

**The Separatist Perspective:**  
**Explaining Regional Autonomy in Indonesia**

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11 January 2016

*Abstract*

Typically an option for conflict resolution, the implementation of regional autonomy is not always an outcome to separatist conflict. This study seeks to understand the circumstances that lead to the implementation of regional autonomy in separatist conflicts, and focuses on separatist-related factors. The nature of separatist nationalism and separatist perception of state legitimacy are identified as two necessary explanatory variables in the implementation of regional autonomy. This case study analysis examines three separatist conflicts in Indonesia, namely those of Aceh, Papua and East Timor. Borrowing Clifford Geertz's (1973) dichotomy on nationalism, conflicts with separatist movements predominantly characterized by an epochalist nationalism, rather than an essentialist nationalism, are more likely to lead to the implementation of regional autonomy. Separatists also have to perceive the state as the legitimate sovereign authority over the disputed territory for the implementation of regional autonomy to occur.

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### *1. Introduction*

With sovereignty at stake, separatist civil conflicts often involve high tensions and extensive bloodshed. The separatist conflict appears to be a zero-sum game - one's gain in sovereignty is the other's loss. Yet, one side's gain in total sovereignty over the disputed territory does not necessarily bring about sustainable peace. Shared sovereignty, therefore, is one possible outcome in separatist civil conflicts, where neither side gets absolute control over the disputed territory, but both share some extent of authority. One manifestation of shared sovereignty is regional or territorial autonomy. A form of decentralized governance and power-sharing arrangement, regional autonomy entails the devolution of authority from the central government to authorities at a regional level, with respect to administrative, financial, political, and/or economic matters, within a defined territory. Regional autonomy retains territorial integrity for the state, but enhances regional jurisdiction and self-governance for the separatists.

Separatist conflicts have been or are among the most salient of intrastate conflicts in Asia, such as those in Indonesia, China, the Philippines, Thailand, and India. Regional autonomy is almost always on the agenda of conflict resolution for these countries. Regional autonomy, however, is not always an outcome in separatist civil conflicts. In Indonesia, for example, separatist civil conflicts have posed a significant political conundrum. The three most salient separatist movements in Indonesia - Aceh, Papua, and East Timor - have had varying outcomes on the implementation of regional autonomy. While the separatist movement remains struggling for greater self determination in Papua, regional autonomy has been implemented in Aceh, and

secession took place in the case of East Timor. Why is territorial autonomy granted to separatist movements in some cases but not others? More interestingly, why is regional autonomy implemented in certain separatist regions but not others within the same state? This thesis asks the question: **under what circumstances is the implementation of regional autonomy an outcome of separatist conflict?** To address these questions, this thesis analyzes separatist conflicts in Indonesia, which have seen varying outcomes on the implementation of regional autonomy across different conflicts.

### Aim and Significance of Research

Most research thus far focuses on the role and effectiveness of regional autonomy in resolving conflict and establishing stability, which means they are typically diagnostic or predictive analyses subject to contextual circumstances. This study, on the other hand, does not aim to determine the efficacy of regional autonomy in bringing about and sustaining peace in separatist conflicts, but rather strives to explain why regional autonomy is implemented in the first place. Recognizing the conditions necessary for the implementation of autonomy arrangements can help to establish or eliminate regional autonomy as an option in ending conflicts. This study thus contributes to the existing literature on conflict resolution of separatist conflicts, focusing on the viability of regional autonomy implementation.

Moreover, there is a predominant emphasis on government-centric factors in the determination of regional autonomy implementation in existing literature. While this study acknowledges the importance of government in shaping the outcome of regional autonomy, it seeks to bring forth the separatist angle as an equally vital contributing

factor. Separatist-related factors have often been discussed, if at all, as supplementary to government-centric explanations. By focusing on the separatist perspective, this study seeks to present an alternative angle to the resolution of separatist conflicts, which are, after all, driven by separatists themselves. A key scientific contribution of this study is that of more balance in the existing literature regarding the determining factors of regional autonomy implementation.

This alternative theoretical approach is also socially significant in guiding stakeholders - e.g. the state, separatists, third party interveners - to understand what has to be accomplished before autonomy arrangements can be a viable option. While the causes of regional autonomy implementation cannot be absolutely separated from the determinants of regional autonomy effectiveness, attempting to distinguish them is crucial in understanding the role of regional autonomy in conflict resolution. After all, the effectiveness of regional autonomy in addressing civil conflict depends on the overall approach towards conflict resolution, assuming that regional autonomy is not the only measure taken to address civil conflict, as it should not be. Determining whether regional autonomy should or can be part of the solution requires stepping back and analyzing the factors that allows for it to be implemented in the first place.

## *2. Background and Literature Review*

Most research on regional autonomy discusses its vital albeit limited role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, and tends to highlight the implications and consequences of autonomy arrangements. While certainly not a panacea for separatist dissent, regional autonomy can eventually “benefit both the political majority, who gain from a unified state, and the political minority, who desire greater local control over important issues” in the long run (Lake and Rothchild 2005, p. 120). Moreover, the implementation of regional autonomy also “[obviates] the need to develop criteria for secession, since secession (except by mutual consent) is simply not available as an internationally sanctioned outcome” (Hannum 2004, p. 276). Kalin reconciles the pros and cons of decentralized governance, which includes territorial autonomy, in conflict situations that involve minorities by asserting necessary conditions under which decentralization can be successful, primarily emphasizing the distribution of power and accountability (2004). Wolff advocates “complex power-sharing” that encompasses but also goes beyond mere territorial autonomy (2009, p.29); it is a “practice of conflict settlement that has a form of self-governance regime at its heart, but whose overall institutional design includes a range of further mechanisms for the accommodation of ethnic diversity in divided societies,” involving approaches advocated by liberal consociationalism, integration and power-dividing (Wolff 2009, p. 29). Siroky and Cuffe contend that the autonomy status of groups influence the probability of eventual secession (2015). These studies suggest that territorial autonomy in and of itself is insufficient to address the complexities of conflict resolution, though it is often a potential part of the solution. Autonomy arrangements have to be complemented by

other policies and institutions that address the roots of the targeted conflict to bring about sustainable peace. While it is useful to consider regional autonomy as a part of a multi-pronged approach towards civil conflict, these studies do not address the factors that lead to regional autonomy implementation in the first place.

While some research discusses the causes of regional autonomy implementation in separatist conflict, they typically emphasize explanations related to governmental strategies. Walter explains that governments “accommodate ethnic minorities seeking greater self-rule” depending on the “value of the stakes or the relative capabilities of the disputants” (2006, p. 313). Using a realist cost-benefit lens of analysis, she argues that governments are less likely to compromise on territory to separatist movements “if the number of ethnic groups in country and the combined value of the land that may come under dispute in the future is high” (Walter 2006, p. 313). In the short term, governments also grant regional autonomy to separatist movements to enhance the acceptability of peace agreements to both sides, with the long term vision for a consolidated state (Lake and Rothchild 2005, p. 120). Governments also implement policies involving “non-core groups” based on their “foreign policy goals ... and [their] interstate relations with external powers” (Mylonas 2012, p. 5). The implementation of autonomy arrangements can thus be partially explained by the power dynamics between government and separatists, governmental strategy to retain its overarching sovereignty, and foreign policy interests of the ruling government.

Yet, empirical observations indicate that there are more factors than those accounted for in government-centric explanations that determine the implementation of regional autonomy in separatist conflicts; separatist-related factors warrant deeper



analyses. Mylonas points out that “large, territorially concentrated, and indigenous groups are more likely to demand autonomy or even fight for self-determination than small, dispersed, and recently settled groups,” though ultimately the implementation of regional autonomy is a state decision and “countries with more such groups are less likely to accommodate them than countries with fewer such groups” (Mylonas 2012, p. 3). Sambanis and Milanovic also agree that “richer, more populous, and resource-endowed regions are more likely to enjoy higher degrees of autonomy” (2014, p. 1848), though the same cannot be said of regions that are more ethnically distinct. Shaykhutdinov investigates the strategies of ethnic groups seeking more autonomy and finds that those which adopt “peaceful protest strategies tend to enjoy more success in achieving their goals in comparison to those collectivities favoring the use of violent tactics” (2010, p. 179). While regional autonomy is ultimately granted by the government, state policy is also influenced, in no small part, by separatist-related factors. Åkermark emphasizes the importance of considering all sides of the story; after all, “autonomy is and should be treated as a relational concept; an autonomy is self-governed *in relation to* others” (2013, p. 25). Hence, to the extent that not all separatist movements are the same, it is crucial to gain a better understanding of the nature and perceptions of separatists and the potential implications for regional autonomy implementation to fill the current research gap.

Mylonas further elaborates that differences in the “state’s understandings of nationhood, civic versus ethnocultural” lead to different implementation of policies towards “non-core groups” (Mylonas 2012, p. 4). Ong contends that state nationalism plays a vital role in “legitimizing the state and in the moral regulation of the citizenry”

(Ong 2004, p. 34). Sidel explains that nationalism is as “discursive” as it is “material”, and it is a dynamic means of shaping political action to define the nation state (Sidel 2012, p. 119-20). Geertz uses two terms to explain nationalism - “essentialism” and “epochalism” (1973, p. 240-41). Essentialist nationalism takes up a more primordialist stance, as it refers to “local mores, established institutions, and the unities of common experience - to ‘tradition,’ ‘culture,’ ‘national character,’ or even ‘race’ - for the roots of a new identity” (Geertz 1973, p. 240-41). On the other hand, epochalist nationalism takes on more aspirational perspective, and takes into account “the general outlines of the history of our time, and in particular to what one takes to be the overall direction and significance of that history” (Geertz 1973, p. 240-41). Geertz recognizes that both kinds of nationalism can be present at the same time within a nation-state, and it is rarely either one or the other.

Applying Geertz’s framework of understanding nationalism to separatist conflict, incongruous nationalisms between the state and the separatists are likely to impact political outcomes. Nationalism is a social construct that is instrumental in shaping domestic political structure, one that can be as rigid as it is malleable. Far from being a static condition, nationalism is a dynamic discourse shaped by domestic actors - government and separatists included. Hence, it is highly probable that the separatist perception of nationalism is not necessarily congruent with that of the state. This thesis seeks to understand if separatist nationalism (or differences in state versus separatist nationalisms) has a possible impact on the implementation of regional autonomy.

By virtue of the fact that separatist movements involve an uprising of a part of the domestic population against the state, state legitimacy is immediately questioned.

