



Uken-Toa in the Pilkada of Central Aceh Regency in 2017: An Identity Politics

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Abstract

This study aims at discovering the effect of identity politics of Uken-Toa in elections of regional heads or pemilihan kepala daerah of Central Aceh regency in 2017. This study utilized qualitative method. The Method of collecting data was through interview. The location of the study was in Central Aceh regency. The informants were taken from general election commission, the winning team of regent and deputy regent candidate of central Aceh regency, the community leaders and traditional institutions of Gayo. The results of the analysis show that there is an effect of the practice of identity politics in the pilkada 2017 in Central Aceh regency, namely the practice of collaboration or political affiliation of Shabela that represents Uken clan and Firdaus that represents Toa clan greatly influences their victory in pilkada. This signifies that there was still massive power of identity as a political instrument. The existence of the power of identity is formed through the course of history, culture and politics. The polarization of the distribution of the identity politics of Uken-Toa in their victory in covering 2 (two) habitus, namely the political habitus Toa actor covers, pragmatism, traditionalism, and loyalty. Then, the political habitus of Uken actor includes, realism, modernism and royalism. The practice of identity politics is a politics that brings together the actors of Uken and Toa clans which include the role of habitus that determines and influences political practices.

Keywords: Identity Politics; Uken-Toa Clans; Central Aceh Regency; Pilkada

Introduction

Political change in Indonesia began since 1998 has given way to open politics (Fuad, 2014). In 2017, elections of regional heads or pemilihan kepala daerah (henceforth: *Pilkada*) were simultaneously held in the provinces and several regencies of Aceh. *Pilkada* in Aceh is radically different from other provinces in Indonesia. It happens due to *Pilkada* in Aceh is not only followed by national political parties, but also local political parties such as *Partai Aceh* (PA), *Partai Damai Aceh* (PDA), and *Partai Nasional Aceh* (PNA). This special condition is inseparable from the condition of Aceh as a conflict-ravaged area. After more than 30 years of conflict between the Government of the Republic of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement or *Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* (GAM), on August 15, 2005, both party deals to sign a memorandum of understanding in Helsinki, Finland. *Pilkada* in Aceh allows the participation of local parties. The participation of local parties in the Aceh Regional Head General Election shows a

significant difference with the regional elections in other regions, where in other regions there are no rules that allow the participation of local parties in the implementation of the General Election.

In the simultaneous *pilkada* in 2017, central Aceh regency was also included in the schedule to vote regent and deputy Regent. This area is one of the regencies in Aceh province, Indonesia. There is something interesting about the execution of *Pilkada* in this area. There is a kind of eternal competition within the Gayo community in central Aceh regency, which is also known in Aceh terms namely; *Uken-Toa* (anthropological term: moety, half-life). Interestingly, these patterns are so real and the turmoil still continues today (Melalatoa, 1981).

Of the fourteen sub-regencies in the central Aceh regency, if the regions are to be sorted out, the *Uken* sub-regency consists of; (1) Bintang district, (2) Kebayakan district, and (3) Lut Tawar district. Before Bener Meriah district was separated from central Aceh regency in 2003, all of these areas of 7 sub-regencies and consisting of 117 definitive villages were regarded as the *Uken* area (<http://www.acehtengahkab.go.id/index.php/page/53/sub-regency-in-number>). Furthermore, the *Toa* areas consist of (1) Bebesen district, (2) Pegasing district, (3) Kute Panang district, (4) Silih Nara district, (5) Ketol district, (6) Celala district, (7) Bies district, and (8) Rusip Antara district. Whereas the Linge district, Jagong Jeget district, and Atu Lintang are regarded as 'neutral positions' area and they are in a favorable position. In other words, whoever is elected in *Pilkada*, they still can get benefit.

In *Pilkada* 2017, of the 6 regent / deputy regent candidates, two candidates came from *Uken* clan and the rest came from *Toa* clan. There are candidates carried by political parties both national parties and local parties. There are also candidates from independent path. Seeing the unbalanced situation, the winner can be ascertained which is from *Uken*. Because, of course, the voters of the *Toa* clan was divided, not only for the four candidates, but also for the two candidates who had voters in the *Toa* region. In addition, one of the candidates from *Uken* chose his deputy regent from *Toa* clan. This condition seems to be similar to *Pilkada* in 2007 in which the combination pair of *Uken-Toa* namely Nasaruddin-Djohar Ali was elected again was re-elected in *Pilkada* 2012, but with different deputy regent namely Khairul Asmara. In 2012, Nasruddin-Khairul Asmara represented *Toa-Toa* clan.

