Inter-villages Sentiments: Decentralization on Nias Island, Indonesia

Erond Litno Damanik

Abstract--- *This paper is an attempt to explore and discuss the decentralization on Nias Island, North Sumatra Province, Indonesia. The problem is focused on strengthening inter-village sentiment that has an impact on district separation and the election of regional executives. The theoretical reference used is the construction of ethnicity as tools to achieve political power. Data was collected through participatory observation and in-depth interviews with subjects such as regional heads, local politicians, and the community. The phenomenological approach is used to analyze problems. This study concludes that decentralization on Nias Island had an impact on strengthening inter-village sentiments. The sentiment was used for the separation of districts and the election of regional heads. The sentiment is reflected in the bo'o Mbanua, bo'o Mbowo or different villages, different customs. Identity construction creates awareness of each village population that is different from other villages.*

Keywords--- *Villages, Sentiment, Identity, Separation, Decentralization.*

I. INTRODUCTION

After the Reformation, Nias Island was formed into 4 regencies and 1 city. South Nias based on Law No. 9 of 2003; Gunungsitoli city based on Law No. 47 of 2008; North Nias based on Law No. 45 of 2008; West Nias based on Law No. 46 of 2008 and the Nias regency established since 1918. Since 2009, the five administrative regions on Nias are planned to become 1 province from North Sumatra. However, the moratorium policy in Indonesia since 2014 has become an obstacle to the formation of Nias Province.

The formation of new administrative is made possible by 2 main reasons; (i) juridical, the existence of legislation, and (ii) formal, the acceleration of development according to the scale of priorities in the region. However, behind these two ideological reasons, there are other substantial reasons. This reason becomes the energy formed by the actors to mobilize the community to demand the formation of new regions. These reasons include: (i) affirming ethnic boundaries based on subculture, (ii) assigning new territorial boundaries based on cultural variant categories. These two reasons are formed through differences in dialects, ceremonies, rituals, historical origins, and other differences, (iii) inter-village *(ori)* sentiment, (iv) clans *(mado)* cleavages in each region formed to remove domination between clans, and (v) obtaining political power and allocating economic resources to local political elites. This study focuses on the third reason, namely the substantial reason for the formation of regions.

In the two decades of the Reformation (1999-2009), regional formation policies did not accelerate development but created new problems in the regions. Problems that arise in the regions are the polarization of primordial identity-based societies; the birth of new kings in the regions, an affirmation of territorial territories based on subculture, and the seizure of economic and political resources in the regions. In other words, regional formation policy is very paradoxical with more dominant juridical and formal reasons showing substantial reasons. In this section, there are two main assumptions about the emergence of regional formation; (i) religion and ethnicity as the dominant factors for the formation of new administrative regions, and (ii) the construction of subculture as distinct identities such as dialects, customs, regional arts, historical origins, and others as the basis for the formation of new administrative regions.

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In this study, anthropologically, the population on Nias is considered homogeneous. This population is called the Nias ethnic group. In another case, the population in 5 regions recognized themselves as Nias people. The history of its origin comes from the sky that descended on Boronadu, South Nias. The phenotypic characteristics are more like those of the Mongols namely Thais, Vietnamese or Chinese. The kinship system is patrilineal and the system of power and inheritance is patriarchal. The pattern of marriage is clan exogamy. The customary law system is summarized in *Fondrako* which consists of good deeds *(Fo'adu),* livelihood *(Fangaso),* government and social stratification *(Fabarahao),* and guarantees of rights and obligations *(Bowo Masi-Masi)* [1].

The entire population uses the Nias language, namely the Sanskrit family which is based in Austronesia. The script is a Brahmi family from South India. The national clothes tend to be the same, dominated by black and red. However, there are differences in subculture units in the five administrative regions. This difference is seen in the dialect of the language, customs, ceremonies or rituals or traditional house forms. This subculture difference is greatly influenced by its geographical and topographical environment, namely the coast and mountains.