Legitimacy is fundamentally a relational concept, a state cannot just possess legitimacy but has to be granted legitimacy by its constituents (in the case of domestic legitimacy). Gilley defines the concept as follows: “a state is more legitimate the more that it is treated by its citizens as rightfully holding as exercising political power” (2006, p. 48). Legitimacy, though heavily determined by state action, still highlights the importance of separatist perceptions towards the state in understanding political outcomes of separatist conflict. It is a function of state policies as well as separatist reactions to these policies. Separatist perception of state legitimacy would have an impact on the state’s decision to implement regional autonomy, assuming that it is in the state’s interest to pursue political legitimacy to maintain its sovereign authority. This thesis also seeks to study the relationship between separatist perception of state legitimacy and regional autonomy implementation.

Many studies involve large-n quantitative analyses to explain trends in regional autonomy; yet, given the complexity of factors and stakeholders involved, more comparative and in-depth case studies can perhaps introduce complementary insights on the empirical occurrence of regional autonomy implementation. Moreover, in the cases where the government remains constant, yet outcomes on the implementation of regional autonomy in varying separatist movements differ, a more comprehensive analysis of state-separatist dynamics focusing on the differences of separatist movements could be key in explaining regional autonomy implementation.

This research focuses on ‘demand-side’ (i.e. separatist-related) causal factors with respect to state-separatist dynamics. This thesis hypothesizes that (1) the nature of nationalism that characterizes the separatist movement, and (2) separatist perception of

state legitimacy influence the implementation of regional autonomy. First, applying Geertz's explanations of nationalism, this research argues that separatist movements predominantly characterized by an "epochalist" nationalism (i.e. "aspirational" and "constructed") rather than "essentialist" nationalism (i.e. based on "timeless" and fixed "core ethnies"), are more likely to lead to the implementation of regional autonomy (Sidel 2012, p. 117-18). Second, this thesis also contends that while separatists strive for a greater degree of self-determination, they must remain respectful of the state's rightful sovereign authority, in order to allow for the implementation of regional autonomy. While the abovementioned are necessary conditions for regional autonomy to take place, this research does not imply that they are sufficient conditions.

### *3. Key Concepts and Variables*

Regional autonomy, or territorial autonomy, is the outcome of interest in this research. In determining the empirical outcome of regional autonomy, it is crucial that regional autonomy is actually implemented on the ground, and not merely agreed upon in an informal or formal agreement. To determine the implementation of regional autonomy, this thesis refers to the Peace Accords Matrix developed by the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, which produces an implementation score (a percentage from 0-100% to indicate the extent of completion of peace agreement provisions) over an indicated time period of “intrastate peace agreements” between 1989 and 2012. The Peace Accords Matrix examines formal peace agreements that included provisions on the implementation of regional autonomy or secession were reached between the state and the separatists. In the case of the non-implementation of regional autonomy, there are two other possible outcomes: status quo (i.e. the region remains subject to central state governance to a large extent) and secession (i.e. the region gains independence as a separate state).

The nature of separatist nationalism and separatist perception of state legitimacy are identified as the two explanatory variables in this research. While these factors have been introduced briefly in the previous section, this section further elucidates and operationalizes these crucial explanatory variables. While this thesis hypothesizes that the explanatory variables are necessary factors, it does not claim that they are also sufficient variables for the implementation of regional autonomy.

First, the nature of nationalism, as mentioned in the prior section, can be placed into two categories according to Geertz - “epochalist” and “essentialist” (1973, p.

240-41). While nationalism can neither be purely essentialist nor purely epochalist, it often tends towards one or the other. In operationalizing the variable of nationalism, this study seeks to place separatist nationality in either the epochalist or essentialist category, according to which type of nationalism largely characterizes the separatist movement. Each separatist movement is thus dominantly empowered by a form of nationalism that informs its outlook, decisions, and actions.

Indeed, operationalizing an arbitrary variable such as nationalism is a tricky undertaking. This thesis does not offer concrete indicators to measure nationalism per se, but in operationalizing nationalism, seeks to apply different explanatory models of nationalism to the separatist movements. Essentialism and epochalism represent the two main approaches to the development of the modern nation. In line with Anthony Smith's position on the significance of ethnic roots in defining the nation in *The Ethnic Origin of Nations* (1986), an essentialist nationalism is best explained by primordialist perceptions based on fixed and ascriptive identities. On the other hand, epochalist nationalism is better cohered with an instrumentalist explanation in the development of a national identity, as espoused by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* (1983). According to Anderson, the modern nation is an "imagined political community," albeit with certain cultural roots, that arose with the development of print capitalism (1983, p. 49). Nationalism, in this case, is ultimately a tool to serve sociopolitical ends. A constructivist approach towards nationalism primarily aligns with epochalist nationalism. Further elucidated by Sidel, epochalist nationalism - representing a constructivist approach - is "predominantly perceived as aspirational, constructed creations of political struggle"; on the other hand, essentialist nationalism - founded

upon the primordialist stance - is based on the “timeless existence and time-tested endurance of core ethnies” (2012, p. 116-17). While an epochalist nationalism means nation-building is constantly a work-in-progress and incomplete, an essentialist stance assumes the inherent completeness and fixed perception of the nation.

An epochalist separatist movement is more dynamic in its interpretations of sovereignty and thus more agreeable with the implementation of regional autonomy, as long as autonomy arrangements cater to separatist aspirational desires, typically through addressing demands for greater political and socioeconomic leverage. On the other hand, an essentialist separatist movement embodies a rigid perspective towards self-determination (i.e. independence is non-negotiable) and thus tends to be less compatible with the implementation of regional autonomy. In the words of Geertz, “to deduce what the nation is from a conception of the world-historical situation in which it is thought to be enclosed - “epochalism” - produces one sort of moral-political universe; to diagnose the situation with which the nation is faced from a prior conception of what it is intrinsically - “essentialism” - produces quite another” (1973, p. 251). The essentialist separatist perceives regional autonomy as a distraction that can jeopardize chances for the ultimate goal of independence. Regional autonomy is only ever considered by the essentialist separatist as a step towards future secession. Moreover, a central government is more likely to offer regional autonomy to a separatist movement that reflects a nationalism compatible with an adaptable stance and general will to compromise by sharing sovereignty without potentially jeopardizing the state’s overarching political authority. The government is more wary and reluctant to

implement regional autonomy in essentialist separatist regions for fear of granting them more leverage to push for secession in future.

Second, the extent to which the separatists perceive the central government as legitimate sovereign authority also impacts the implementation of regional autonomy. While separatist movements generally demand a larger degree of autonomy and self-governance (that does not necessarily involve complete secession), it is crucial that they signal to the state their respect for the state's legitimate sovereign authority to implement a regional autonomy arrangement. Undermining state legitimacy is less likely to correspond with separatist acceptance of the state's capacity to implement regional autonomy, as well as less likely to lead to the state offering regional autonomy to the separatist movement for fear of further jeopardizing its political authority and territorial sovereignty by paving the way towards secession. This explanatory variable of separatist perception of state legitimacy requires in-depth analysis of separatist-state dynamics to arrive at a nuanced and qualified indicator.

To operationalize the variable of separatist perception of state legitimacy, this research will focus on two key aspects - the historical legacy of the separatist region, as well as state use of violence against separatists. The historical relationship of each separatist region with the development of the modern nation-state it is situated within is crucial in understanding the origins of separatist sentiments and also informs the development of a separatist movement. The varying historical legacies of each region contribute significantly to the stories of each separatist movement and its relationship and perception of the host state as a legitimate central authority. State-imposed violence is also vital in understanding separatist perception of state legitimacy. To the extent that



violence is a primary means for the state to assert its authority especially in situations of civil conflict, separatist response towards such use of violence is arguably indicative of their perception toward state legitimacy. The use of violence is a double-edged sword in asserting state authority - it can quell separatist conflict, and/or fuel anti-government sentiments.

In understanding the role of these two necessary separatist-centric causal factors in regional autonomy implementation, this study also examines how they interact with other intervening factors such as government perception (e.g. state nationalism) and external intervention (e.g. international involvement) to derive a more comprehensive understanding towards the determinants of regional autonomy implementation. A deeper understanding of whether secession takes place (or the status quo remains) in the case of non-implementation of regional autonomy requires exploring other abovementioned intervening variables. Should the political cost exceed the benefit of maintaining status quo from the government's perspective, secession may occur instead. Usually a solution of last resort, secession typically requires the involvement of external actors, given that any new state requires international recognition. Though not the primary focus of this study, the intervening variables of government perspective and international intervention remain important to provide basic and supplementary explanations on the variation in outcomes in the case of non-implementation of regional autonomy. These intervening variables are woven into the analyses to complement the main arguments based on the two main explanatory variables of separatist nationalism and separatist perception of state legitimacy.

#### *4. Case Selection*

A former Dutch colony, Indonesia declared its independence from the Netherlands in 1945, though the latter only formally handed over sovereign authority in 1949. It is currently the largest Muslim-majority nation in the world, though ethnically diverse, and comprises 31 provinces, 1 autonomous region, 1 special region, and 1 national capital district (CIA World Factbook 2015). While it is currently a democracy, its tumultuous political history included Sukarno's "Guided Democracy" from 1957 until a 1965 coup, which was followed by Suharto's hard-handed "New Order" authoritarian regime from 1967 to 1998 (CIA World Factbook 2015). Since 1999, democratic elections were restored to the nation-state. The combination of the 1997 financial crisis and the fall of Suharto triggered social and political chaos that cumulated to become a nation-wide crisis in a crucial transitional period. Tadjoeuddin identified 26 provinces with a total of 1093 incidents of social violence (i.e. at least one human or material damage) in the 1990 to 2001 period (2002). Categories of social violence include communal violence, separatist violence, state-community violence, and industrial relations violence (Tadjoeuddin 2002, p. 6). Aspinall and Berger contend that social instability in Indonesia, in particular secessionist and ethno-nationalist movements developed "in direct response to the way in which the New Order state under Suharto attempted to realise the nation-building goals of Indonesian nationalism" (2001, p. 1004). Secessionist sentiments were strongest in East Timor, Papua and Aceh, where separatist movements were "fuelled by brutal and indiscriminate state violence against them during the Suharto era" (Aspinall and Berger 2001, p. 1004). Tadjoeuddin

similarly identified conflicts in Aceh, Papua and East Timor as cases of separatist violence in Indonesia (2002).

The three separatist civil conflicts in Indonesia - namely Aceh, Papua, and East Timor - have thus been identified as cases for analysis in this research. The desire for self-determination and secession is/was the key goal that characterized uprisings in each of these regions, qualifying these three conflicts as separatist. In a study that analyzes social violence in Southeast Asia, Tadjoeeddin defines “separatist violence” as the “social violence between the state and the people of certain area, which is rooted in regional separatism, i.e. a movement motivated by the desire of people in certain areas to separate from Indonesia as a country” (Tadjoeeddin 2002, p. 6). Tadjoeeddin proceeds to identify only the conflicts in Aceh, Papua, and East Timor as that of “separatist violence,” from the period of 1990 onwards, a categorization that is largely undisputed in expert analyses. While the causes of these separatist movements are not entirely the same, Aspinall and Berger elaborate that these separatist movements stemmed from a general desire for self-determination based on a nationalist sentiment that runs contrary to that of the Indonesian state (2001). The names of the key resistance movements in each of these regions are also indicative of their secessionist goal - Free Aceh Movement (in Indonesian: *Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* or GAM), Free Papua Movement (in Indonesian: *Organisasi Papua Merdeka* or OPM), and Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (in Portuguese: *Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste Independente* or FRETILIN).

