

Understanding Aceh Referendum Discourse in the Context of Asymmetric Decentralisation

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Abstract— *As a result of recent political dynamic, particularly after the world most complicated simultaneous national elections, Aceh referendum discourse has been re-echoed by Acehnese local elite. This issue has become an interesting phenomenon to be investigated. As a result of MOU Helsinki Peace Agreement in 2005, Aceh has been granted as a special region by the central government by way of an asymmetric decentralisation scheme to run its government. Is it true that the local Acehnese really want the referendum? Or is it just a political discourse enacted by the local elites for their own political interests? This paper examines how ideology operates through discourse. It uses Van Dijk ideological discourse analysis. This paper argues that referendum issue re-enacted is not just an ordinary elite' speech. It strongly entails political ideology of certain group. For ideology to operate in discourse, local elites have strategically manipulated context, event, knowledge and their group belief both to attract public attention and to strengthen their political bargaining position with the national elites.*

Keywords— *Referendum, Asymmetric Decentralisation, and Ideology*

I. INTRODUCTION

This article examines the trajectory of Aceh asymmetric decentralisation and the role of Acehnese local elite. Recently, right after the bloody complex of the 2019 presidential election, referendum has been re-articulated by a former high ranking GAM commander (Panglima GAM), Muzakir Manaf. In Aceh, referendum is not a new political issue. Historically, the referendum was proposed by local elite in the conflict era in 1999. It dedicated to the work of civilian intellectual, Muhammad Nazar, the leader of Acehnese popular movement (SIRA, Sentral Referendum Aceh). At that particular time, referendum was a proposed answer to the bloody protracted and prolong conflict between Aceh and Jakarta. In its first launched, referendum attracted thousands of Acehnese to gather in the Baiturrahman Raya Mosque (Mesjid Raya Baiturahmman) Banda Aceh and it has shaken the national elites. Yet, the current referendum issue re-enacted by the GAM ex-commander pertains to be based on the disappointment of the result of national democratic contestation. Nevertheless, it is important to note although both referendums took place in different political context, referendum discourse re-echoed by the local elite is not just an ordinary statement. It strongly entails an ideological aspect of political discourse raised by local elite to attract attention both national and local audience and to strengthen their bargaining position with the national elites.

This ideological aspect of political discourse is historically rooted in conflict and embedded in the former Free Aceh Movement or Gerakan Aceh Merdeka ideology linked to the Aceh independence. Although later the former GAM commander, Muzakir Manaf has re-corrected his speech to stress that Aceh is part of Indonesia, yet interestingly referendum discourse enmeshed crucial ideological element of the Acehnese nationalism.

Along the line of Aceh asymmetric decentralisation, scholars have argued that asymmetric decentralisation has been hijacked by local elite [1]. In this context, elite used their predatory power in the form of money politics and violence in appropriating local resources [2], [3], [1]. Others have pointed out that asymmetric decentralisation in a form of special autonomy has given spaces for elite to promote local democracy and later contest for local power and authority [4], [5], [6]. However none of them examined the role of ideology as power resource used by local elite. This ideological power resource reflected in how elite construct political discourse to influence attitudes and actions of others.

This article uses Van Dijk discourse analysis [7], [8] to investigate how ideology works through discourse. In explaining how ideology operates in political discourse, this paper is organised into four sections. The first section explores the origin of asymmetric decentralisation and elite conflict in Aceh. The second part of the paper explains Van Dijk discourse analysis as conceptual framework. The third sections explains the method used in the paper. The final section explores how ideology works through political discourse.

A. The origin of Acehnese asymmetric decentralization and elites conflict

Aceh is located at the northern end of Sumatra Island, in the western part of Indonesia. In 2013, its population reached for about 4.7 million people [9]. More than 80 percent are ethnically Acehnese and almost all are Muslims [10]. Historically, Aceh asymmetric decentralisation rooted in conflict and as a result of conflict resolution. Yet, Aceh asymmetric decentralisation never escaped from local elite contestation.