This study intends to explore and discuss the dynamics of inter-villages sentiment. In this case, dynamics are construction. Furthermore, the inter-villages sentiment is a phenomenon of political life at the regional level played by regional actors. In this study, the observed phenomenon is the strengthening of inter-village sentiment that has an impact on district separation and executive elections. In this study, the inter-village sentiment is a subculture cumulation that shows differences in cultural variants that are packaged as new ethnic identities. The inter-village cultural variant received reinforcement which was constructed as an element of differentiation from other villages [2]. Each variant that gets this reinforcement becomes an identity that is considered unique as its cultural identity [3]. Then, this identity becomes a personal reference, a source of motivation and symbols and standards of behavior namely social radar to interpret the social world [4].

As social radar, cultural identity has the potential to be used as a tool, strategy, and tactic for achieving social, economic, political, social and cultural objectives. The identification mechanism departs from the strengthening of inter-village sentiment. Strengthening inter-village sentiment becomes positive energy for the formation of new administrative regions. Each subculture difference is used by actors to create an inter-village sentiment. The inter-village sentiment is intended to form collective awareness. This awareness is used to mobilize the public to demand the formation of new administrative territories. Furthermore, each actor who plays a role in regional formation takes advantage of the opportunity to be executive or legislative in his area. In this case, the inter-village sentiment is the dynamics of ethnicity that have experienced construction according to the dynamics of local politics influenced by national politics.

II. Literature Review

Ethnicity is seen from two perspectives, namely (i) primordialism, and (ii) constructivism. The first perspective emphasizes primordial attributes as the basis for identity. Ethnicity is seen as a significant collectivity of symbols [3], [5] or feelings that have an interest in certain groups [6]–[9] as well as biological instincts based on nepotism [10]. Primordial attributes become specific characters of society that cannot be changed [11]. In essence, ethnicity according to primordial views tends to be given, natural and permanent. The second perspective (constructivism) emphasizes the structure of society. According to this perspective, ethnicity is social perception and a choice that must be made [12]–[14] or the product of cognitive processes that are intentionally created [15]. In essence, the constructivism perspective views the existence of ethnicity as perceptions formed through the establishment of ethnic social boundaries according to ethnicity situations [16]–[21].

An ethnicity is a tool [21] for obtaining economic and political opportunities. Therefore, the construction of ethnicity is one of the ways that actors can get this opportunity [22], [23]. In this case, ethnicity can be mobilized to seize greater opportunities namely political power. The mechanism is very dependent on the identity construction carried out by the actor. On the one hand, construction has the potential to create conflict but on the other hand, can create group cohesion.

This cohesion is used by actors to achieve their political interests [19], [22], [24]. In this study, ethnicity is the social radar for understanding the social world [4]. As social radar, ethnicity is a personal reference, a source of motivation and the construction of social symbols and a standard of behavior [21]. Ethnicity is not seen as static but dynamic according to its social environment. In a dynamic social environment, ethnicity experiences redefinition and even reconstruction according to the opportunities that exist. The construction according to the ethnicity situation around it [12]. Finally, reconstruction is an 'ethnic game' [10], which is caused by the strategic stability of ethnic identity [17]. This situation allows ethnicity as a strategy, tactic or tool to achieve social goals in a plural society [14].

Local politics in Indonesia in the era of decentralization reflected the strengthening of regional identity. It is said that substantial reasons are more dominant than formal reasons for the phenomenon of regional formation. Pakpak Bharat Regency in North Sumatra was formed because of the exclusion of its identity which was attacked by Toba migrants [25], [26]. The Malay in Asahan formed the Batubara Regency to separate themselves from the Toba Islam [27]. The formation of 2 regencies in Labuhanbatu is an effort to separate the Mandailing, Angkola, Malay, and Toba even though they are fellow Muslims [28]. Mentawai became a district that was separated from its parent to reduce the dominance of the Minangkabau [29]. The same phenomenon occurs in the formation of regions in Sambas and Buton [30]. The studies in West Kalimantan [31], [32], West Sumba [33], East Lombok [34], even in Riau [35] showed the existence of a phenomenon in the form of redefinition of its ethnic social identity. Ethnic politics in Kendari in the formation of regions widened to the economic and socio-cultural arenas [36].