While all three Indonesian case studies involve ethnic-based separatist movements with relatively well-defined territorial claims, each has seen varying

outcomes on the implementation of regional autonomy. Moreover, these cases operate within the same state and thus interact with the same central government of Indonesia. The separatist conflicts have also occurred over similar time periods, beginning from the late 1960s or 1970s and lasting till the early 21st century, if not still ongoing. Yet, out of the three cases, only Aceh has seen the implementation of regional autonomy since the 2005 Helsinki Peace Accord; Papua remains at the status quo and separatist sentiments persist; East Timor seceded from Indonesia in 2002. Following the signing of the Helsinki Peace Accord by the Indonesian state and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) in 2005, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was also produced as a precursor to the implementation of regional autonomy via the Aceh Governance Law (“Aceh Warns Jakarta”). While the implementation of all provisions in the accord remains in progress, regional autonomy has arguably been implemented in Aceh to a large extent, according to the Peace Accords Matrix, in which the MoU received an 85% implementation score after 8 years. With the exception of the Human Rights Court and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, all other provisions have been implemented as of 2014 (Peace Accords Matrix). The case of Papua is representative of the status quo outcome and remains, to a large extent, subject to the central authority of the Indonesian government. According to the Peace Accords Matrix, there was no formal peace agreement signed between the Indonesian government and Papuan separatists on the implementation of regional autonomy. The absence of the Papuan case in the Peace Accords Matrix, however, is indicative of the non-implementation of regional autonomy. The matrix does not include any formal treaty between the Indonesian state and the Papuan separatists simply because there is none to evaluate in

the first place. Although the Special Autonomy Law was signed in 2001 to grant Papua “a greater share of the territory’s vast natural resource earnings and ... the founding of an indigenous upper house,” the implementation of regional autonomy was severely undermined by President Megawati’s subsequent signing of a law that called for a partition of the region that ran contrary to autonomous arrangements that were previously agreed upon between the state and separatists (Chauvel and Bhakti 2004; p. 37, 81). Papua therefore has yet to effectively gain regional autonomy due to the backsliding of the Indonesian government’s policies towards the region, in spite of laws passed that have promised autonomy to the region. East Timor successfully seceded from Indonesia and was internationally recognized as an independent state in 2002. The Peace Accords Matrix indicates a 94% implementation score ten years after the agreement between the Republic of Indonesia and the Portuguese Republic on the question of East Timor was signed in 1999. The agreement paved the way for a referendum held in 1999 that led to the independence of the region in 2002.

This research hypothesizes that differences in the outcome of regional autonomy implementation can be explained, at least in part, by variations in the explanatory variables of separatist nationalism and separatist perception of state legitimacy. Table 1 below summarizes the key variables and outcomes of the three case studies. While the separatist movement in Aceh can be predominantly characterized as an “epochalist” nationalism at the initiation of regional autonomy implementation, the movements in Papua and East Timor are based on an “essentialist” nationalism to a larger extent. Aceh separatists arguably remain respectful of the political legitimacy of the Indonesian state, though not the same can be said of the Papua and East Timor cases. Aceh was part of

the Dutch East Indies and even contributed to the post-World War II Indonesian push for independence (McGibbon 2004, p. 91); though Papua was effectively under Dutch rule, it was forcibly incorporated into Indonesia in 1969 (McGibbon 2004, p. 95); East Timor was a Portuguese colony until it was invaded and occupied by Indonesia in 1975. Established in the 1960s, Suharto's "New Order" regime ensured the "institutionalisation of nation-wide repression in the ensuing decades" through violence, shaping the varying reactions from separatist movements and influencing their perception of state legitimacy (Aspinall and Berger 2001, p. 1007).

<b>Case Study</b>	<b>Separatist Nationalism</b>	<b>Separatist Perception of State Legitimacy</b>	<b>Regional Autonomy Outcome</b>
Aceh	Epochalist	Yes	Implementation of regional autonomy (2005)
Papua	Essentialist	No	Non-implementation of regional autonomy (status quo)
East Timor	Essentialist	No	Non-implementation of regional autonomy (secession, 2002)

Table 1: Overview of Case Studies and Variables

As a side note, the extent and nature of international involvement vary across the three separatist conflicts. To the extent that international involvement does not directly affect the explanatory variables (i.e. type of separatist nationalism and separatist perception of state legitimacy), but has a potentially significant impact on the implementation of regional autonomy, the comparability of the cases are not necessarily jeopardized. In fact, international involvement provide complementary explanations for the sufficient conditions that lead to implementation of regional autonomy, as well as

explain the variation in the outcomes of non-implementation of regional autonomy. International involvement manifests in different forms, including mediation, political pressure, and direct intervention (e.g. humanitarian, military). International involvement is particularly important in the case of secession, since the independence of a state depends on international recognition of its status as a state.

Analyzing these three cases of separatist conflicts are useful to enhance understanding on why regional autonomy is implemented or not, given that the overarching governing state (i.e. Indonesia) is held constant. The ‘demand-side’ causal factors, i.e. concerning separatists, of regional autonomy are arguably more salient in understanding the variation in autonomy implementation outcomes in the abovementioned Indonesian cases, and thus suitable for the purposes of this research.

## *5. Methodology*

This thesis is based on an in-depth qualitative analysis of the three cases. Each case study analysis comprises two parts according to the two explanatory variables and hypotheses on separatist nationalism and separatist perception of state legitimacy. The cases are analysed with main emphasis on separatist rhetoric and behavior, as well as relevant interactions with the state. These separatist movements are the Free Aceh Movement (or GAM), Free Papua Movement (or OPM), and Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (or FRETILIN). Analyses of the development of the separatist movements is crucial to understand the nature of nationalism they embody. To elucidate separatist perception of state legitimacy, their response and actions towards state policies as well as interaction with state representatives are important for consideration.

Given that the end of the Suharto “New Order” regime in 1998 brought about significant political and social crises and signified a key transitional period in the ‘democratization’ of Indonesian politics, this thesis focuses on the period from 1998 until: (1) the implementation of regional autonomy for Aceh in 2005, (2) the secession of East Timor in 2002, and (3) present day for Papua since it remains at the status quo. Given that the historical development of the separatist movements are crucial in informing certain arguments in this thesis, some references are made to events prior to the abovementioned time periods due to their spillover impact on post-1998 events. Given the lack of access to primary information and documents such as the manifestos of separatist movements and local newspapers due to a language barrier and limited time to conduct field research, this research bases most of its analyses, where possible, on reports by regional experts at independent think-tanks that have had the resources to



conduct in-depth and on-the-ground research in the relevant regions. Examples of such organizations include the East-West Center based in Washington D.C., the International Crisis Group, and the United Nations. These specialized regional reports are among the most comprehensive and accessible sources of information on the Indonesian separatist conflicts. Research analyses are also supplemented by relevant academic articles and books that primarily focus on the conflict areas.

While this research is designed as a rigorous case study analysis, the applicability of findings may be limited due to the fact that all the case studies take place in a uniquely Indonesian context. The historical trajectory of Indonesian political development is distinct and contributed significantly to the uprising of separatist conflicts. Moreover, the two explanatory variables explored in the research, though arguably necessary, are not sufficient to explain the implementation of regional autonomy in general, as other intervening variables are important for consideration as well. The framework provided by this research design, however, provides a lesser-explored angle to approach the issue of regional autonomy implementation, which can be applied to other cases as well. This research strives to convey that the implementation of regional autonomy, although ultimately imposed by the government, is a two-way street. Understanding separatist-related factors provide insight to differential implementation of regional autonomy, and can also shed more light on the effectiveness and implications of regional autonomy implementation.

## 6. Case Study Analyses

### a. Aceh

#### i. Separatist Nationalism

Unlike other Indonesian provinces, the region of Aceh has a relatively distinct ethnic and national identity. Since the independence of Indonesia, Aceh has always distanced itself from the greater Indonesian identity. The population of Aceh adheres strictly to Islam, and was an independent Islamic sultanate before the Dutch invaded in 1873 (Schulze 2004, p. 1). The Acehnese national identity put forth by GAM since its inception appeared to be one based on ethnicity, “defined through blood ties, religion, and *suku* (ethnic group) affiliation” (Schulze 2004, p. 7). More importantly, Acehnese nationalism also depended on its distinction from the “other” Indonesians (Schulze 2004, p. 7). The Acehnese national identity appears to tend towards an essentialist nationalism as argued by Schulze (2004); a fixed and ascribed ethnic identity is a key component of being Acehnese.

While Acehnese nationalism in general seems to be significantly essentialist, GAM as a separatist movement is not necessarily defined by nationalist sentiments that always tend towards essentialism. As actors with their own set of goals to accomplish, separatists often deploy nationalism as a tool to garner popular support for their cause. During the Post-Suharto era (i.e. from 1998 onwards), GAM developed from a relatively insignificant guerilla movement into a popular resistance movement. Since its inception in 1976, GAM has evolved as a whole, its “ideology and rhetoric have undergone a number of shifts” (Schulze 2003, p. 246). Though GAM appealed to the

Acehnese identity, its nationalist ideology had not always been exclusively primordialist.

According to GAM's official website, the "supreme aim" of the organization is "the survival of the people of Aceh Sumatra as a nation; the survival of their political, social, cultural, and religious heritage which are being destroyed by the Indonesian colonialists" (ASNLF 2015). This aim has not changed since at least 2002, which was before the implementation of regional autonomy took place in 2005 (Schulze 2004, p. 6). It is important to note that GAM alludes to the Acehnese identity not as one that is rigid and exclusively ethnic, but one that encompasses an aspirational combination of political, social, cultural and religious facets that are allegedly threatened by the Indonesian state. Moreover, the assumption that the Acehnese identity is fundamentally ethnic and primordialist is reductive, and undermines the significance of the historical development of Aceh as a unique sociopolitical entity. The divergence of Aceh from the rest of Indonesia goes beyond mere ethnic group affiliations, which have to be perceived as part of a bigger picture that is the historical development of Aceh as a national entity. Aceh's separate experiences with colonization, the development of Acehnese social structure, and its role in the Indonesian revolution for independence differentiate the region from the rest of the Indonesian provinces (Sulistiyanto 2001, p. 438).

