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**The Role of Local Political Parties in Aceh of Indonesia****Rozaili Binti Zaini Djalil****Abstract**

This research paper analyzes the existence of local political parties in Aceh as a proof for the development of democracy in Indonesia after the Reformation Era. By adopting a socio-historical method, this paper explores the roles of local political parties of Aceh. The data obtained showed that local parties play several roles in maintaining the religious values of Islam, adat, and the integration of Aceh into the entity of Republic of Indonesia. The paper concluded on the note that for Aceh people, it is believed that local political parties have the strategic ways to channel their political aspirations. Implications of the study as well as directions for future empirical research were discussed.

**Keywords:** Political parties, democracy, Islam, Aceh of Indonesia.

**Introduction**

The emergence of local political parties is the result of a peace agreement in Aceh, which same is a series of conflict resolution between Aceh and the Indonesian government through the signing of the MoU (Memorandum of Understanding) between the Indonesian government and Free Aceh Movement (GAM). After the signing of the MoU, Aceh was given the authority to be able to live independently, both in economics and politics, as well as in law.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of August, 2005, when the Republic of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) signed up the MoU in Helsinki, Finland, it was considered yet another uncertain attempt at putting an end to Indonesia's thirty years of conflict in its westernmost province, Aceh. After this is the historically unprecedented reconstruction process that followed the tsunami of December 2004 and also two orderly conducted elections in 2006/2007 and 2009; in this light, Aceh's peace process is not only still on track, but also widely considered to be a role model to finishing protracted civil wars for political participation and autonomy regulations (Stange, 2010).

The purpose of local political parties in Aceh is divided into two levels: the generic and the specific. The general objective is to realize the ideals of the nation of Indonesia as stipulated in the Constitution State of Indonesia, 1945, in order to develop a democracy based on Pancasila for upholding the sovereignty of the people in their Homeland and for the welfare of the entire people of Aceh.

In today's era of reform, participation and political responsibility for every citizen, especially for the general public, cannot be implemented smoothly and optimally. There are many people who cannot understand the political dimension and existence, and also their rights and political obligations. Both general purpose and special purpose is done constitutionally. It means that the local political parties and national political parties are prohibited from carrying out activities contrary to the *Pancasila* (The State Base of Indonesia) and the Constitution State of Indonesia, 1945 or Legislation as well as engaging in activities that endanger the integrity of Indonesia (Law No.11: 2006).

## **Purpose And Scope**

The objective of the current paper is to analyze the existence of local political parties in Aceh and see them as proof of the development of democracy in Indonesia after the Reformation Era. This paper, considered best to the author's knowledge as the first and leading of its kind, explores with a socio-historical method the roles of the local political parties of Aceh. Therefore, this is a qualitative research study using content analysis, and it is well appropriate due to the exploratory nature of the research.

## **Definition of Local Parties of Aceh Province**

Local political parties in Aceh were established in the bid to maintain the integrity of the Unitary Republic of Indonesia and given the specificity of the Government of Indonesia to Aceh. Therefore, the vision and mission of the local political parties were just to accommodate local values and local Acehnese religious values.

## **Political Development in Aceh**

The existence of local political parties in Aceh is part of the region's aspiration to lead people's participation in political life. In general, local political parties rely solely on the support of Aceh region in Indonesia (Mukhti, 2013). Local political parties are organized in

the form of voluntary bodies by a group of citizens who reside in Aceh on the basis of similarities in desires and ambition to fight for the interests of its members, the community, the nation and the state through the elections. Those elections are designed to recruit the parliament members in national and provincial levels, and also to vote candidates as the Governor/Deputy Governor, the Regent/Vice Regent, and Mayor/Deputy Mayor (Qanun Aceh No.3: 2008). Local political parties have different goals, but in general, it can be categorized into three kinds:

1. To protect minority rights: the local political parties aims at protecting and promoting the economic, social, cultural, linguistic, and educational right of certain minority groups.
2. To acquire autonomy: the local political parties are to acquire autonomy or increase regional autonomy.
3. To achieve independence: the local political parties explicitly fight for the independence of its region and the formation of new states. Therefore, local political parties have the aims of liberating the local territory from disintegration in order to have a peaceful, democratic and constitutional way (Mukhti, 2013).

In summary, the local political parties in Aceh serve as a platform to offer political education for members and the general public, and also to create a conducive atmosphere for the unity of Indonesian people and for their welfare. All local political parties are also entitled to receive the same treatment, equal and fair from the Government of Aceh.

### **The History of Aceh Local Political Parties**

The emergence of local political parties in Aceh started with the Helsinki MoU signed on Monday, August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2005 on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Indonesia, Hamid Awaluddin, Minister of Law and Human Rights, and also on behalf of the Free Aceh Movement's leader, Malik Mahmud. The parties are determined to create the conditions so that the government of the Acehnese people can manifest power through a fair and democratic process within the unitary state and constitution of the Republic of Indonesia.

