied by such claims like indigenous rights, local wisdoms, etc. This scheme, when runs effectively, is expected to enhance state's legitimacy and provide an alternative model besides the centralistic, state dominated and security-based model of governance to build state's legitimacy.

Unfortunately, as mentioned before, these narratives lack a well-defined plan and hand-over almost the whole process of transformation to the negotiation among the involved actors. The arguments mentioned above seem to have their meaning bended in this negotiation process. It is noteworthy that many of the

⁴⁰ The underlying idea behind the reform has been to minimise the role of the state, including in the main pillar of New Order government—the military and the bureaucracy. In fact, the agenda of reform was to curb military engagement in politics and ensuring that bureaucracy is led by elected officers. For this reason, general elections are considered as prerequisite for further changes.

horizontal conflicts that have occurred and occurring in Indonesia are also brought in the name claiming the neglected right of certain group by other social groups. The process establishment of many new autonomous region and government involved those arguments mentioned above directed, not toward the central government in Jakarta, but to other social groups considered as alien - *pendatang*. This is also usually related to the dynamics of power relations among the elites both at local and national level through both formal and informal channels.⁴¹

Obviously, the question is how do we comprehend this proses of change? The situation aforementioned illustrates how same principles, values and procedures are used to pursue different motives and goals which somehow contradictory to the very same principles, values, and procedures. The notion of reform requires careful qualification because it is the state that has no control over itself, let alone over the society. Basically, everyone is in favour of reform. But everyone has their own interpretation of what reform he/she means by reform is. For this reason it is important to bear in mind that the notion of reform is, in fact, not based on a predetermined design. It is more products or consequence of negotiation among competing groups than well-deliberated and planned goals. We cannot treat the reform as a usual policy process given that the idea of reform itself is not easily agreed upon. For this reason it is safe to suggest that the direction of change depends on the way the public understands the state.

This article proposes an alternative approach to respond this current situation of proliferation of local governments for the causes of both reproducing national unity and deepening democracy as its concluding remarks.

This is bound to be a complex and thorough attempts that requires careful and deliberate measures since the adopted model of governance is found to be incompatible with the social formation where it is to be implemented. The broader context in Indonesia also exacerbates the complexity where we find the central government lacks the legitimacy to impose its policies from above and such

41 See Nordholt and Klinken (eds.), *op.cit.*

centralistic model of governance itself has become obsolete and hardly acceptable. However, it is necessary to have the democratic regime stands as hegemony in order to govern the fluid political dynamics of Indonesian society. It is just that it cannot be done as it used to be in the previous regime through imposition of command and control from central government, since such attempt is hardly acceptable in the context of democratic regime and would be very likely to be counterproductive against the already dwindling legitimacy of the central government.

The alternative way proposed here is for the central government to get the public at local level engage through their local government as its agents. This is to be attempted through more through discursive engagement to mobilize consensus among the stakeholders than merely relying on command and control mechanisms such as used in the previous regime. The author has proposed this approach in several research projects related to the formation of new local governments in regions with specific and particular needs like Papua and now is being involved in similar research for the context of national border areas.

From the experience in those researches public service provision and welfare are strategic issues for a common starting point. This is because despite of the dwindling public trust toward the central government, they still expect the state to effectively carry their distributive roles. The proliferation of local governments in Indonesia takes place mostly in the remote areas where the state presence is hardly found or at the best they use to come rather in their leviathan face. This situation should be perceived as an opportunity for the central government to adjust the ways it presents itself and to construct national unity.

Some of the main obstacles commonly faced are, still, the lack of legitimacy of the central government before the local public in the related regions and the strong inclination among some of the decision makers and bureaucrats to monolithic model of governance and their reluctance to engage discursively to reconstruct the national unity through different approaches. However, such attempt is worth trying if Indonesia is to break out from the trap of bi-polar opposition

28 between centralized and decentralized model of governance.

For this alternative way to work it also requires more active part from the public at the local level. The central government will not turn into this more consensual approach by itself. Such initiative should come from the public, and if its work for the local elites to push their agenda into the central government policy agenda, this should be work for the more civic minded citizens.

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