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**Decentralization, Identity Construction, and  
Conflict: Education under Aceh's Special  
Autonomy**

A dissertation presented in fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Development Studies

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2017

## **Abstract**

This study contributes to the existing literature on decentralization by exploring the relationship between decentralization, identity construction and conflict in the context of decentralization reform in Indonesia. Using the concept of bottom-up autonomy as its theoretical lens, this study explores the impact of political decentralization on the autonomy of Aceh and examines the notion that autonomy can contribute to peaceful management of intra-state conflict. The study involves research into education stakeholders in the two districts of Aceh and uses the qualitative methods of pairwise ranking, semi-structured interviews, observation, and document analysis.

More specifically, the impact of decentralization on the autonomy of Aceh is investigated through perceived changes in three areas of education: the curriculum, the structure, and the financing of education. The results demonstrate that the autonomy agreed between Aceh and the Indonesian government has contributed to extensive bottom-up autonomy for Aceh by accommodating the distinct identity of the Acehnese and by providing a political framework for local empowerment. Through providing frameworks for the accommodation of local identity and for local empowerment, the form of bottom-up autonomy resulting from political decentralization has offered negotiated avenues for managing intra-state conflict peacefully. These frameworks have hopefully created common ground for both parties to sustain peace.

However, this study also revealed that there is potential for internal discontent within Aceh society as a result of perceived unequal access to resources. This study does not, therefore, emphatically conclude that political decentralization necessarily reduces conflict. Instead, this research suggests that political decentralization which results in extensive bottom-up autonomy may be a tool for promoting a more peaceful management of conflict between regions and the central state than would otherwise be possible.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to all those who have taken the time to participate in and to support this study. Firstly, I am extremely grateful to both my PhD supervisors, Dr Gerard Prinsen and Associate Professor Bethan Greener, who consistently challenged my limitations and extended the boundaries of my knowledge. Their expertise, guidance, and patience have continuously inspired and motivated me throughout my PhD journey. Thanks would never be enough to show how grateful I am to them.

Equally great thanks go to the participants of this study in Aceh, Indonesia, who have offered me their time, wisdom, insight and hospitality. Without their cooperation and trust, this thesis would never have been realised. My deep gratitude goes to the Head of the Education Office of the Province of Aceh, the Head of Education Office of Banda Aceh, the Head of Education Office of Bireuen, the Head of Bireuen BPPD, the Head of Bireuen Education Council, and the Director of ICAIOS (The International Centre for Aceh and Indian Ocean Studies), for their assistance and their warm welcome towards me and the idea of this research. I am also indebted to my research assistant, Fendra, who showed me many aspects of Acehnese life that enriched my understanding of the cultural and sociological background of Aceh and the Acehnese.

Special thanks also goes to NZAID and the Massey University Graduate Research Fund who made this research possible through their financial contribution. I am also grateful to participants at the 2015 Asia and Education Conference (University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand, 11-13 December), for adding their valuable comments to the findings of this thesis.

Finally, I would like to express my love and gratitude to my family who have always had faith in me and supported me in many ways. My parents who always encourage me to reach beyond my boundaries, and send their best prayers to me. My beloved husband Rudi whose affection and encouragement has kept me positive and determined, and my wonderful children Naja and Zahra, who are

always there for me and provide me with ongoing love and support. They have been a long-lasting source of energy during this intellectual endeavour.

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## List of Acronyms

- BOS – *Biaya Operasional Sekolah* (School Operational Fund)
- BPPD – *Badan Pembinaan Pendidikan Dayah* (Dayah Education Board)
- DBO – *Dana Bantuan Operasional* (Operational Fund)
- DEO – District Education Office
- DI/TII – *Darul Islam/Tentara Islam Indonesia* (Abode of Islam)
- DoRA – Department of Religious Affairs
- DoEC – Department of Education and Culture
- DPRA – *Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Aceh* (Aceh’s People Representative Council)
- EC – Education Council (*Majelis Pendidikan Daerah*/MPD)
- EO – Education Office
- EU – European Union
- GAF – General Allocation Fund
- GAM – *Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* (Free Aceh Movement)
- HUDA – *Himpunan Ulama Dayah Aceh* (the Association of Dayah Ulama of Aceh)
- IAIN – *Institut Agama Islam Negeri* (State Institute of Islamic Studies)
- ICMI – *Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia* (the Association of Indonesian Muslim Scholars)
- KPA – *Komisi Peralihan Aceh* (The Aceh Transition Committee)
- LCC – Local Content Curriculum
- LoGA – the Law on Governing Aceh
- MAA – *Majelis Adat Aceh* (the Council of Aceh Custom)
- MoEC – Ministry of Education and Culture
- MoRA – Ministry of Religious Affairs
- MoU – Memorandum of Understanding
- MUI – *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (Indonesian Ulama Council)

MPR – *Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat* (People’s Representative Assembly)  
MPU – *Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama* (Ulama Representative Council)  
MUNA – *Majelis Ulama Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam* (the Ulama Council of Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam)  
NII – *Negara Islam Indonesia* (Islamic State of Indonesia)  
OGF – Oil and Gas Fund  
PA – *Partai Aceh* (Aceh Party)  
PAD – *Pendapatan Asli Daerah* (Local revenue generated)  
PEO – Provincial Education Office  
PNA – *Partai Nasional Aceh* (Aceh National Party)  
PPP – *Partai Persatuan Pembangunan* (Development Unity Party)  
PUSA – *Persatuan Ulama Seluruh Aceh* (All Aceh Ulama Association)  
PWR – Pairwise Ranking  
SC – School Committee  
SPAF – Specific Allocation Fund  
SPF – Special Autonomy Fund

## **List of Acehnese/Indonesian Terms**

*Balai Pengajian* – preschool where students study to read and recite the Qur'an

*Bahasa* – Indonesian Official Language

*Dayah* – Aceh Traditional Islamic Boarding School

*Diniyah* Programme – The programme initiated by Banda Aceh District Education Office to introduce the addition of Islamic education curriculum in public schools

*Ulama* – Muslim/religious Scholar

*Teungku* – Teacher of Islamic religious subjects

*Santri* – Students of *dayah*

*Madrassa* – Modern Islamic Schools

*Qanun* – Arabic term for regional or local regulation (bylaw) intended for the implementation of the Law on Special Autonomy for the Privileged Province of Aceh as the Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam

*Kitab Kuning* – Classical texts of Islamic studies (literally 'Yellow Book')

*Tadris* – the teaching method of reciting the Qur'an

*Adat* – Traditional norms and culture

*Dinas* – Government local offices

*Uleebalang* – the chieftain who controlled goods in and out of Aceh in nineteenth century Aceh society

*Pesantren* - The term used for Islamic boarding school in Java

*Ustadz* - Teacher of Islamic religious subjects