The Leader of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM), Malik Mahmud, provided credentials to Mohammed Yahya Mu'ad, SH for the establishment of local political parties (Partai GAM) on 19<sup>th</sup> February, 2007. Partai GAM stood by notarial deed of H. Nasrallah, SH notary deed

07 on June the 7<sup>th</sup>, 2007 with Kanwilikum and HAM registration by the numbers: WI.UM. 08, 06-01.

On 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> April, 2008, a meeting was held between the Republic of Indonesia (GoI), the Free Aceh Movement (GAM), and CMI, which was facilitated by IPI Interpeace in Jakarta. Then on April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2008, Vice President Muhammad Jusuf Kalla with Malik Mahmud Meuntroe created legal certainty for the establishment of the Aceh political parties. Then, the recruitment of candidates from the parties of Aceh was continued to be made in democratic reforms in Aceh. Aceh local political parties launched a campaign with emphasis on implementation of the MoU. Aceh local political parties are committed to building Aceh in particular and then Indonesia in general, and also preserve unity throughout the country (Yahya, 2012).

## **Aceh Parties And Free Aceh Movement**

Most political analysts see the change of name from Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM- The Freedom Movement of Aceh) to Aceh Party as a pressure from the central government against GAM. This is such that there is no option for GAM to save the Party in order to pass the verification conducted by Ministry of Law and Human Rights of Aceh provincial office. Now the name of GAM parties has changed into Aceh parties, that has a mission to transform as well as build the insight and thinking of the people of Aceh on their perception of the parties as becoming the parties of revolutionary development. Although this is not an easy matter, especially among former GAM members who are used to fighting with weapons before they later turned into a political movement for development.

It takes much time to transform all these ideas. For GAM elites, they got to learn from the long fight with the Indonesian Government that was done for 30 years and did not bring anything good except the loss of life and property of innocent people. The battle has led to the generational misconception of Aceh and the destruction of Aceh civilization. This historical reality has been experienced over the 30-year war of Aceh and also raises awareness to the fight for political democracy, so that Aceh will be more dignified.

Aceh Party took the spirit of the struggle from the various parts of the world into the Party program through their outlining of agendas of folk defense. Thus, the Aceh parties will truly become the parties of the people who uphold sovereignty and freedom. Aceh parties needs to

open itself up to all elements by explaining the vision, mission, and programs of the parties openly. In this manner, Aceh parties will actually be the alternative parties for the struggling people in Aceh. More importantly, Aceh parties must be a party that is ready to take necessary risks for the benefit of liberating the people of Aceh from all oppression, ignorance, and misery. Not vice versa, the Aceh parties should not focus only on using the people during the general election. This is such that once the representatives of Parta Aceh eventually lay hold of power, they soon forget the people and become control freaks.

If such a situation is achieved, the fate of the Aceh people remain the same irrespective of whosoever rules. They will always be the object and never the subject. The overall specific purpose behind this state, which is to make Aceh safe, peaceful, tranquil and prosperous, will be realized through the victory and the simplicity of their behavior.

### **Aceh Local Parties in 2009 Election**

The election in 2009 was different from that of 2004; the interesting fact about the 2009 election was when the local parties also participated in the elections. This then led to a competition between the national parties as well as the local parties. The existence of local parties eventually succeeded in having a positive impact that strengthened the political decentralization; shortened the control range of political organizations; facilitated the aggregation and interests of the people; facilitated a political communication channel; charted an easier way to defend the interests and identities of local politics in the diversity and as well as encouraged broad political participation in the region.

### **Aceh Parties For The Governorship Election in 2017**

Aceh parties, being one of the local parties, began to show some of the names that will be nominated as a candidate for the governorship election in 2017. They are Zaini Abdullah, who is also the incumbent. Zaini Abdullah has a large base of support among GAM considering that he was also a former Minister of Foreign Affairs when the conflict period of Aceh GAM took place.

On the other hand, the party also released the name of Zakaria Saman, the consultative council of the Aceh parties who is a former Defense Minister of GAM that had great influence among the supporters of the Aceh parties. However, one name that is familiar is

Muzakir Manaf, a former GAM commander. Currently, he is also the vice governor of Aceh, accompanying Zaini Abdullah.

The three names above have the same support in Aceh parties; they are utilizing the network and supporters of the Free Aceh Movement so as to be nominated for the Governorship election of Aceh in 2017. But of course, as a political party, Aceh parties could only have one name for the governorship nominee. At the end, the local elections in 2017 sparked internal conflict within the parties (Hajad, 2016).

Aceh parties is a hope and a symbol of resurrection for the people in Aceh who expect Aceh to be more prosperous after prolonged conflict. However, when a split in the Aceh parties continues to happen in every election, the strength of the Aceh parties will continue to erode. The contribution of their supporters and other people will be divided and diminished. Consequently, people will cease to believe in them and have to choose another party that is considered more transparent and robust in terms of institutionalization. Aceh parties, a symbol of democratization in Aceh, will eventually disappear from local politics in Aceh.