Asymmetric decentralisation could not be avoided when Aceh was granted 'special region' status (Daerah Istimewa), following negotiations with Daud Beureueh, the leader of Darul Islam Rebellion, the introduction of Sharia law was limited to one by law restricting the sale of food and drink during Ramadhan [11], [12]. Dissatisfied with

this narrow application of Sharia law, some Acehese Islamic scholars, including Daud Beureueh himself, continued to struggle for its further implementation. In response, in 1962 the Indonesian government issued a decree that provided for 'the orderly and proper implementation' of 'elements of' Sharia Law, bringing an end to the rebellion despite Beureueh's view that 'the situation was not ideal' [11]. Over the next decade, Acehese desires to strengthen Islam were thwarted by the increasing centralisation of state power under Suharto (Miller 2004). In 1968 the provincial government of Aceh passed a regulation on the enforcement of Sharia law to the Indonesian government which the Indonesian government simply ignored (Miller 2004).

After the collapse of the New Order regime, to avoid national disintegration and to accommodate Acehese demands, President Habibie formally recognised the original 'special region' (Daerah Istimewa) agreement through Law No. 44/1999, thereby giving Aceh 'control over its religious, cultural and educational affairs' (Miller, 2004). Subsequently, under President Megawati Sukarno Putri, Law No. 18 of 2001 on 'Special Autonomy for the Province of Aceh Special Region as the Province of Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam' expanded on the previous law by allowing the implementation of Sharia law (Miller, 2004). There followed the establishment of a Sharia court (Mahkamah Syariah) to regulate Islamic practices in relation to marriage, divorce and inheritance and obligations with respect to conduct, such as the wearing of the headscarf (jilbab) for women, and banning the consumption of alcohol, gambling and other forms of Islamic misconduct (Miller, 2004).

Later, in accordance with the 2005 Helsinki agreement, Sharia law was addressed in the Law No. 11/2006 regarding the governing of Aceh. This new law covered the new institutionalisation of the Islamic conduct, such as the establishment of a Sharia police force (Wilayatul Hisbah), whose main tasks are to monitor and enforce the rule of law and punish offenders, and the establishment of the Islamic Scholars Council (Majelis Permusyawaratan Ulama) which is responsible for resolving disputes and interpreting Islamic discourse around the implementation of Sharia. Law No. 11/2006 mandated the Council to make a fatwa (a legal pronouncement in Islam). The MOU also had introduced 'free and fair' local elections for both executive and legislative offices, and allowed the establishment of political parties to nominate candidates to stand for such offices [13]. The MOU also set out the new local fiscal arrangements. According to the MOU, Aceh will secure 70 % of the local revenue from current and future hydrocarbon deposits and other natural resources in the province [14]. Furthermore, beginning in 2008, as stipulated in the Law of Government of Aceh, to boost the local economy, Aceh will also receive a 2 % share of the national budget (DAU) for 15 years and then 1% for another 5 years until 2027 [15]. Total central government transfers from these allocations allowed Aceh's revenue to increase from 1.2 trillion to 9.8 trillion between 1999 and 2009 [16], and further increased to 10.65 trillion [15].

Nevertheless, asymmetric decentralisation in Aceh depicts how elite struggle over power and resources emerged as vocal points in understanding social conflict. Although to a certain extent identity politics such as Islam and ethnicity might not be ignored as triggering social conflict factors, yet it was elites, who took control over how Aceh might be organized, in fact resulted in contestation among other influential elites in Aceh over power and resources.

There are two significant groups of scholars who study the role of local elite in Aceh asymmetric decentralisation. First is the political economy perspective and second is the institutional democratic approach. With regard to the political economy perspective, a number of scholars looking particularly to vertical conflict between Aceh and Jakarta pointed out that identity politics of ethnicity combined with religion, ideology and economic exploitation grievances were the driving forces of the birth of the GAM movement in 1976 except the first rebel movement in 1950s was motivated by Islam [9], [16], [17]. Yet, so far Nielsen article's on Questioning Aceh's inevitability: A story of failed national integration?, describes differently on how power contestation is put in place as the driver of the vertical and horizontal conflict in Aceh. In regard to the horizontal conflict within prominent elites in Aceh explained by Nielsen [18] and also some illustrated by [19], elite competition primary motive was based on power and resources.