If devoutness to Islam is crucial to the Acehnese identity and the basis of an essentialist nationalism, it is important to note that GAM takes on an ambiguous stance towards Islam (Schulze 2004, p. 8). While "GAM itself [was] not an Islamic movement," it used Islam as a political tool to garner popular support. To the GAM

separatists, religion was vital in the formulation of its nationalist ideology but “mainly as a reflection of Acehese identity and culture” (Schulze 2004, p. 8). Harris concurs that “GAM has attempted to mobilize the population based on Acehese nationalism rather than fidelity to Islam” (Harris 2010, p. 339). Furthermore, the expansion of GAM after 1998 with the fall of Suharto and the democratization of Indonesian politics involved recruitment of members who were “ethnically different” and from “districts of Aceh that were not part of GAM’s traditional support base” (Schulze 2003, p. 257). GAM followers were then no longer merely driven by ethnic nationalism; they were motivated by economic grievances (Harris 2010), a collective “disillusionment with Jakarta, hatred for Indonesia, and revenge” (Schulze 2003, p. 250). Post-1998 GAM saw the rise of a movement that was more ethnically diverse and representative of the whole Acehese population, through their collective historical experiences under the oppressive rule of Jakarta.

In July 2002, GAM signed the Stavanger Declaration which “formally articulated the movement’s vision of an independent Aceh as a democracy rather than as a return to the sultanate” (Schulze 2004, p. 10). Instead of focusing on an essentialist conception of Acehese identity and a return to its Islamic sultanate roots, GAM was projecting its aspirations for greater self-determination and constructing a Acehese nationalism based on its collective history and political struggle since, in line with the “post-Suharto proliferation of nongovernmental organizations with human rights, democracy, and referendum agendas that broadened the Acehese independence movement” (Schulze 2004, p. 10). Hence, while Islam may be the basis for an essentialist Acehese nationalism, its role in GAM ideology was instrumental. GAM

nationalist ideology is clearly different and arguably more epochalist in the years leading up to the implementation of regional autonomy in 2005.

Divergence from an essentialist nationalism and towards an epochalist ideology that aspired for enhanced rights to self-determination in line with the spirit of democracy actually reflected GAM's increasing alignment with the general development of the Indonesian political structure. GAM ostensibly sought democracy, and post-Suharto Indonesian politics were about democratization. The intensification of conflict between the state and separatists in the post-Suharto era "was more the result of failed democratic reforms than the inevitable consequence of competing nationalisms" (Miller 2009, p. 8). Rather, GAM epochalist nationalism placed it in a better position to bargain for the political future of Aceh; it was not necessarily at odds with the overarching changes in Indonesian governance, and the possibility of reconciling differences was greater than if GAM were to be founded on an intractable essentialist ideology that necessarily excludes compromising on a primordialist Acehnese identity.

## ii. Separatist Perception of State Legitimacy

GAM's perception of the Indonesian state's legitimacy as central authority shifted according to the development of interactions between both sides, whether through negotiations or military combat. The historical legacy of the Aceh region and how it came to be incorporated into independent Indonesia, as well as its subsequent circumstances in modern Indonesia were crucial to informing GAM's perception on the Indonesian state's legitimacy as the central sovereign authority. The use of excessive military force by the Indonesian government to take out GAM had also impacted

GAM's capacity and influenced its perception of state authority. From 1998 to 2004, GAM displayed significant opposition to the legitimacy of the Indonesian state in controlling the Aceh region, with GAM taking an adamant position on Indonesian governance as an extension of colonial rule and engaging in extensive violence with the Indonesian National Armed Forces (Tentara Nasional Indonesia, TNI). There were efforts to engage with each other at the negotiation table, which produced interactions that were highly informative of GAM's predominantly negative perception towards state legitimacy. Failed attempts by the Indonesian government to implement special autonomy in 1999 and 2001 were indicative of the lack of political will not just from Jakarta, but also from GAM separatists. A shift in the GAM stance in 2004 entailed increased respect for the Indonesian state's legitimacy as sovereign authority and willingness to compromise, albeit due to intervention of the international community, a disastrous tsunami, and a change in Jakarta leadership. Regional autonomy was formally implemented in 2005.

It is a historical fact that Aceh played a substantial role in the fight for Indonesian independence, which is often "cited as evidence that at the point of Dutch withdrawal from Indonesia in 1949, the Acehnese saw themselves as being firmly part of the Indonesian Republic" (Smith 2010, p. 19). Yet, the historical legacy of Aceh and how it came to be incorporated into Indonesia is far from straightforward. Aceh only agreed to partake in the cause for Indonesian independence with the understanding that it would be granted its own provincial status, which did not turn out to be the case (Miller 2009, p. 42). It is based on this historical turning point that "GAM maintains that Aceh did not voluntarily join the Republic of Indonesia" and was instead

“incorporated illegally” (Schulze 2004, p. 6). GAM perceived the Indonesian state as a “Javanese neo-colonial empire,” comparing the legitimacy of the Indonesian state to that of colonial rule, one that is implicitly imposed and superficial (Schulze 2003, p. 247). Though GAM ostensibly drew upon this historical event to bolster its cause for Acehese independence, contemporary discontent for the Indonesian state “primarily came into being as a reaction against the counterproductive policies and practices of the New Order [and] did not, according to this logic, require any substantive re-thinking of Aceh’s position within the unitary state” (Miller 2009, p. 8). Thus, while GAM may have claimed that the Indonesian state lacked legitimacy in controlling the Aceh region based on historical legacy, Acehese disgruntlement with Indonesian rule cannot be merely attributed to the one historical event of Aceh’s incorporation into Indonesia. The historical legacy that shaped separatist perception of state legitimacy extends to the subsequent intertwined histories of Aceh and Indonesia as a whole.

From 1998 to 2004, GAM surged in strength and influence in the Aceh region, gaining momentum from the increased political and social freedom in an Indonesian state emerging from authoritarian rule. GAM separatists at that point no longer merely perceived Indonesia as a neo-colonial power, but more of a dictatorial regime that lacked legitimacy primarily due to its oppressive and forceful governing methods in the past decades. Though the controversial incorporation of Aceh into Indonesia in 1949 may be one reason for GAM to question Jakarta’s legitimacy, the subsequent methods of governance by the Indonesian state were more important in shaping GAM’s perception of state legitimacy. To the extent that the Indonesian government had undergone various changes since, GAM’s perceptions of state legitimacy were also

subject to change. Historical legacy remains relevant in this discussion, but in a broader way.

GAM's initial rejection of autonomy offers from the Indonesian government was a result of the separatists' distrust towards the state's political will. GAM was marred by their previous experiences with offers of 'autonomy,' which, from the perspective of a GAM negotiator, "represented for [them] an abhorrent system of brutal oppression and impunity for murders, rapes, disappearances, massacres and all sorts of brutalities" (Nur Djuli and Abdul Rahman 2008, p. 29). The rejection of autonomy by GAM was not so much due to a perception that Jakarta was not the legitimate sovereign authority, but mainly because of the notion of autonomy had connotations of extended oppressive rule. Moreover, the Indonesian government had passed two separate autonomy laws in 1999 (Law No.44/1999 on the 'Special Status of the Province of Aceh') and in 2001 (the *Nanggrow Aceh Darussalam* or NAD law), both of which failed to translate into actual governmental implementation of regional autonomy in Aceh (Miller 2009). This "background of broken autonomy promises by past Indonesian governments" cultivated a stance of wariness from the separatist point of view (Miller 2009, p. 42). Rather, GAM negotiators proposed during the Helsinki peace process "self-government," which they believed was a "terminology that allowed [their] delegation to venture into new ground in relations with Indonesia without accepting the unjust autonomy law" (Nur Djuli and Abdul Rahman 2008, p. 29). Though it seemed to be a matter of semantics, GAM was more willing to negotiate based on a potential solution "without the same abhorrent connotations" that autonomy brought to the table (Nur Djuli and Abdul Rahman 2008, p. 29).



Though the Indonesian government had a significant part to play in the failure of the abovementioned autonomy laws, one must consider that GAM separatists also lacked the political will and came across as uncompromising in their pursuit for independence. Stemming from a perspective that questioned the legitimacy of Jakarta's autonomy promises but not so much the fundamental legitimacy of its central authority, GAM was largely uncooperative. The lack of separatist respect for state legitimacy, in this situation, was not necessarily unyielding.

Resistance from the separatists, however, signalled to Jakarta that GAM lacked respect for the state's legitimacy, contributing to the reluctance of the government to grant a greater extent of self-determination to the region, for fear of jeopardizing national unity. Moreover, the East Timor referendum vote for independence in 1999 also fuelled popular stance in "rejecting autonomy as an unacceptable compromise to independence," that GAM was more than willing to champion (Miller 2009, p. 53-54). Political debate over decentralization amongst members of the Indonesian government was relatively contentious, with "unitary state proponents generally [believing] that some form of decentralization was necessary to prevent Indonesia's troubled peripheral provinces from seceding," while others challenged that "excessive regional autonomy would heighten political fragmentation and national disunity" (Miller 2009, p. 88). The Indonesian government had to make the difficult decision on the extent of regional autonomy implementation to appease the separatists, while keeping in mind the state's primary interest in maintaining national unity and stability. As much as regional autonomy implementation was a state decision, the separatists had to accept it as well. A lack of respect by GAM for the legitimacy of the state indicated a lower likelihood that

GAM would accept an 'autonomy' solution from the state, as well as a lower possibility that the state would implement any meaningful autonomy solution to appease GAM, for fear that it would provide a platform for them to pursue further independence.

State use of violence played a substantial role in galvanizing Acehnese popular resistance against the Indonesian state, contributing to the growth in GAM strength, particularly in the immediate post-Suharto period. Aceh was declared a military operation zone (Daerah Operasi Militer, or DOM) from 1989 to 1998, as part of Suharto's efforts to clamp down on the separatist movement (Smith 2010, p. 20). The Indonesian military was responsible for thousands of deaths, most of which were that of civilians, as well as extensive sexual assault (Smith 2010, p. 20). Though DOM was lifted after Suharto, the consequences it had on mobilizing the Acehnese against the state persisted for years after, as the separatist movement drew strength from the desire for revenge against the state for the brutal oppression. It was a vicious cycle of violence. DOM turned out to be "counter-productive," and indiscriminate killings and human rights abuses by troops continued after 1998, despite an apology made by President Megawati in 2001 to Aceh (Smith 2010, p. 21).