Indonesia is heterogeneous in religion, ethnicity and regionalism, so the emergence of political identity cannot be avoided (Romli, 2019). Identity politics is always constructed and maintained reflexively based on the changing needs and interests (Widayanti, 2009). So, when identity shifts towards changing interests, it can be said that identity becomes something political. It also means political difference. This can be seen from the statement of Heller in Haboddin (2012) that defines identity politics is a political movement whose focus of attention is the differences as a major political category. Furthermore, Morowitz (1998) defines identity politics as providing a firm line to determine who will be included and who will be rejected. Identity politics are also often referred to as the formation of new languages of identity and actions to change social practices, usually through the formation of coalitions where at least some values are shared (Barker, 2004). In identity politics, of course tribal ties play an important role, they become potential cultural symbols and become a source of strength for political actions (Chandrakirana, 1989).

The politics of identity between *Uken-Toa* in Central Aceh sometimes triggers rivalry in the power struggles. The demarcation line between *Uken-Toa* has further strengthened identity politics in *Pilkada* in central Aceh regency. The strong history of the competition between *Uken* and *Toa* had influence in the constellation of the *Pilkada* of central Aceh. The identity of *Uken-Toa* has become a prominent issue in facing every *Pilkada* in central Aceh. The doctrine of the *Uken-Toa* has been very strongly attached to individual members of the community, which are often politicized in each *Pilkada*. The conflict management is even used as a kind of strengthening the competition sentiment between *Uken & Toa*. This can give birth to a negative influence in *Pilkada* of central Aceh. Bowen (1991) argues that

the arrival of the Dutch in Gayo area created a system of political hierarchy in the Gayo community which shaped the politicized identity of the *Uken-Toa*.

There are Four (4) uniqueness on every occasion and continue to be popularized by political actors through oral propaganda about the position of the group. The uniqueness of the political process, namely; (1) the political conflict of *Uken-Toa* continues, but the family structure, like the family of the *Toa* clan is in *Uken* area. This is maintained according to the customary values they have. *Pilkada* does not make their relationship in the society damage or perish. (2) The identity politic of *Uken-Toa* falls into the Latent political conflict and Politics without open conflict. (3) Among these actors, finally, many people make identity differences into strengths by accumulating them in forms of capital including economic, political, social, cultural and symbolic for the sake of mere power ambitions. (4) Not only that, the historical events between *Uken* and *Toa* clans in the past continue to be voiced in every political opportunity. Therefore, *Uken-Toa* has a connection with the politics of central Aceh. In *pilkada* of central Aceh, the polarization of political identity in the UK has strengthened. So, the researcher was interested in describing the influence of *Uka-Toa* in the 2017 Central Aceh Regional Election.

Several previous studies related to elections, ethnicity, and identity politics were mostly carried out by researchers. Herdiansah, Husin, & Hendra (2018) in their study tries to construe how Islamic organizations and groups construct discourse and maintain its influence in social media. The results of this study indicate that social media has become a contested space of Islamic organizations and groups to show their political position upon the government. In other cases, Hamidah (2018) puts her attention on how the Jakarta provincial election has empowered the identity of politics which posed a great challenge to the constructed social cohesion. She argues that the issue related to SARA in Jakarta is the culmination of the political ideology of confrontation which gives subsequent impact to the equilibrium of social cohesion in the society. The other scholars, Humaizi, Yusuf, & Sinaga (2019), explore the interest pattern of PASTI and Joko Tingkir as ethnic groups in *Pilkada* of Medan city in 2015. There is a similarity between ethnic groups in political communication with contestant but there is the difference of orientation of postelection compensation expectation. Those researchers are different from this study so that this study is still interesting to be discussed. Based on the above problems, this study aims to describe the influence of *Uken-Toa* clans in the 2017 central Aceh elections; and describe the *Uken-Toa* model of political competition in the *pilkada* of central Aceh in 2017.