Historically, power contestation between the two prominent elites emerged in the period of Indonesian post-independence of Soekarno's nationalist project. This issue concerned with what and who would 'fill the glass' in Aceh region [18]. Under the PUSA organization (Persatuan Ulama Seluruh Aceh), the ulamas had successfully thrown the aristocratic uleebalangs out of power and led the rebellion against Jakarta nationalist project under the Darul Islam movement in around 1950s pursuing the Islamic state and Aceh was part of in it [18]. Interestingly, this resistance also emerged as a result of the decision of Jakarta to merge Aceh Province with North Sumatera Province where this policy turned to cause Daud Bereuh (Aceh Governor) had lost his power [16]. In terms of horizontal conflict within Aceh itself, there was also internal conflict within Darul Islam elite, namely: the compromiser (Hasan Saleh) and the stubborn ulama (Daud Bereuh) (Nielson, 2002, p. 15). In fact, through negotiation, Hasan Saleh under the Revolutionary Council (Dewan Revolusi) gained concession from Jakarta to establish Aceh as special province in regard to the practice of Islamic law, adat (costmary law) and education. Even though Daud Bereuh saw that this agreement did not guarantee Islamic sharia practice in Aceh, yet he made reconciliation with Hasan Saleh as a means of his pragmatism in terms of securing his future position as one of the ruling elites in Aceh [18].

The Suharto's modernisation project in around 1970s in Aceh had fuelled the conflict between the secular aristocrats (the new uleebalangs) and the reformist ulamas. By nurturing the Acehese technocratic scholars, the new order regime secular modernization had contributed to set

up who and how Aceh society might be ordered. This project turned to social change created by the new order era in Aceh where State University were established (Syahkuala University) and the gas reserve was found in North Aceh in 1971 [18]. This was the foundation to build modern Aceh society integral with the new order economic policy strategic alliance with the nurtured new Acehnese uleebalangs technocrats led this secular modernization project and they dominated the Aceh regional government position. Meanwhile the ulamas went different direction and more focused on developing the practice of Islamic law instead of pursuing the modern secular Aceh (Nielson, 2002, , see also Miller, 2004).

However, the economic modernization reform in fact had turned to excessive exploitation and domination by Jakarta and this served as a basis for the new secular uleebalang backfire against Jakarta by forming the new separatist movement (The GAM) . This was a great momentum where Hasan Di Tiro positioned elite grievances for economic exploitation of Acehnese as he was acting both as secular educated man and also business man who failed in competition with foreign contractor to construct a pipeline for Mobile Oil in North Aceh (Nielson, 2002, p. 22 and Braithwaite, John, et al ,2010,). In this particular issue Nielson (2002, p. 23) does not ignore the ethnicity factor as a trigger for vertical conflict yet it was merely used as an effective instrument for mobilising people support for separatism. Jakarta was referred by Hasan Di Tiro as ‘Javanese colonialists’ that exploited and destroyed Acehnese economy and identity (Nielson, 2002, Braithwaite, John, et al , 2010).

In relation to the identity creation manufactured by the founding father, Di Tiro who was the ulama descendant in fact claimed that the last Sulthan had handed to his family and this would guide him to create future independence Aceh as ‘traditional monarchy’ instead of an Islamic state with Tiro himself as the Sulthan (Smith, 2002, p. 74 and Nielson, 2002, p. 23). The role of the Sulthan or the King according to Kingsbury served as a Wali Nanggroe or guardian of the right of its people including protector of the practice of Islam (Kingsbury, 2007, p. 172). This traditional Aceh elite style of governance system reflected what Kingsbury (2007, p. 172) described as ‘the complex balance of power’ among the Sulthan (Wali Nanggroe), the aristocrat uleebalangs (land lord) and the intellectuals ulamas (Islamic scholars). This power sharing arrangement serves as basic ideology of the GAM in expressing their power structure where Malik Mahmud (the GAM elite) claimed as “the sate code”: “Adat bak Po Teumeureuhom, Hukom bak Syah Kuala, Kanun bak Putroe Phang, Reuesam bak Bentara (Power rest with the king, Law with the great imam of Syah Kuala, Tradition with the Princess of Pahang and Regulation with the Bentara)” (Kingsbury, 2007).

Among the prominent political scientist who have giant stake on the Indonesian politics in particular Aceh context is [14]. In his study on Combatants to Contractors: Political Economy of Peace in Aceh, Aspinall explained how local elite re-building in co-opting local political and economic resources in fact was shaped by broader structural factors