Following the Suharto era, the Habibie and Abdurrahman Wahid presidencies from 1998 to 2001 did not present clear and cohesive strategies with respect to the use of force to combat Aceh separatism. When Megawati Sukarnoputri's took over the presidency in 2001, the Indonesian government took a "hard-line security approach [that] represented a return to DOM in everything but name" (Miller 2009, p. 102). As a result, GAM responded with more resistance. GAM spokesman Sofyan Dawood announced that the rebels "will not forge a relationship with Megawati" because 'the

policies of Megawati and Sukarno have only harmed the Acehese people and not solved anything” (Miller 2009, p. 104). However, it is important to consider that the Megawati, upon taking over the presidency, might have had “no choice but to militarily respond to the threat posed by GAM in order to restore an effective governing presence in Aceh” (Miller 2009, p. 107). Indeed, lawlessness was pervasive in Aceh, significantly due to separatist actions; GAM was even “criticized by sections of Acehese society for scaling up its attacks on the Indonesian state machinery” (Miller 2009, p. 109). Excessive and brutal use of force by the government against the Acehese even beyond the DOM period exacerbated Acehese resistance and provided momentum for GAM’s separatist cause. Moreover, two ceasefire agreements - the 2000-2001 Humanitarian Pause and the 2002-2003 Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (COHA) - broke down, due to the lack of trust and cooperation from both sides. State violence up till the Megawati presidency seemed to do more damage than good to state legitimacy.

The prospects for peace were indubitably grim from 1998 to early 2004, as the conflict between GAM and the Indonesian government only seemed to becoming more intractable with the failure of negotiation attempts. During these immediate years of the Post-Suharto era, “state power in Aceh was extremely weak” due to economic and political instability (Miller 2009, p. 13). GAM did not project respect for the legitimacy of the Indonesian state, and remained adamant in their pursuit for independence.

The seeds for peace were planted in late 2004, with the election of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono as President and Jusuf Kalla as Vice-President. While other factors such as international intervention and the humanitarian crisis left in the wake of the 2004 tsunami disaster, the change in Indonesian state leadership to contributed

substantially to GAM's enhanced respect for state legitimacy and the integrity of peace negotiations.

President Yudhoyono and Vice-President Kalla were known for their personal commitment towards peaceful negotiations as a solution to the conflict, having been strong supporters of the strategy even prior to their appointments as President and Vice-President (Aspinall 2005, p. vii-viii). The presidential elections in 2004 "helped to convince the GAM leadership that they now had negotiating partners they could trust," altering the previous state-separatist dynamics of mutual distrust where GAM displayed little respect for the legitimacy of the Indonesian government in a context of violence and oppression (Aspinall 2013, p. 47). Separatist perception of state legitimacy, in this case, seemed to be largely influenced by the individuals within the state apparatus. For the purposes of this study, individuals that make up the government are not separated from the government itself in explaining the overall separatist perception of state legitimacy. Moreover, the focus here is on state use of violence, which differs from one administration to another. The administration of President Yudhoyono and Vice-President Kalla represented a non-violent state approach towards the separatists.

Kalla was key in taking the first initiative to reestablish negotiations with GAM in early 2004, when he was still a cabinet minister under Megawati and the military approach was very much in place (Aspinall 2005, p. 16). He sought to engage both GAM military commanders in the field as well as the exiled GAM leaders in Sweden. Driven by a resolute desire for a peaceful solution, Kalla's initiatives eventually led to the involvement of foreign mediation from the Crisis Management Institute (CMI), established by former Finnish president Martti Ahtisaari.

The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami was a significant turning point as it altered the conflict dynamics and brought about increased international interest in resolving the conflict. While many claim that the Indian Ocean tsunami that struck Aceh on 24 December 2004 led to renewed peace negotiations between the Indonesian government and GAM, it is important to consider that the peace process started way before the disaster. The tsunami hit Aceh especially hard, having “killed more than 160,000 people in the province itself and destroyed much housing and infrastructure, including in the provincial capital, Banda Aceh” (Smith 2010, p. 23). Both the government of Indonesia and GAM “suffered catastrophic losses” (Smith 2010, p. 23). As a result of the tsunami, there was also a decrease in armed conflict between both sides due to “sudden presence of thousands of international relief workers” (Aspinall 2005, p. 20). Moreover, the natural disaster “prompted renewed international interest in promoting a peaceful resolution of the conflict, with various foreign leaders openly calling for a return to talks” (Aspinall 2005, p. 20).

While the humanitarian crisis left behind by the massive tsunami played an important role in facilitating the peace process, it was not the main reason. Ahtisaari “received confirmation that the two sides had agreed to meet in late December 2004, a few days *before* the Indian Ocean tsunami struck Aceh” (Aspinall 2005, p. 19). Though the humanitarian consequences of the tsunami did provide greater impetus and international pressure for negotiations to take place, the lead up to the negotiations began before the natural disaster, “[flowing] mostly from GAM’s declining military position and from changes in the composition of government on the Indonesian side” (Aspinall 2005, p. 20). The tsunami merely provided an opportunity for both GAM and

the Indonesian government to move forward. On one end, the Indonesian government “had already quietly been pursuing options for renewed talks, the tsunami provided them with an opportunity to present the peace talks as a response to the humanitarian disaster rather than as a policy reversal” (Aspinall 2005, p. 21). On the other end, GAM always had the “long-term strategic objective to internationalize the conflict,” in order to gain more international recognition for its cause of greater self-determination (Aspinall 2005, p. 20). Indeed, the tsunami was “not itself the chief cause of the return to talks” but “best viewed as a pretext by which the two sides could return to the negotiating table and offer greater concessions than in the past without losing face” (Aspinall 2005, p. 21).

A divergence in the mediation strategy, as compared to former ceasefire negotiations in the 2001 Humanitarian Pause and 2002 COHA, also put more pressure on both sides to make concessions. Ahtisaari insisted on the strategy most pithily summed up as “nothing is agreed until everything is agreed,” whereby both sides had to reach an agreement on a broad political solution before a ceasefire can take place (Aspinall 2005, p. viii). Given the military deadlock, this strategy was crucial in forcing both sides to confront the most difficult issue from the very start.

In a historical shift of its previously unwavering stance on independence, GAM announced in February 2005 that they are amenable to a political solution “based on “self-government” rather than full independence ... as a means to break the deadlock” (Aspinall 2005, p. 26). GAM remained resistant to the notion of “special autonomy” due to its negative connotations with a brutal military approach, though they indicated that they were amenable to “expanded Acehese self-government within an overarching

relationship with Indonesia” (Aspinall 2005, p. 26). From the GAM perspective, the key difference between “special autonomy” and “self-government” was that of state violence and military rule, which had a lasting negative impact on separatist perception of state legitimacy as the central authority. With a change in Indonesian governmental leadership and approach, facilitated by the involvement of the international community and a military deadlock, GAM came to display more respect for state legitimacy as shown by the historical step it took to compromise its stance on a political solution to the conflict. This was an important signal to the Indonesian government that GAM formally announced its willingness to forgo independence, albeit requiring substantial concessions on self-government from the Indonesian state. The Helsinki Peace Agreement was formally signed on 15 August 2005, with significant concessions from both sides.

GAM perception of state legitimacy was largely shaped by the dual factors of historical legacy and state use of violence. From 1998 to 2004, GAM showed little respect for legitimacy of the Indonesian state, driven predominantly by sentiments of revenge and injustice from brutal oppression by the Indonesian government. Although separatist respect for state legitimacy was not the only factor that contributed to the eventual implementation of regional autonomy, it played a crucial role in altering state-separatist dynamics. This was evident when the Indonesian government signalled a change in approach from one that is dominated by military violence to another that pushes for peaceful negotiations. GAM developed more respect for state legitimacy as the central authority when Sukarno and Kalla, proponents of a peaceful resolution to the

conflict, were elected in late 2004, paving the way for a peace process that led to the implementation of regional autonomy.

The case of Aceh therefore presents a sturdy argument for the role of separatist nationalism and separatist perception of state legitimacy in determining the implementation of regional autonomy according to the hypotheses of this study. GAM nationalism was aspirational and predominantly epochalist in the lead up to 2005, which aligned well with the notion of shared sovereignty and thus regional autonomy implementation. In terms of GAM perception of state legitimacy, it was clearly lacking from 1998 to 2004 due to a contentious historical legacy defined by the forced incorporation of Aceh into Indonesia and negative connotations that separatists associated with autonomy as a consequence of previous political backtracking by the government. Excessive state use of violence also exacerbated the lack of respect for state legitimacy till 2004. Separatist perception of state legitimacy eventually improved from 2004 onwards when the separatists perceived a change in approach from Jakarta, disrupting the legacy of mistrust and violence and paving the way towards a compromise. While the 2004 tsunami facilitated the peace process by enhancing international pressure and involvement, it was not the main and/or sole driving force behind the implementation of regional autonomy. The combination of an epochalist separatist nationalism and separatist perception of state legitimacy was accompanied by the formal implementation of regional autonomy in Aceh in 2005.



## b. Papua

### i. Separatist Nationalism

Papuan nationalism presents a case where both epochalism and essentialism play significant roles. While Papuan nationalism originated as a form of epochalist struggle to define a Papuan political entity in the midst of Dutch-Indonesian tensions, it gradually evolved to emphasize more elements of an essentialist nationalism as a result of Indonesian rule and mutual ‘otherization’ between Indonesians and Papuans. Yet, Papuan nationalism as a whole is far from homogenous and unified, given the diverse ethnicities and tribes within Papua. While this study focuses on the Free Papua Movement (Organisasi Papua Merdeka, or OPM), a prominent separatist organization advocating for the self-determination of Papuans, understanding the development of an overarching Papuan nationalism is also a key part of the puzzle.

Papuan nationalism first emerged as a product of the region’s struggle to define itself during the difficult transitional period when the Dutch and Indonesians contended for authority over the region. The epochalist roots of Papuan nationalism were based on its “history and nationalist historiography of decolonization, specifically Papua’s incorporation into Indonesia” (Chauvel 2005, p.2). The Papuan nationalist identity entailed a transformation from “being the object of a struggle among others (the Dutch and Indonesians) to being direct participants in their own struggle against the Indonesians” (Chauvel 2005, p. 3). The epochalist echoes of Papuan nationalism has persisted through most of the last few decades, as Papuan nationalists in the post-Suharto period “have structured much of their demand for independence as an

argument about the history of Papua's integration into Indonesia," emphasizing the historical and political aspects of a collective Papuan identity (Chauvel 2005, p. 8).