### **The Existences of Local Parties in Administration System**

Regarding the establishment of the local political parties in Aceh, it was regulated in Law No. 11, Year 2007, Article 75 Verse (1) to (8) and Verse 76 Verse (1) and (2). When it is viewed more juridically, local political parties have a place in the state system of Indonesia. From the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, particularly in Article 28 E of Verse (3), it can be understood as a form of constitutional guarantee of every citizen to realize the right to freedom of association and assembly. On the basis of this article, the state guarantees the right of citizens in setting up organizations or other forms of union or association according to their respective needs.

### **Aceh Local Parties on the Principles of Democracy**

A government is said to be democratic when in its implementation mechanism, there is the implementation of the principles of democracy. The basic principles of democracy is equality, freedom, and pluralism. Democracy needs to be supported by some six norms or basic elements that are needed for a society of pluralism, i.e. awareness of pluralism,

consultation; and in line with the objectives, there are norms of honesty and consensus, freedom of conscience, equality of rights and obligations (Ubaedillah, 2009).

A crucial element of democracy that need some urgent attention according to the developmental process of democracy is elections and political parties. Political parties serve as a container or shelter for the people's aspirations. That role is for the implementation of democratic values. It is the involvement of the public to control state governance through political parties so that any political aspirations can be channeled diversely on regular occasions (Ubaedillah, 2009).

Local political parties in Aceh have been created within the framework of special autonomy for Aceh province in connection with the demands of the Free Aceh Movement as an armed separatist movement in Aceh. Local political parties in Aceh that are limited to only following the local elections in Aceh alone and to fighting for the position in the provincial parliament and the DPRK nor filed in local elections Aceh, indicates that a local political parties system in force is a closed system (Hamid, 2008).

The existence of local political parties does not indicate a distrust in the national political parties, but they are just in place as some other political means or mechanism towards the establishment of democratic political processes, and to promote opportunities for participation and aspiration. Local political parties in Aceh makes political recruitment clearer. Based on the Acehnese, leadership selection in the concerned area will be more selective and effective. This is because the local parties have a very close proximity to their constituents.

Furthermore, regarding the dissolution of the local political parties in line with what has been listed in UU No. 2 Article 41 in 2008, that local political parties shall be deemed dissolved if: A local political party voluntarily dissolves itself, a concerned local political party merges with other local political parties. In such circumstances, it will generate new local political parties or a local political parties will be dissolved by the Constitutional Court decision.

### **Positive And Negative Sides of Local Political Parties**

In general, concerning the consequences of the establishment of the local parties: if traced further backward, it is closely associated with the concept of decentralization (Djumala,

2013: 221). Former President Megawati once lamented that the local parties would threaten national integration, as local parties can use it as a vehicle to secede them from Indonesia. Decentralization has dual roles as both a "conflict deterrent (conflict silencer)" and as "conflict agent (source of conflict)". In the context of conflict reducer (conflict deterrent), decentralization can provide opportunities for citizens to participate in the process of making decisions and to make people closer to the government and feel involved in the political system. Through this way, people will be less likely to secede.

Apart from providing a positive impact, decentralization also has a negative effect that is a source of conflict (conflict agent). Also, decentralization of a region has the opportunity to highlight the identity of ethnic backgrounds. With the authority to legislate for their autonomy, local governments have the right to issue regulations in the region in order to develop language and local customs, which may discriminate against other groups.

Another negative side of decentralization is the desire of local elites to demand a greater degree of autonomy and expand its power. When the area already has a certain degree of autonomy, it would appear as a tendency that the region will demand more. The demands for more autonomy are what will encourage the emergence of new conflicts between the center and regions. If this happens, the decentralization provided by the center is considered failing. The main factors responsible for the failure of decentralization is as it is for the local parties in the region (Djumala, 2013: 222).

For some democratic countries in Europe (UK, Spain and Canada), for example, they allow and have local parties that explicitly fight separatism and these are not illegal as long as the parties are trying to reach purpose in a democratic and peaceful way. However, it should be noted that political parties and local separatists have not reached their destination. If a country is fully democratic, respects human rights and have carried out the correct form of regional autonomy, the desire for independence will decrease (Hamid, 2008).

## **Conclusion**

From the discussion above that has been described, it can be concluded that democracy is a tool to tame separatism. Democracy that had developed over in Indonesia is laden with political accommodation. Every political issues, such as the problem of disintegration and rebellion, will find its origin in a democracy. This is except for groups of separatist activists



and rebels that do not want to use democracy. In the state system of Indonesia, local political parties in Aceh serve as the organization that is authorized by law to obtain and seize political power and political position by constitutional means. The local political parties in Aceh were established in an effort to maintain the integrity of the Unitary Republic of Indonesia and given the specificity of the Government of Indonesia to Aceh. Therefore, the vision and mission of the local political parties are tied to just accommodating local values and local Acehese religious values.

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