that already exist in Indonesian politics. Aspinall (2009) argued that peace building process had important roles in facilitating the reintegration of the GAM ex-combatants into civilian life, but the former combatants’ resilience in local power was more to do with their capacity to draw and re-generate the already established social structure underpinning the Indonesian political economy in general that strongly value patrimonial and predatory corrupt system. In elaborating his argument on the emergence of the new local elite in the local power, Aspinall focused on how the GAM ex-commanders appropriated the post conflict construction sectors through the mechanism of old patrimonial, predatory corrupt system including violence that already historically been practiced by the GAM combatants during armed conflict (2009). Aspinall specific work on the local political economy aspects of the GAM elite ex-commanders was developed from Aditjondro (2007a, 2007b) who was focusing on much broader scope than him. Aditjondro (2007) was early unpacking how patronage networks and predatory corrupt behaviour of national business elites involved in appropriating local post conflict reconstruction in Aceh in the name of human disaster relief as the aftermath of tsunami reconstruction in Aceh. This networks involving Suharto’ business crony era including some former high rank Indonesian military commanders who in fact had closed business interests’ cooperation with the top KPA leadership (Muzakir Manaf) through engaging in large contractor business sectors. This in turn triggered the rise of the local business elite which mostly occupied by former high ranking GAM ex-commanders.

The other block of scholars has linked the asymmetric decentralisation with the emergence of the local elite to the local democratization process as a result of the peace deal (opportunity to gain political office). Although to some extent, the scholars who stand on democratization argument also drew the work of Aspinall on political economy approach, yet their position more stress on the role of the peace and democratization process in rendering the GAM elite group into local power in post conflict Aceh. For example, (Tornquist 2011, Labolo 2014) asserted that space for local elite re-building has been facilitated by peace and democratization process. These associated elections in fact have given the former GAM rebel insurgency group a share in local power and to hold political power. However this packet of democratization also has contributed to the dynamic of elite conflict over power and resources. The new local elite drifting back into the old practice of predatory power undermining the fair democracy and civil society. Ansori (2012) also argued that peace process has given the opportunity for the GAM ex-combatants in local power but it also generates pattern of conflict among elites GAM and in particular between ex-commanders and their rank and file ex-combatants over political and economic resources.

B. Conceptual framework: ideology in discourse analysis

This section elaborates on the framework used in this paper. It explains Van Dijk discourse analysis.[7], defines ideology as ‘a shared representation of social groups,... as

the basis of a social group's self-image, ideologies organize its identity, actions, aims, norms and values, and resources as well as its relations to other social groups'. 'Ideologies are the basic frameworks for organizing the social cognitions shared by members of social groups, organisation, or institutions'[8]. 'Ideology functions as 'the interface' between the cognitive representations and processes underlying discourse and action, on the one hand, and the societal position and interests of social groups, on the other hand' [7]. Van Dijk offers some characteristics of ideology. First, ideologies 'organize and ground the social representations'. Second, they function as 'the ultimate basis of the discourses and other social practices of the members of social groups as group members. 'Ideologies are largely expressed and acquired by discourse, that is, by spoken or written communicative interaction' [8]. Third, ideologies 'allow members to organize and coordinate their joint actions as the part of the socio-cognitive interface between social structures (conditions, etc.) of groups on the one hand, and their discourses and other social practices on the other hand'. (Van Dijk 2006). Subsequently, Van Dijk (2006) stresses that for ideology to operate in the level of discourse has to be based on several aspects:

a. Context

Context is pivotal in providing subjective 'definition of situation'. Context is essential in controlling process of discourse and 'make sure that a discourse is socially appropriate' (Van Dijk, 2006, 121).

b. Events

For ideology to be operated in discourse it basically needs event. Event is 'a subjective interpretation of language users of the situation interpreted by the actor'. 'people understand a discourse if they are able to construct a model of it' whether it is positive or negative' (Van Dijk 2006).

c. Knowledge

Knowledge is categorised as a general belief that functions to control the construction of specific model and hence indirectly, also the production of discourse. 'It is this share, presupposed, taken for granted knowledge that makes discourse and mutual understanding possible, also across ideological group boundaries' [8].

d. Group beliefs

'Group beliefs are characteristically ideological. In this sense they are controlled and organised by underlay ideologies. Group beliefs control the context and events models of their members when these speak of group members, and thus indirectly the discourse structures...' [8]

e. Strategic processing

'On the basis of the ideologically biased models and socially shared beliefs actor strategically produce and understand talk and text, on line, word by word, sentence by sentence turn by turn'[8].

Van Dijk (2006) points out that 'discourse is not always ideologically transparent, and discourse analysis does not always allow us to infer what people ideological belief are. This always depends on the definition of communicative situation by the participants that is on context'.