The predominantly epochalist Papuan nationalism gradually evolved to take on a more essentialist character. While it originated "as a defensive reaction against perceived intrusions by that outsider [i.e. Indonesia]," it eventually "asserted itself ... in the form of a new cultural Melanesianism that attempted to both embrace local identities and give them wider expression as part of a national identity" (Webster 2001, p. 510). The Papuan nationalist movement had grown from one that was small and elitist to one that is extensive and "with roots in the villages," taking on a "distinct ethnic expression" that clearly distinguishes between Papuans and Indonesians (Chauvel 2005, p. 3-4). Though the perception that the Papuan identity, as one that necessarily excludes the Indonesian identity, is a colonial legacy and may be argued as constructed rather than primordialist, modern Papuan nationalism has invoked local traditions in the expression of a "new cultural Melanesianism" (Webster 2001, p. 525, 528). Papuan nationalists since 2000 have asserted that "Papuans were racially different from the peoples of Maluku, the Lesser Sunda Islands, Sulawesi, and Java," as Papuans had "black skin and curly hair" (Chauvel 2005, p. 15). Beyond race and skin color, religion also differentiates Papuans from the majority of Indonesians. Most Papuans are "either animists or Christians," whereas a majority of Indonesians are Muslims (Vermonte 2007, p. 280). The Papuan-Indonesian dichotomy was no longer just tied to historical and political differences, but was even granted a "God-ordained quality" as explained by Papuan nationalist Mrs. Agu Iwanggin, who believed that "Papuans are Papuans" and "can never be turned into Javanese or Sumatrans, or vice versa" (Chauvel 2005, p.

52). Though the allegedly illegitimate incorporation of Papua into Indonesia was vital for the Papuan nationalist cause, Papuan leaders “have also insisted that their Melanesian cultural roots separated them from the Malay and Javanese majority of Indonesia” (McGibbon 2004, p. 6). Indonesian racism against the Papuan identity, moreover, fuelled further ‘essentialization’ of the Papuan nationalist identity. While the official Indonesian ideology advocated for equality, Papuans have often been portrayed in derogatory terms (e.g. “*Papua bodoh*” or stupid Papuans) by Indonesians, thus exacerbating “Papuan perception of difference” and reacted to “with a counter-racism by many Papuans” (Webster 2001, p. 521). The growth of Papuan nationalism and mutual ‘otherization’ between Papuans and Indonesians have therefore led to the evolution of what was originally an epochalist nationalism to a nationalism that is ostensibly characterized by essentialist elements.

Yet, for all the emphasis on the Papuan ethnicity as a significant component of Papuan nationalism against the Indonesians, the Papuans are hardly ethnically homogenous themselves. Among the Papuans, there are about “310 ethno-linguistic groups,” which in fact “presents a challenge to the forging of a common Papuan identity” (Chauvel 2005, p. 54). The “pan-Papuan identity” does embrace this diversity (Chauvel 2005, p. 4), but the potency of a collective Papuan nationalism based on ethnicity is also limited in pushing for a unified goal of self-determination against the Indonesians.

The OPM represents one group of Papuan nationalists which has come to embody a nationalist ideology dominated by an essentialist interpretation of the Papuan identity. The OPM emphasizes the tribal aspect of Papuan identity; and pushes for

independence from governmental control in all forms. According to an OPM newsletter, the “struggle to free West Papua is not to take away one government and then replace it with a new government,” but rather “a struggle between modern society and tribal people” (OPM SG 1999, p. 2). Ambros Aminin, OPM Regional Commander in 1999, expressed that the struggle to detach the Papuan community from the modern society of Indonesia is inextricably linked to one’s nativeness as a Papuan and the inherent right to live on Papuan soil (OPM SG 1999, p. 2). In his words, “other people who have no right [to Papua] come and take over [Papua], while the native is forced from [their] own land and chased into the jungle,” and when he dies, “[his] next generation with [his] hair, [his] colour of skin, [his] language, [his] culture, [his] arts and dance that characterise [Papua] all will disappear forever” (OPM SG 1999, p. 2). From this OPM perspective, ascriptive Papuan attributes are intertwined with the tribal way of life in an essentialist expression of Papuan nationalism.

While OPM is one of the main resistance movements Papua, it is also relatively fragmented. As an organization it comprises two parts, one of which is based in Papua itself and engages in armed conflict with the Indonesian army, while the other part of the organization is based outside of Indonesia and adopts a more peaceful and diplomatic strategy (Vermonte 2007, p. 284). The factionalization of OPM implies the possibility of some incongruity in the nature of nationalism espoused by OPM separatists. However, the overall trend of Papuan nationalism indicates that OPM nationalism on the whole tends towards essentialism rather than epochalism.

Since Papua was incorporated into Indonesia, an originally epochalist Papuan nationalism has developed to take on a generally essentialist character in modern times.

Such essentialist Papuan nationalism has also presented itself as fundamentally at odds with any form of Indonesian nationalism. Regional autonomy is not immediately palatable to either the Papuan separatists or the Indonesian government. Papuan separatists do not perceive their identity under the umbrella of Indonesian nationalism and sovereignty, while the Indonesian government is not likely to implement any meaningful form of regional autonomy that would lead to the eventual secession of Papua. Ironically, the essentialist nature of Papuan nationalism has also jeopardized the diverse region's capacity to form a cohesive identity and united nationalist front.

## ii. Separatist Perception of State Legitimacy

The Indonesian government does not yield much respect from OPM separatists as a central sovereign authority. The historical background of Papua significantly differs from the rest of Indonesia, and the use of violence by state security apparatus against Papuan separatists has undermined governmental efforts to quell nationalist sentiments in the region. Efforts to implement special autonomy in the region have not succeeded due to backtracking by the Indonesian government, as well as a lack of local capacity and effective institutions.

The Papuan narrative on the region's forced incorporation into Indonesia reflects its disregard for the legitimacy of the Indonesian state as the rightful sovereign authority of Papua. Historically, Papua was not part of Indonesia's struggle for independence, unlike Aceh, and remained under the Dutch administration when Indonesia gained independence in 1949 (Vermonte 2007, p. 280). Indonesia proceeded to engage with the Netherlands in a struggle over control of Papua, which played a

significant part in building the Indonesian nationalist narrative, until Papua was eventually incorporated into Indonesia in the 1960s (Vermonte 2007, p. 280). The historical legacy of Papua's incorporation into Indonesia provided much basis for Papuan separatist claims. Instead of being organically assimilated into a newly independent Indonesia, Papua "was integrated into the state more than a decade after Indonesia attained its independence," which it did not play a role in (McGibbon 2004, p. 6).

Moreover, although the Indonesian government claimed that Papuans voted for incorporation into Indonesia in the UN-observed 1969 'Act of Free Choice' (Penentuan Pendapat Rakyat, or PEPERA), the referendum was allegedly unfair and improperly implemented. The OPM argued that should it have been conducted properly, it would have resulted in Papuan independence instead (Vermonte 2007, p. 284). In addition, Indonesian legitimacy as sovereign authority over Papua has always been under question - first by the Dutch and then by the Papuans since 1961 (Chauvel and Bhakti 2004, p. 3). The historical legacy of Dutch-Indonesian struggle over control of Papua even "provided a fertile environment for the emergence of a rival Papuan nationalism," one that contributed to the hardening of a Papuan separatist perception that neither the Netherlands nor Indonesia should have legitimate authority over Papua (Chauvel and Bhakti 2004, p. 50-51).

The pervasive Papuan stance remains that Papua "declared its independence on December 1, 1961, the date the Morning Star flag was first raised, but its independence was subsequently denied by an 1962 agreement between the Netherlands and Indonesia that was signed in New York" (Chauvel 2005, p. 8). In a government-sponsored

conference of Papuan nationalist leaders, also known as the Papuan Presidium Council, it was affirmed that Papua had been independent since 1961 in what became a “landmark event for the expression of secessionist sentiment” (Smith 2010, p. 28). The early historical struggle of Papua’s incorporation into Indonesia thus remains crucial in framing the lack of separatist respect for state legitimacy.

Political developments in the Post-Suharto era did not do much to improve separatist perception of Indonesian legitimacy as the sovereign authority. Jakarta’s efforts to implement special autonomy in Papua were largely ineffectual, due to a “lack of clarity and substance” in the special autonomy laws and an ultimate emphasis on the state-centric “objective of strengthening national integrity within the unitary state” (Chauvel and Bhakti 2004, p. 31). The Indonesian government offered several concessions, albeit mostly minor, that turned out to be symbolic, and short of satisfactory to the Papuan aspirations of self-determination. Firstly, the Habibie administration met with the “‘Team 100’ of West Papuan representatives ... [which] gave hope to the Papuans that they could achieve independence through negotiation and other non-violent means” (Vermonte 2007, p. 289). The following Abdurrahman Wahid administration, largely acknowledged the “most democratic administration from the West Papuan point of view,” allowed Papuans to raise its own flag as long as it was lower than the Indonesian flag, restored the name of the region from Irian Jaya to Papua, as well as financially backed a congress in 2000 that led to the establishment of the Papuan Presidium Council (or PDP), which is a “council accommodating seven important constituent elements of the Papuan community” (Vermonte 2007, p. 289). Megawati’s administration enacted the Special Autonomy bill (Otsus) in 2002, which

“provided that 80 per cent of revenues from forestry and 70 per cent from oil and gas would be retained by Papua,” and formalized the name of the region as Papua and the use of the Papuan flag (Vermonte 2007, p. 289-90). Soon after, however, Megawati “issued the Presidential Instruction (Inpres) No. 1 in 2003, which divided Papua into three new provinces: Papua, Central Papua and West Papua,” in a move that did not involve prior consultation with Papuans and highly undermined the Special Autonomy law (Vermonte 2007, p. 290). Partition was perceived by Papuan separatists as “an attack on special autonomy,” and “[made] it easier for the central government to escape a referendum (for independence) because a referendum might be possible in one province but not in three” (Chauvel and Bhakti 2004, p. 38-39). Moreover, the implementation of special autonomy would require significant involvement of the provincial government and Papuan society, and the “imposition of partition marked a disjuncture in the process” (Chauvel and Bhakti 2004, p. 39). Any trust or respect that the Papuan separatists might have had for the Indonesian government was substantially dissolved by the major backsliding of policies implemented by the Megawati administration (Vermonte 2007, p. 290). Yudhoyono then “endorsed the establishment of a representative Majelis Rakyat Papua (Papuan People’s Council - MRP),” which did not achieve his goal of quelling separatist sentiments (Vermonte 2007, p. 290). In 2005, Yudhoyono “reaffirmed that the province is legally a part of the Republic of Indonesia” (Vermonte 2007, p. 291).

Since 1998, OPM demands have remained unwavering in its pro-independence stance. The legacy of superficial concessions and political backsliding by the Indonesian state did not serve to improve separatist perception of state legitimacy. As much as the



failure of the special autonomy law could be attributed to lack of political will from Jakarta, Papuan separatists were not convinced with the concessions made by the state either. The historical legacy of the Papuan region only served to widen the rift between Papua and Indonesia, contributing to a hardening separatist stance that the Indonesian government lacked sovereign authority.