Method

This study utilized qualitative method. The Method of collecting data was through interview. The location of the study was in Central Aceh regency. The informants were taken from general election commission, the winning team of regent and deputy regent candidate (Shabela-Firdaus) of central Aceh regency, community members from *Uken* and *Toa*, community leaders and traditional institutions of Gayo.

Results

Central Aceh Regency at Glance

Central Aceh regency is one of the regencies in the Province of Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam with an area of 4,318.39 km², located between 4 ° .10 '33 -5 ° .57' 50 "LU and 95 ° .15 '40" - 97 ° . 20'25 "BT. This Regency consists of 14 sub-regencys, 268 villages / villages, Linge district is the most extensive sub-

regency, has 207,528 Ha, while the district with the smallest area is Bies with an area of 2,886 Ha. The Gayo tribe is the dominant tribe inhabiting this region. It is estimated that in 1904 the arrival of the Dutch colonial, this is inseparable from the plantation potential of "*Tano Gayo*" which is very suitable for the cultivation of Arabica coffee, tobacco and resin. The Gayo tribe is divided into four sub-tribes, namely Gayo Lues, Gayo Deret, Gayo Lut, and Gayo Serbajadi. Actually, these four tribes are one, which distinguishes them only from the area of residence. The Gayo tribe is also a tribe that applies the values of Islamic Shari'a in various activities of the life of its people, so that all are of theocratic nature (based on Islamic teachings), both custom, culture and education system are all based on Islamic Religion. According to Ibrahim (2002), Islam entered into Perlak Aceh in the 8th century AD, the Gayo tribe who settled there gradually began to enter Islam. In daily activities, they are governed by customs, and religion is included in the arts.

Identity Politics of Uken-Toa in Central Aceh Pilkada in 2017

In accordance with the statement of Bowen (1993) which states that the existence of clans and the existence of divisions of the *Uken-Toa* concept such as in the Gayo Lut region. There are clans that grow and develop as markers in the interactions of their daily lives. Bowen well saw the influence of the Dutch arrival in Gayo. One of them is creating a system of political hierarchy in Gayo society, which then politicize the identity of the *Uken-Toa*.

Now, the practice of this clan can be found in several Gayo Lut areas, especially Kebayakan Regency (*Uken*) and Bebesen (*Toa*). This clan in the Gayo Lut community is called *Belah*. The term *Belah* refers to two things. first; indicates a place or settlement and both sides indicate geological lines that refer to the patrilineal or lineage system. Melalatoa (1983) calls it a system (moiety). It is defined as a relationship that is built on the basis of the social coating that exists in the Gayo community, namely descendants (*kuru*). *Belah* can be identified with *kuru*, *moiety*, *paroh* and *klan* which is a living group which consists of several families. The power of *Belah* is as a social control to prevent marriage between the sides. With the practice of Islam as a role model for the Gayo community, the strength of religion, culture, and customs strongly reflects the Gayo community in the past

The naming of *Belah* was widely known in the Gayo Lut community when there was a division of power between the kingdom of *Bukit* to the kingdom of *Cik Bebesen* between 1610-1901. This was the forerunner of the conflict between *Bukit* and *Cik Bebesen* which formed the structure of the Gayo Lut community into two groups namely *Belah Uken* and *Belah Toa*. *Belah Uken* refers to people who inhabit Kebayakan district and *Belah Toa* refers to people who inhabit Bebesen district.

There are four uniqueness of Gayo compared to other regions in Indonesia that can be found in the distribution of clan groups. First, Gayo, a minority group in Aceh province, refused to be said as Acehnese even though they live in the Aceh region. It occurs since Gayos have different histories, languages, cultures. Second, the differences of the groups identity in the struggle for power in the local political arena are precisely reproduced as a means of political legitimacy by political actors to fight for *pilkada*. Third, the political elites in Gayo had suggested to separate themselves from the province of Aceh by discussing the establishment of a new province, namely Aceh Leuser Antara, even though it has not yet been realized. Fourth, the historical events that make the Gayo Lut community split into two identities namely, between *Uken and Toa* are often narrated as symbolic power through *urang-urang* sentiment (identity awareness) popularized by political actors in order to gain power.