Local politics in Banten reflect *Jawara's* (freeman) nepotism, which is a group of thugs as executives [37]. The same phenomenon occurs in North Sumatra, namely free-man as an executive [38]. In the North of Tapanuli, ethnic politics was carried out by way of cleavages of clans that referred to ancestors and descendants [39]. In Labuhanbatu, Karo, and Simalungun where ethnicity strengthens in the formation of new regions [40]. This fact contradicts the goal of democratic decentralization which was formulated in 1998 [41]–[45]. All of these phenomena indicate ethnic resurgence through the regional formation and executive election [46], [47].

Local politics in Indonesia more closely reflect flow politics [48] which leads to contrasting primordial identity differences. This fact is caused by the structure of a plural society that demands territorial, ethnic and religious representation in government structures [49]. *Anut Grubyuk* (fitting in) for example, as a form of grouped Javanese voting behavior. This potentially supports patronage-driven democracy [50]. Furthermore, the emergence of religious-based political parties triggers the politicization of religion in every executive election [51], [52]. Political anomalies such as this only occur in developing countries [53], [54], where religion and ethnicity become political forces [22], [55], [56]. This fact is paradoxical with the assumption of modernization that shifts religion and ethnicity to the private domain [57]–[60].

Ethnicity is a crucial theme in North Sumatra. This is due to the plural societies. This plurality creates keen competition. Social cohesion is a serious threat that impacts conflict. For example, the Mandailing and Angkola conflicts in 1922-1925, were caused by the concept of Batak [61]. Likewise, the Pakpak, Karo, and Simalungun are refused to be called Batak [40]. Besides that, the concept of Malay in Medan, Binjai, and Langkat is very vague. They are Karo people who became Muslims [62], [63]. In Medan City and Pematangsiantar, ethnicity has an impact on the segregation of settlements, work, and even houses of worship [64]. Ethnicity is a differentiator [65]. This fact is one of the factors that emerged for regional formation. However, the plan to form regions in Simalungun and Karo, for example, is to divide the Muslim and Christian population constrained by the moratorium policy.

The political life of a plural society allows all societies to compete freely to influence the political process, namely to prevent group domination [66]. However, pluralism has weaknesses: (i) limiting individual participation in the political process, (ii) only representing associations of interest, (iii) the influence of actors is more prominent than members, (iv) the existence of neglected subordinate groups, and (v) placing the government as referees in competition between groups [67]. This phenomenon in Indonesia is also happening in other countries, especially in Eurasia and Australasia. In Eurasia,

the phenomenon of ethnic politics is intended to distinguish migrants and hosts, or form new countries [68]–[71]. In Hungary and Romania, ethnicity becomes a political channel through electoral politics [72]. In Australasia, ethnicity is intended to distinguish Chinese immigrants from Indians, Aborigines, and Maori [73].

In principle, ethnicity is the basis of solidity which contributes to the subject's empirical experience. This solidity reflects the personal points of reference that control individuals in their social life. In local politics, ethnicity is a reconstituted construct to primordialism. This element consists of (i) psychological mechanisms to facilitate social categories, (ii) intrinsic values that mark social group boundaries, and (iii) social references to reading and interpreting social phenomena. Therefore, ethnicity is a characteristic inherent in social situations that are constantly changing or manipulated. Ethnicity is dynamic and becomes an important theme in any political life because there is a solidity of members that can be utilized for economic and political purposes.

III. METHOD

The state of the arts in this study moved from a constructive paradigm to view ethnicity in local politics on Nias. This study refers to the phenomenological approach [74] to find out the subject's experience of the object being studied. In this study, phenomenology is based on the subject's social actions namely awareness, experience and meaning to the social world. The subject's experience is a source of knowledge that represents the phenomenon being studied. The subjects in this study are actors or elites in the regions. They are the pioneers of regional formation, executive and legislative candidates, as well as leaders of certain associations such as clans, religion, and society. Data collected through participant observation and in-depth interviews of the subjects [75]. Data collection was carried out for 4 months in 5 administrative. Interviews focused on ethnicity construction, regional formation, executive or legislative elections. The data are analyzed in-depth based on the phenomenological approach.