While historical legacy has an important role to play in explaining the lack of separatist respect for state legitimacy in the first place, the indiscriminate use of violence by state security apparatus has exacerbated Papuan perception of Indonesian illegitimacy as sovereign authority. The failure of the special autonomy law to appease Papuans could also be attributed to violence (Chauvel and Bhakti 2004, p. 33). Indeed, the era of violent oppression under Suharto prior to 1998 was “counterproductive” and “aggravated the problem by strengthening a separate Papuan identity and the desire for Papuan independence” (Chauvel and Bhakti 2004, p. 1-2). Though the post-Suharto period presented an increase in non-violent political engagement with Papuan separatists, violence was still employed as a state strategy to clamp down on the independence movement. Moreover, the security approach deployed by the state since late 2000 might have even led to greater counterproductivity “because it followed a period of relative political openness with lower levels of violence, a time when political change seemed possible” (Chauvel and Bhakti 2004, p. 35). The central government maintains its authority in Papua via its “near monopoly of the control of force,” subsequently “[fuelling] the opposition it is supposed to quell” (Chauvel and Bhakti 2004, p. 4). In Papua, “Jakarta’s authority is powerful but fragile” - powerful in might but fragile in legitimacy (Chauvel and Bhakti 2004, p. 4).

Papuan separatists continue to assert themselves, and “have been countered by tough security action on the part of the government” (Vermonte 2007, p. 279). This cycle of state-separatist violence continue to jeopardize the legitimacy of Jakarta as sovereign authority, given the extensive and indiscriminate use of force by state security apparatus. For example, the Indonesian Council of Churches reported that in July 1998, “over 100 Irian Jayan demonstrators gathered around an independence flag were tortured, raped and massacred” (Vermonte 2007, p. 283). Other flag-raising incidents in December 1999 and October 2000 led to 28 and 40 people killed respectively by Indonesian soldiers (Vermonte 2007, p. 289). Furthermore, several “leading independence leaders lost their lives” in 2001, as a result of military action associated with members of the government (Smith 2010, p. 28). Although these killings were not officially ordered by the government per se, government officials were implicated (Smith 2010). The injustice of government-related violence experienced by Papuan separatists certainly contributed to the negative and deteriorating separatist perception of state legitimacy, which prevented any meaningful implementation of regional autonomy.

Papuan separatists do not respect the legitimacy of the Indonesian government as the sovereign authority of their region, as a result of historical factors including the legacy of Papuan incorporation into Indonesia and political backtracking of the Indonesian government, as well as the excessive state use of violence. Though this part of the Papuan case study analysis covers Papuan separatist perspective in general, instead of focusing on OPM in particular, it is reasonable to assume that OPM stance aligns significantly with that of Papuan separatists on the whole. Historical legacy and

state use of violence are common experiences faced by Papuan separatists in general. The lack of separatist respect for Jakarta's legitimacy as sovereign authority in Papua has precluded any meaningful implementation of regional autonomy. Papuan separatists have remained largely unconvinced of Jakarta's political will and capacity to make effective concessions for their self-determination aspirations.

The Papuan case study is one of non-implementation of regional autonomy, characterized by a separatist movement that primarily espouses an essentialist nationalism and strongly disregards the legitimacy of the state. Separatist nationalism in Papua has developed to take on an overtly essentialist nature with the increasing resistance against the Indonesian state, contributing to the incompatibility with any meaningful implementation of regional autonomy that still entails subjugation to an Indonesian government. Furthermore, Papuan separatists do not perceive the Indonesian state as the legitimate sovereign authority, for reasons associated with a historical legacy that includes an arguably illegitimate incorporation of the region into the Indonesian state and empty political promises of greater self-determination from the Indonesian government. Government-associated violence to quell separatist sentiments has also only served to exacerbate separatist contempt and disregard towards state legitimacy. A lack of separatist respect for state legitimacy has been a significant hurdle in the actual accomplishment of a political compromise in the form of regional autonomy.

### c. East Timor

#### i. Separatist Nationalism

East Timorese nationalism had strong epochalist roots, as it came about primarily due to a distinct colonial history from the rest of Indonesia and a shared experience of brutal oppression by the Indonesian state. Cultural factors such as religion and language, or the more essentialist aspects of East Timorese national identity, later contributed substantially to the development of East Timorese nationalism in cementing the irreconcilability of East Timorese and Indonesian nationalisms. The Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor (*Frente Revolucionária de Timor-Leste Independente*, or FRETILIN), the most prominent separatist organization, incorporated both epochalist and essentialist aspects of East Timorese nationalism in their push for self-determination. In the case of East Timor, separatist nationalism had both essentialist and epochalist elements, and the analysis to place it under one category is complex and arguably indeterminate. Separatist nationalism in East Timor, however, is intractably at odds with Indonesian nationalism. The distinct colonial history of East Timor and its forced incorporation into Indonesia contributed to a nationalism that started out as epochalist but eventually cultivated an essentialist character to obtrusively exclude the Indonesians. From the fall of Suharto in 1998 until East Timor independence in 2002, FRETILIN nationalism was largely aligned with East Timorese nationalism and vice versa, given the organization's prominent role in the regional push for independence.

Having been borne out of a “distinct colonial history” and “a shared experience of oppression by an outside power,” East Timorese nationalism was predominantly

epochalist in its initial form (Aspinall and Berger 2001, p. 1012). East Timor, unlike the rest of Indonesia, was not part of the Dutch East Indies but was a Portuguese colony instead. It was then forcibly incorporated into Indonesia via a military occupation in 1975, the illegitimacy and injustice of which contributed to the basis for the rise of separatist and nationalist movements in East Timor. Indeed, sections in the East Timor constitution, when it attained formal independence in 2002, “reflect the political reality that a truly *national* sense of East Timorese identity and community arises primarily from the collective of the brutal Indonesian occupation” (Leach 2002, p. 44). In the constitution, the specific “‘valorisation of resistance’ clause remembers the long and traumatic struggle for national liberation ... [as] the new East Timorese constitution recognises and sacralises the resistance as the core tradition of the independent state” (Leach 2002, p. 43).

While East Timorese nationalism comprises substantial epochalist elements, it is important to note that the nature of East Timorese epochalist nationalism is necessarily at odds with Indonesian nationalism. The political struggles and aspirations of the East Timorese population were a direct result of the Indonesian occupation, and highly incompatible with any form of shared sovereignty with Indonesia, its perceived illegitimate occupier. This study argues that an epochalist nationalism is generally more adaptable and agreeable with the concept of shared sovereignty and regional autonomy, as long as key separatist political and socioeconomic aspirations can be met. It is clear that in the case of East Timor, the separatists perceive secession as the only way to achieve its goals, since the prevailing stance is that they were not even supposed to be part of Indonesia in the first place.

Essentialist elements of East Timorese nationalism took on an expanding symbolic and galvanizing role in the years leading up to independence. Throughout the years of “brutal and systematic Indonesian repression, accompanied by grand developmental schemes and mass education,” East Timorese nationalism “found in language and religion two of its prime ingredients” (Arenas 1998, p. 135). FRETILIN, empowered by the cause of self-determination from oppressive Indonesian rule, strived to distance East Timor from the Indonesian antagonists and “sought to build a nationalist movement grounded in ‘traditional’ cultural and social patterns in East Timor” (Aspinall and Berger 2001, p. 1012). While the Portuguese colonialists did not exert extensive control over the East Timorese, the sudden and overt invasion of the Indonesians into their lives and sense of national identity saw the East Timorese “[react] with similar strength, but as a cultural antipode” (Arenas 1998, p. 136).

Language and religion - Tetum and Catholicism - contributed to the essentialist components of East Timorese nationalism (Arenas 1998, p. 137). Contrasted with the Malay-speaking and Muslim-majority population of Indonesia, Tetum and Catholicism contributed to the stark primordialist differentiation of the East Timorese from the Indonesians. Both language and religion are also invariably intertwined in East Timorese nationalism, as Tetum was also “the language chosen by the Catholic Church to carry out the liturgy when the Portuguese language was prohibited by Indonesia” (Arenas 1998, p. 137). The Catholic Church played a fundamental role in consolidating the East Timor nationalist cause, by providing a “unifying forum for expressing the common suffering of various ethnic and language groups in East Timor” (Leach 2002, p. 44). A general nationalist sentiment of a distinct East Timorese cultural identity was

maintained by the Catholic Church, led by a predominantly indigenous priesthood (Cotton 2000, p. 3). Moreover, the use of the Tetum language in church services also cemented the *lingua franca* status of the language in certain areas of East Timor, “facilitating its emergence as a distinctly ‘national’ language and expression of national identity” (Leach 2002, p. 44). The role of the Catholic Church in the nationalist project was also recognized in the constitution (Leach 2002, p. 44).

Furthermore, FRETILIN also drew strength for the separatist movement from the robust “system of kinship alliances” in East Timor indigenous society, around which it structured its “programme for political and economic development” (Taylor 2001, p. 213). Such a strategy saw the emergence of a nationalist movement that “[drew] increasingly widespread support through policies aimed at developing aspects of the indigenous social structure and value systems in a largely successful attempt to create a national economy and community” (Taylor 2001, p. 217). FRETILIN bolstered the aims of epochalist East Timorese nationalism by appealing to the essentialist aspects of East Timor national identity, demonstrating the the crucial interdependency of both natures of nationalism in shaping East Timor separatism.

Although East Timor eventually declared independence as a secular state, the significance of essentialist aspects in the national identity cannot be undermined. In reference to the people of East Timor, the constitution used the term “*maubere*,” which was “closely associated with FRETILIN” and deemed a “sacred part of its identity,” as it was FRETILIN that “turned the connotation of *Maubere*” from one that is “backward, illiterate and poor” to one of “national pride” (Leach 2002, p. 43-44). The essentialist and epochalist components of East Timorese nationalism are intricately woven together

to give rise to a nationalist movement that was not only highly incompatible with, but also specifically opposed to Indonesian nationalism. Separatist nationalism in East Timor was thus arguably unwavering and uncompromising in its aspirational desire for self-determination, jeopardizing any possibility for shared sovereignty and regional autonomy.

## ii. Separatist Perception of State Legitimacy

The population of East Timor had never perceived Indonesia as the legitimate sovereign authority over its territory, due to factors owing to historical legacy and the brutal use of state violence. As mentioned in the previous section, East Timor had a distinct colonial history under the Portuguese, which was unlike the rest of Indonesia. Moreover, East Timor was forcibly incorporated into Indonesia through a military invasion. Under Indonesian military control, incidences of brutal violence and human rights abuses were extensive in East Timor, further exacerbating separatist perception of Indonesian illegitimacy as its ruling authority.