II. METHODS

This paper uses qualitative method by utilising library studies. Secondary data and information were collected from publications such as government reports, NGO and international donor reports, scholarly books and articles, conference or working papers, and newspapers. Relevant literature in regard with Aceh asymmetric decentralisation, the role of local elite, and discourse analysis were examined through literature review.

III. DISCUSSION

This section explains how ideology operates through discourse. It applies the Van Dijk, (1995, 2006) discourse analysis to elaborate on how referendum as discourse entails ideology of certain group [7],[8].

As has been noted that the current referendum discourse re-enacted by the GAM ex-commander, Muzakir Manaf was linked to the presidential contestation result that made Prabowo Subianto lost. Nevertheless, it is interesting to investigate that the Muzakir Manaf statement of referendum entails ideological messages that related to the ideology of the GAM group. Based on Helsinki peace agreement it was stipulated that GAM had to dismantle its organisation including its military wings. Yet, its ideology is still intact.

If we have a look a little bit closer to the referendum issue raised by former GAM commander, Muzakir Manaf, referendum as discourse is not just ordinary issue since it strongly deliver important messages linked to the former GAM ideology of Aceh independence. As Van Dijk (2006) noted that for ideology to operate in discourse must have several elements:

First, In terms of context, local elite set the context or definition of current situation that was linked to injustice practice of national government and the failure of the Indonesian national democracy. As noted in the media, Muzakir Manaf says that "our country in Indonesia is no longer clear about the matter of justice and democracy. Sorry, Pak Pangdam, in the future we will ask for a referendum," said Mualem at the conduct commemoration of the 9th death of Hasan Tiro at Amel Building Banda Aceh [20]. This statement delivers two important messages. First, literally, the terms injustice and undemocratic practice are referred to Indonesian state or central government which was the actor who fail to conduct fair and just presidential election. Yet this message also contains social memory of conflict which brought the state as the ultimate actor of conflict that made Acehese suffering for almost 30 years. Thus context was successfully set by the elite targeted to awaken local Acehese public memory and also the national audience of conflict between Jakarta and Aceh. It sounds the memory that conveys important message, 'remember we (Acehese) were involved in conflict with Jakarta before'. Second, Muzakir Manaf, himself served also as context that sends the messages of who he is. Muzakir Manaf was a top level GAM military commander who led the GAM military wing. After the conflict he served as KPA (Komisi Peralihan Aceh) or Aceh and the Transition of Commission which the home base for the GAM ex-

combatant. He is also head of Partai Aceh or Aceh party. In this regards, his social status sends messages of his past and current leadership position as an elite.

Second, context itself is not completed without events. For ideology to operate as discourse it necessarily needs events to strengthen the messages. Thus it also happens in the event of the commemoration of the GAM founding father Hasan Di Tiro. By utilising this event, Muzakir Manaf further states that:

“The problems of the Indonesian people, are increasingly piling up. Indonesia is entangled in various problems such as the fate of several countries in Africa. Moreover, Indonesia in the future will be colonized by foreigners; this is what we are worried about. Therefore, Aceh is better off following East Timor, "said Mualem. Instead of us being colonized by others, it is better for us (Aceh) to stand alone. This is one of the efforts and thoughts of the Acehnese today. Hopefully with all our intentions, we better follow East Timor, God willing” [20].

The above statement conveys important message of ‘colonised by foreigners’ and ‘better for Aceh to stand alone’. These two statements were linked to the ideology of Aceh nationalism which Hasan Di Tiro echoed during the conflict stage. In the construction of discourse, the figure of Hasan Di Tiro’s role is central. That is why elite utilised this momentum. Hasan Di Tiro was the GAM intellectual in the conflict era who constructed the idea of Acehnese as a nation; the other GAM elites were supporters and followers of his idea. The idea of Acehnese nationalism constructed by Hasan Di Tiro drew on elements of a shared history; however, some of the elements of this historical past were also reconceived by him as a GAM political ideology to forge a separate Acehnese national identity, as the basis for the common destiny of an independent state of Aceh. The shared history of Acehnese nationalism constructed by Hasan Di Tiro consisted of three significant elements: the construction of the idea of an Acehnese nation, the glory of the Sultan, and Islam.