IV. STUDY RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Until 1999, the Nias Islands *(Tano Niha)* was an administrative area called Nias Regency. However, after 1999, the islands were divided into 4 districts and 1 city. Geographically, the Nias separated the Indonesian Ocean from the island of Sumatra. The journey to Nias can be done by air from Kualanamu International Airport in Medan, the capital of North Sumatra Province, to Binaka Airport on Gunungsitoli, for 1, 3 hours flight. Besides, the journey can be done from the sea, namely the Port of Sibolga, Central Tapanuli on the West Coast of North Sumatra to the Port of Gunungsitoli for 12 hours. Figure 1 below is a map showing the position of Nias in the province of North Sumatra.
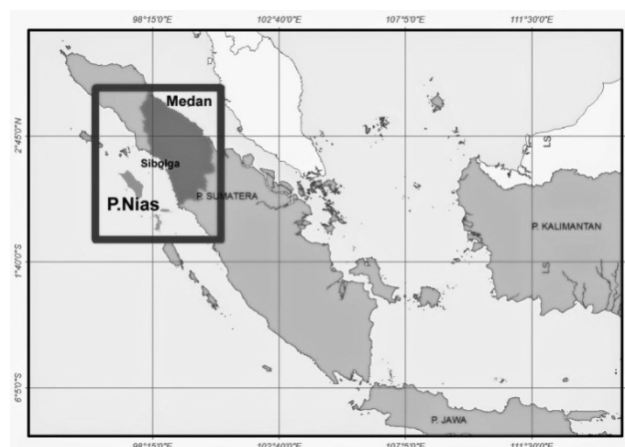

Fig. 1. Maps of Nias Island, North Sumatra
Source: http://sistiminformasigeografi.com

The Nias formation is determined by alluvium, Gunungsitoli, Gomo and Lelematua [76]. In the Nias, there are small islands that are partly uninhabited. Geologically, Nias is an outer arch area that does not have volcanoes. The geological structure tends to show folds and faults. Anticline and syncline are not united and partly sharpens to the northwest and

southeast. The topography tends to show lowlands with hills in the center of the island. These topographic differences create subculture differences in the population. Archaeologically, Nias is divided into two characters, North and South Nias [77]. Anthropological literature in Indonesia, notes that Nias people are homogeneous, called Nias ethnic groups [78].

However, the five administrative regions on Nias show subculture differences. This difference is reflected in the expression *bo'o Mbanua, bo'o Mbowo* or different villages, different customs [79]. Each village has unique characteristics as its social identity. This difference becomes the energy that drives the community to form new regions on Nias in the era of decentralization. Nias became a battle area for England and the Netherlands. In 1756, north of Nias was controlled by the East Indie Company (EIC), England. However, the entire archipelago was conquered in 1825 and became the first area in North Sumatra to be conquered by the Netherlands. Before colonialism, the island was called *Tano Niha* and the Dutch changed it to Nias Land and became a slave recruitment area [80]. In 1836, Nias exports included coconuts, rice, poultry, pepper and slaves to Java. The lytic tradition in Nias is a very unique archaeological artifact. This specificity refers to the ethnohistory of the people who already existed in the Great Stone Age. This stone artifact is not found in other areas in North Sumatra, Aceh or Minangkabau which are its neighbors. Megalithic artifacts such as sculpture, sarcophagus, and dolmen have links to India and South Asia [81].

Nias population is different from Batak or Minangkabau when viewed from cultural, physical and language characteristics [82]. The skin color is brighter, cheekbones are less prominent, lips are thinner, and the nose is flatter than proto-Malay Sumatra [80]. Nias populations in the north and south are different [83]. This difference is seen from subculture in each cultural region such as dialects, ceremonies, rituals and traditional house forms [84]. This difference is more influenced by ecology, namely the coast and the interior that forms coastal and island societies. Nias people look for ancestral origins to the sky as is generally the case with Polynesians [80]. Nias ancestors descended from the sky in Boronadu, Gomo, Sout Nias [79], [85], [86]. Most likely, the ancestors of Nias people today are a mixture of Chinese, Thai or Vietnamese who migrated and settled in Nias. The phenotypical characteristics of the Nias people with those mentioned have similarities and are supported by the same region, namely Indo-China in East Asia [77].