In *pilkada 2017*, the political form of *Toa* represented through a centrifugal system and *Toa* adopted a centrifugal system. The political practice did not have much impact on split conflicts on the

Uken-Toa family structure, because the regent came from *Uken* region, and the deputy regent from the *Toa* region. In fact, at the time of *pilkada*, *Uken* and *Toa* united to win the regent and deputy regent. Friction comes not from the *Uken-Toa*, but it comes from the opposition party. The influence of *Uken-Toa* in *pilkada* 2017 of central Aceh greatly affected the victory of the regent and deputy regent of Central Aceh for 2017 – 2022 period. In accordance with the results of Bowen's research (1993) through the ethnographic approach of the Gayo people in general, he states that basically *Uken-Toa* is not the basic principle of the real Gayo Society. This can be seen from *Pilkada* 2017, which at this time collaboration of these clans occurred, the regent from *Uken* and the deputy regent from *Toa* clan. Bupati came from *Uken* and the Deputy Regent came from *Toa*, because the conflict was latent conflict.

Identity Politics in the Effort to Win the Regent-Deputy Regent Candidate

Shabela Abubakar and Firdaus pair (Shabela-Firdaus) won the most votes in *pilkada* of regent and deputy regent of central aceh. This pair was promoted and supported by *Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan* (PDIP) and the *Partai Amanat Nasional* (PAN). The facts show that the local political process in Gayo often intersects relations between institutions that are propagated by the actors who fight in it. As acknowledged by the Shabela winning team, the contestation of *Uken-Toa* lived and developed at the elite level not at the grassroots level. As quoted by the interview with the winning team of Shabela Firdaus:

"In this *pilkada*, of course, we are realistic that economic capital is important. Because the campaign requires a lot of money. Of course, the entire winning team tried to be able to raise capital to be ready for the fight. In addition, we also understand that party support is the vehicle that led us to be able to fight in the Central Aceh *pilkada*. However, the collaboration between the *Uken* and *Toa* pair is the key to winning the Regent and Deputy Regent 2017 Election. "

The quotation above shows that, when participating in *pilkada*, it requires a high political cost that must be spent by the candidates. Not to mention, the situation in the field has been segregated into groups of interest groups that carry the interests of their own groups. The grouping is based on the needs of *Uken* and *Toa* in the Gayo community which are propagated by political elites. The upheaval of *Uken-Toa* sentiment was reproduced to influence the psychology of grassroots voters. In addition, transactional politics which are prioritized by political elites are a part that cannot be separated from the direct local election pattern adopted in Indonesia. Shabela-Firdaus team stated that to be able to win the battle, the candidate should possess supporting political party and good political costs, financial costs and electability in many societies. Political practice bringing together the elites of *Uken* and *Toa* clans accumulates capital capital as the basis of strength in political contestation at the dominant local level playing economic, social, political and symbolic capital. Shabela candidate representing *Belah Uken* has social and economic capital. On the other hand, Firdaus as the representation of *Belah Toa* tended to master political, cultural and symbolic capital.

There are five (5) forms of propositions in discovering patterns of practice of identity politics with forms of capital played by political actors at every level both in the regency and the countryside in the victory of the Shabela-Firdaus candidate. First, the capital is always supported by arenas, both political, economic, social and religious. Second, in the arena of the dominant capital politics played is political capital and economic capital. Third, in the economic arena, the capital is social capital. Fourth, in the religious arena, the capital is economic capital. Fifth, in various arenas, each capital has a role to support the existence of political actors.

The existence of identity-based political practices through sentiments that have grown and developed is built on temporarily political interests. The practice took place by popularizing the term *Belah*) was part of the political strategy played by the elites. *Urang-urang* sentiment is built through a political process and difficult to eliminate at the level of democracy. It happens because the problem is a political practice built by elites to kill political opponents (political rivalry) in *pilkada*. The existence of the political phenomenon of *Uken-Toa* is a response that is present due to the politics of decentralization that is taking place at this time. Although in fact, long time ago, there was a modern political system based on democracy, sentiments regarding group, culture, and religion that had taken place in various parts of the world. Racist treatment, for example, is a practice that promotes hate propaganda and considers the group itself to feel superior and superpower.