First, the historical legacy of East Timor in relation to Indonesia provided the very reason for separatist sentiments in East Timor to exist and the very foundation for an East Timorese nationalism. East Timor was not part of the Dutch East Indies, unlike the rest of Indonesia, and did not play any role in the independence of Indonesia. A Portuguese colony, East Timor first faced the possibility of independence in 1974 when Portugal underwent a military coup, with FRETILIN declaring then East Timor independent on November 28, 1975 (Arenas 1998, p. 133). Shortly after, however, Indonesia invaded East Timor and forcibly incorporated the region as part of the



Indonesian state, in spite of UN resolutions condemning the Indonesian invasion (Arenas 1998, p. 133). The Indonesian government justified their actions by “expressing concern that East Timor would become a destabilising, left-wing redoubt in the middle of the Indonesian archipelago” (Aspinall and Berger 2001, p. 1011). The lack of active intervention by regional and international actors also indicated that they “gave the Indonesian takeover at least their tacit approval” (Aspinall and Berger 2001, p. 1011).

It is obvious that the circumstances under which East Timor came to be part of Indonesia were of questionable legitimacy. In fact, the United Nations General Assembly had never formally acknowledged Indonesian incorporation of East Timor (Aspinall and Berger 2001, p. 1012). The stance of East Timor separatists regarding the legitimacy of the Indonesian state was clear; the separatists had “always centred its claim to self-determination on the illegality of Indonesian annexation and the territory’s unresolved status within the UN” (Aspinall and Berger 2001, p. 1018).

The indiscriminate and brutal use of violence by Indonesian state military personnel not only exacerbated the negative perception that separatists had towards state legitimacy, but also attracted the attention and intervention of international actors to curb state-sanctioned violence as a means of control in East Timor. East Timor was a “virtual fiefdom of the Indonesian military” through the 1990s, as everything remained under tight control and close regulation by the military (Aspinall and Berger 2001, p. 1011). The Indonesian government altered its military strategy in late 1998, forming several “militia groups” of dubious legality but were “organized and supplied by elements of the Indonesian military,” and generally served to “intimidate the population and destabilize the independence camp” (Cotton 2000, p. 6).

East Timor separatists, however, reacted to the violence perpetuated by the Indonesian military by committing to nonviolence (Cotton 2000, p. 6, and Fukuda 2000, p. 23). The military wing of FRETILIN, FALINTIL “remained in cantonments and did not engage in retaliation against the militias, which would have provided a pretext for more concerted action against independence supporters, or for the aborting of the consultation process” (Cotton 2000, p. 6). Instead, the separatists sought for help from third parties and diminished Indonesia’s capacity to legitimately justify the use of violence against East Timor separatists (Fukuda 2000, p. 23).

On one hand, the brutal use of state violence diminished domestic legitimacy of the state as it “alienated people to the point where even those who had originally favoured Indonesia turned against its rule” and “[strengthened] the people’s awareness of their identity, cultural traditions, and heritage, which in turn, fortified their will to resist” (Fukuda 2000, p. 30). The violent military approach deployed by the Indonesian government to assert influence in East Timor further estranged the separatists and East Timorese in general, bolstered the resistance movement and an exclusive East Timorese national identity, and diminished Indonesia’s status as a legitimate authority.

On the other hand, Indonesian military violence also brought to international attention the illegitimacy of Indonesian state control over East Timor. The U.N. Assistance Mission to East Timor (UNAMET), established in 1999, found evidence of “Indonesian military complicity in incidents of violence” (Cotton 2000, p. 6). The introduction of international actors into the East Timor issue and the “consequent intense foreign security restrained the full potential for intimidation” by the Indonesian state in their attempt to assert decisive control over East Timor (Cotton 2000, p. 6).

Appealing to international actors for action was also a strategy of the East Timor separatists to achieve their goal of independence.

Indeed, while this study focuses on separatist-related factors, it would be myopic to undermine the significance of other complementary intervening factors, in particular international involvement. International involvement, in the case of East Timor, is especially crucial in leading to secession. Several international missions were established in East Timor to monitor the situation, manage the conflict, and abate the violence, including the U.N. Assistance Mission to East Timor (UNAMET), International Force for East Timor (INTERFET), and U.N. Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) (Cotton 2000). Under international pressure with the increasing spotlight on human rights abuses and restive separatists in East Timor, the Habibie administration agreed to a U.N.-monitored referendum on East Timor independence in 1999 (Aspinall and Berger 2001, p. 1012). The mission of the UNAMET was to “[gauge] the views of the East Timorese on their political future,” which led to a “popular consultation” that saw the East Timorese vote overwhelmingly for independence (Cotton 2000, p. 5-7). Shortly after the vote, however, violence broke out once again, with the alleged involvement of Indonesian security apparatus (Cotton 2000, p. 7). UNAMET was toothless in terms of imposing order and authority in East Timor, though it “internationalized the East Timor issue and subjected events there to intensive scrutiny” (Cotton 2000, p. 5-6). By then, East Timor had gripped the attention of regional and international actors, resulting in intervention led by Australian and U.N. forces in the form of INTERFET and UNTAET subsequently. INTERFET facilitated the restoration of order and security in East Timor after the violent breakout, but did not

have the mandate to “resolve many problems of administration or reconstruction” (Cotton 2000, p. 12). The UNTAET, following a U.N. Security Council resolution, was established with “executive, legal and administrative responsibility for the territory” (Cotton 2000, p. 12). Eventually, East Timor was officially recognized as an independent state and a member of the United Nations in 2002. The secession of East Timor from Indonesia would not have been possible without the backing of international actors (Aspinall and Berger 2001, p. 1012-13).

Based on a distinct colonial legacy, an unwanted incorporation into a state, and a violent occupation by Indonesia, East Timor separatists had never perceived the authority of the Indonesian state over their region as legitimate. This negative separatist perception of state legitimacy also contributed to the development of a distinct East Timorese nationalism that was necessarily opposed to the Indonesian state. Under these circumstances, the implementation of regional autonomy was highly unlikely; East Timor separatists were adamant in their demands for total separation from the illegitimate Indonesian occupation, while Indonesia faced intense regional and international pressure to give in to separatist demands. The referendum clearly demonstrated the overwhelming desire of the population of East Timor for independence, which Indonesia could not sustainably suppress with force without incurring political repercussions from global actors. While separatist-related factors help to explain the non-implementation of regional autonomy, international support was key in catalyzing the eventual secession of East Timor.

East Timor presents an alternative case of non-implementation of regional autonomy, characterized by an essentialist separatist nationalism and strong separatist disregard for state legitimacy. Unlike Papua, however, East Timor seceded from Indonesia in 2002, with the key difference being the extent international involvement. While separatist nationalism in East Timor had strong elements of essentialism and epochalism that drew strength from each other, essentialist nationalism took center stage in galvanizing a robust opposition towards Indonesian occupation in the lead up to secession of the region in 2002. Separatist nationalism was intractably at odds with Indonesian nationalism in the case of East Timor, rendering the successful implementation of regional autonomy or any form of political arrangement short of complete self-determination highly tedious and unlikely. Separatist perception of state legitimacy was also doomed from the beginning - East Timor had a starkly different historical legacy from the rest of Indonesia by virtue of a distinct colonial legacy under the Portuguese instead of the Dutch, and was illegitimately invaded and occupied by Indonesian forces in 1975. Extensive and indiscriminate use of force further alienated the Indonesian government from the East Timorese, and strengthened the will of the separatists and their perception of Indonesia's illegitimate authority over the region. Such circumstances did not bode well for the possibility of regional autonomy from the separatist point-of-view, since such an arrangement would require acknowledging the legitimacy of Indonesian rule in the first place. The repercussions of state violence also eventually brought about international involvement in the conflict from 1999 onwards, which bolstered the separatist movement and facilitated the successful secession of East Timor in 2002.

## *7. Conclusion*

This research engages in an in-depth analysis of separatist-related factors that determine the implementation of regional autonomy in separatist conflicts. The nature of separatist nationalism and separatist perception of state legitimacy have been identified as explanatory variables for the outcome of regional autonomy implementation. The study argues that these explanatory variables are necessary, but not sufficient factors for the implementation of regional autonomy. The two hypotheses tested in this study are: (1) a predominantly epochalist rather than an essentialist nationalism is more likely to lead to the implementation of regional autonomy, and (2) separatist respect for the state as the legitimate sovereign authority is more likely to lead to the implementation of regional autonomy.

Using a case study research method, the two main hypotheses are generally aligned with the cases of Indonesian separatist conflicts in Aceh, Papua, and East Timor. Out of the three cases studies, regional autonomy had only been implemented in Aceh, which had a separatist movement characterized by an epochalist form of nationalism and perceived the Indonesian government as a legitimate central authority to a large extent. Regional autonomy, on the other hand, has not been significantly implemented in Papua, which is home to a separatist movement that is founded on an essentialist nationalism and profoundly questions the political legitimacy of the Indonesian government. East Timor, an alternative case of non-implementation of regional autonomy, successfully seceded from Indonesia and comprises a separatist movement with epochalist roots albeit strong essentialist elements and had never perceived the control of the Indonesian government over its territory as legitimate.

The research analysis is far from straightforward, but a qualitative understanding of separatist-centric factors serves to complement existing explanations related to government strategy for the implementation of regional autonomy. The research is also cognizant of complementary intervening variables, particularly international involvement, in influencing the outcome of regional autonomy, especially in the case of secession. Indeed, the factors leading to the implementation of regional autonomy are numerous and interrelated, but this research sheds some light on the importance of the separatist viewpoint in the otherwise government-centric research literature on regional autonomy implementation. The implementation of regional autonomy, after all, is a two-way street; as much as it is ultimately the government's prerogative to implement the policy, its actual implementation also depends on the political will of the population within the relevant territory.

Some limitations of this study include the generalizability of results and the operationalization of explanatory variables. While the hypotheses are generally applicable to the three case studies, the results are limited to cases from Indonesia, where the government is held constant across all case studies. The generalizability of outcomes from this thesis is thus potentially limited. Further research in other countries or regions might involve more complex considerations and require a more sophisticated understanding of the variables involved. Moreover, the explanatory variables of nationalism and separatist perception of state legitimacy are not easily operationalized. Due to the complicated and nuanced nature of these variables, an objective measurement is hard to derive, placing much importance on the sources used and depth of qualitative analysis.

Further research should consider at a deeper level how international involvement may influence separatist-centric factors in determining the implementation of regional autonomy. Separatist movements, after all, increasingly seek international alliances and recognition to gain credibility and legitimacy for their goals, thereby influencing state-separatist dynamics and the eventual implementation of regional autonomy.

On the whole, this research has implications in determining the suitability of regional autonomy as a potential solution to separatist conflicts. A compatible form of separatist nationalism and separatist respect for state legitimacy are arguably crucial conditional factors for the actual implementation of regional autonomy. Regional autonomy should not be perceived, however, as a sufficient solution in itself to separatist conflict under these, and any, circumstances. This study seeks to highlight the importance of a bottom-up perspective in what has typically been assumed as a predominantly top-down implementation of regional autonomy.



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