Hasan Di Tiro specifically linked Acehnese nationalism to a certain set of ideas about the Acehnese nation or, in Acehnese terms, *bangsa Aceh* (Aceh nation) (Aspinall 2003; Schulze 2003, and 2004). The construction of the idea of an Acehnese nation was defined by the blood ties of a *suku* (ethnic group) (Schulze 2004,). This is seen in Hasan Di Tiro’s memoirs where he dwelt on the blood of the ancestors (blood denoting supreme sacrifice): ‘... memorise your history! It has been written, not by ink over the papers, but by your forefather's blood over every inch of our beautiful valleys and breath-taking heights’ (Tiro 1981, 69 in Aspinall 2003 18-19). In contrast, Hasan Di Tiro constructed the otherness of the Indonesian state as ‘Javanese colonialist’ and emphasised its cruelty: ‘the Javanese who have stolen our properties...have robbed us from our livelihood, ... have abused the education of our children, ... have exiled our leaders, ... have put our people in chains of tyranny, poverty and neglect’ (Tiro 1976 in Schulze 2003, 246). This idea of the Acehnese

nation was intended by Hasan Di Tiro to serve the future GAM political objective of forging a distinctive Acehnese national identity that is incompatible with that of Indonesia’s.

Third, the referendum statement rearticulated by Muzakir Manaf also entails common Acehnese knowledge that trigger social memory of what we understand about referendum. Referendum discourse linked to the situation of the 1999 referendum enacted by the Acehnese local elite in the conflict era. The dynamic of the 1998 reform era that turned to flourished local democratisation and decentralisation, the independence of Timor Leste and the prolonged vertical conflict between Aceh and Jakarta that resulted in the appropriation of Aceh economic resources, the harsh military operation and human right violation had triggered the Acehnese popular movement to promote referendum as a leeway to the conflict. The referendum had gained momentum when thousands of Acehnese to gather in the Raya Mosque in Banda Aceh. In other words referendum meant to create separation from Indonesian state.

Fourth, referendum discourse particularly linked to the group belief which entails the objective of the former GAM movement: Aceh independence. As has been noted above, the GAM ideology reflects the notion of Acehnese nationalism that translated the idea of distinctive Acehnese, the glory of the Sulthan, Islam and the political idea of democracy and human right. This ideology was crucial in garnering massive civilian population support and hence legitimation of its political goal for the independence of Aceh. Scholars say that GAM ideology was transformative and shifted over time to adjust to its global and domestic political environment. The GAM ideology was shifted from nationalism to democracy in adjusting to the political environment as a result of reformacy era in 1998. It was in this context that referendum was promoted by the student movement under SIRA (Sentral Information Referendum Aceh). Nevertheless, it doesn’t mean that GAM left the ideological construction of the Acehnese nationalism since this ideology had given GAM consistency to stick to their claim to the Acehnese independence.

At last, the local elites strategically proceed to pack the context, events, knowledge and its belief system to provoke general public attention regarding the referendum discourse. In this particular stage, local elites aware and understand that their statement contain an ideological discourse linked to their political interests. They also understand that their political statement has political consequences. Hence, after several days enacting the referendum issue. Muzakir Manaf successfully attracted local and national public attention. In response to his statements, there are pro and contra to the referendum issues re-articulated in his speech. For those who pro with the issue, raised the concern that Jakarta was not properly realised the MOU Helsinki, but others particularly the government convince the public that referendum is unconstitutional.

Although not even until a month later Muzakir Manaf has revised his statement to convince the public that his

statement is just an emotional speech and nothing to do with separatist movement. He justified that Aceh is part of Indonesia. However, given the prolong 30 years of armed conflict that caused great pain and human right disaster, and the underlining ideology of Aceh nationalism that in fact still intact, the idea of Aceh independence is like a time bomb which search a great momentum in the future.

IV. CONCLUSION

To date the scholars who took political economy position have argued that Aceh asymmetric decentralisation has been appropriated by local elite to contest for local power and authority. Other scholars who concerned with institutional democratisation argument, pointed out that Asymmetric decentralisation in Aceh have made local elite promote democratic process in their contestation for local power. Yet what has been lacking in their account is how ideology is involved in the process of discourse used by the elite to contest for local power. By using Van Dijk (1995, 2006) tools of discourse analysis, this paper has explained how ideology operated through discourse. Elite strategically used context, events, knowledge and group beliefs to capture and manipulated their ideology through enacting a referendum discourse. For sure the referendum discourse has served as a new wave of the local political dynamic. This issue may have been ongoing as the dynamic of asymmetric decentralisation which gives a new space for the local elite to attract public attentions and to have bargaining position with the Jakarta national elites.

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