Political contestation and capital accumulation played by political actors both at the regency level and in rural areas are two patterns, namely approaches through politics, economics and religion. First, economic capital is played by distributing a certain amount of money, at the elite level, a successful team, and volunteers who are supported by entrepreneurs and contractors who support candidates in *pilkada*. Then the second pattern is through religious approaches, namely, by building places of worship, and religious assistance. In addition, to influence voters especially for farmer groups, some candidates share business capital, fertilizer, and farm equipment. Capitals played by candidates in *pilkada* are considered to influence voter behavior are political capital played in the religious (spiritual) arena such as building places of worship, financial assistance to religious groups and financial aid for religious activities. From these two patterns, the actor of *Belah Uken* dominantly used economic capital as a strategy of political succession. On the other hand, actors from *Belah Toa* predominantly use economic capital, and politics through a spiritual approach.

The Political Habitus of Uken-Toa

Habitus is an important element that actors have in assessing, determining, deciding and evaluating their social reality. In other words, habitus is an intermediary for actors in various arenas, especially in the political arena. The political habitus of the actor of *Belah Toa* includes, pragmatism, traditionalism, and loyalty. Meanwhile, the political habitus of *Belah Uken* actor includes, realism, modernism, and royalism. This was conveyed by the gayo community leaders as in the fragment of this quote;

"Actually the characteristic of *Belah Uken* is straightforward and in politics, they are more realistic and inclusive. Unlike *Belah Toa*, they tend to be pragmatic and exclusive. Indeed, after the reformation era, there was a kind of leadership shift that was dominantly represented by bureaucrats as regional heads. The impression of bureaucrats seems to be formal and exclusive".

The orientation of identity politics that took place in the location of the research was full of identity politics as stated by the informant of the winning team of Shabela-Firdaus. The emergence of sentiment regarding *mu-urang-urang*, namely, *Uken and Toa* in the Gayo Lut community indicates that the power of identity is still a massive political instrument. The *Uken-Toa* identity works during *Pilkada* for political actors. This issue became very sensitive when each actor represents a candidate to fight. Thus, the relation between the identity of *Uken-Toa* contains an identity relationship in which there is power determined by social discourse to politics.

Discussion

In terms of maintaining democratic values, basically, Gayo custom is very strict with its democratic value "*Sacred Mupakat - Behu Berdedele*", which is guided by being a fold. Local politics concerns political issues at the local level, both at the provincial and Regency / city levels, or even at the village level. According to Bowen (1993), looking at ethnodemographic and ethnopolitical conflicts between *Uken and Toa* in the pre-colonial phase in 1904, it can be identified through the distribution of population divided into two forms, (1) centrifugal (spread) and (2) centripetal (centered). In response to democracy, actually the people of Gayo are politically in a position of control, holding the highest authority of the government. With that understanding, the discussion of democracy is no longer solely related to general elections. However, it turned out that the break-up politics played by the Netherlands had succeeded only on the surface which disrupted the fellow Gayo people themselves, now. The sentiment of *Uken-Toa* as the inheritance of the invaders, continues to this day. Identity politics *Uken-Toa* goes into politics of latent conflict and politics without conflict. The political process of *Uken-Toa* is still included in the category of political forms of conflict. This is also included in instrumental processes namely it is still in the framework of formation, unification and maintenance of social structures or it can be categorized as associative processes or positive processes.

Conclusion

The Influence of identity politics of *Uken-Toa* Identity central Aceh pilkada in 2017 is a practice of collaboration or political affiliation of *Shabela* that represents *Belah Uken* and *Firdaus* represents *Belah Toa*. This political affiliation greatly affected the victory of *Shabela-Firdaus*. The relation between *Uken* and *Toa* identity contained an identity relationship in which there was determined power from social to political discourse. This indicates that the power of identity is still massive as a local political instrument. The existence of the power of identity is formed through the course of history, customs, culture and politics.

The polarization of the political distribution covers 2 (two) habitus, which includes the political habitus of *Belah Uken* and *Belah Toa*. The political habitus of *Uken* actor follows a centrifugal system, namely; (1) realism which includes showing direct facts, lost kinship on the surface. But, in their heart and feeling, it is still exists; (2) modernism which includes acceptance about developments that occur and tends to follow new developments, and (3) royal which covers motivating, funding, and loyalty. In the other side, political habitus of the actor of *Belah Toa* adheres to a centripetal system, namely; (1) Pragmatism; (2) Traditional; And (3) Loyal.

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