The social behavior of Nias people is very complex as seen in the intermingling of custom and social norms [87]. This complexity is influenced by religious and ecological understanding. Before colonialism, a war between villages often occurred on Nias. Village warfare is caused by (i) unnatural deaths, (ii) rape of women, (iii) theft, (iv) acceptance of runaway slaves from other areas, (v) unpaid debts, (vi) land and territorial disputes, and (vii) insults [88]. The war on Nias was represented in the popular War Dance. The inter-villages war illustrates the defense of village honor [89]. Nias is divided into small areas according to the clan *(Mado)* who are subject to the chiefdom. The total number of clans in Nias is 118, spread over five administrative regions. Table 1 below shows the main clans in each of these areas.

Table 1. Clans dominant in 5 administrative regions on Nias

Administrative regions	Clans dominant
Gunungsitoli city	Harefa, Zebua, Zega, Telaumbanua
Nias regency	Mendrofa, Laoly, Lafau, Bahea, Larosa, Nazara,
South Nias regency	Laia, Daichi, Duha, Manao, Zaluchu,
North Nias regency	Zega, Lase, Hulu, Zendrato, Halawa, Wau
West Nias regency	Baeha, Gulo, Waruwu, Hia, Daely

Source: Fieldwork data, 2018.

In the era of Dutch colonialism, Nias was one sub-district in the Tapanuli Residency (1857) and became part of the West Sumatra Residency. In 1906, Nias was upgraded to the regency in the Tapanuli Residency, which has capital in Sibolga. This change is inseparable from the development of the political situation of Dutch colonialism. In 1918, based on State Decree no. 178, Nias became regency led by a regent based in Gunungsitoli [90]. At that time, Nias was divided

into 3 districts: (i) Telukdalam with 18,981 populations, (ii) Loewau with 12,169 populations and (iii) Lahusa with 15,101 populations [90]. In 1937, based on State Decree no. 563, Nias Island is divided into 2 sub-districts and 10 districts. The separation of the district is based on a traditional area called *ori,* which is the unity of several villages.

The appointment of the district leader is based on the genealogical unity of the *Tuhenori (ori* leader*)* according to *Mado* (clan) or *Fondrako.* This system of government continued until 1942 and was maintained throughout the Japanese era (1942-1945). After independence, Nias was determined to become 1 district in North Sumatra according to Emergency Law No. 8 of 1956, dated November 14, 1956, concerning the Establishment of the Autonomous Region in North Sumatra Province [90]. Based on the 1930 census, the population on Nias reached 46,251, consisting of 23,537 men and 22,714 women. The demographic composition of the five regions in 2018 reached 1,013,891 people, with the distribution as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Demographic composition on Nias, 2018

Administrative regions	Capital	Large (Km$^{2)}$)	Populations
Gunungsitoli city	Gunung Sitoli	284,78	128.965
Nias regency	Gido	980,32	168.703
South Nias regency	Teluk Dalam	1.825	457.757
North Nias regency	Lotu	1.202,78	131.346
West Nias regency	Lahomi	544,09	127.120
Total population			1.013.891

Source: Fieldwork data, 2018.

South Nias Regency which was formed in 2003, is the largest and most populous regency in all of Nias. In this regency, there are popular beach resorts that are famous for surfing in Telukdalam, and historical tourism in Boronadu (Gomo) which is known as the origin of Nias ancestors. In this region, there is a tradition of Rock Jump *(Fahombo Batu).* In 2004, the dispute between the people of Telukdalam and Gomo occurred due to the contestation of the executive election. Teluk Dalam is the district capital so the regent must be from this region. Meanwhile, Gomo is the origin of the Nias people and want the regent from this area. The elected regent is from Gomo. Furthermore, the elected regent compiled the structure of his dominant officials from Gomo. Several times the admission of civil servants, tend to give priority to the Gomo people. This situation created jealousy from the Telukdalam peoples. This situation affected the next contestation in 2009.

The 2009 contestation had an impact on public demonstrations. During the 6-month demonstration, there was a burning of the regent's office, the local parliamentary (DPRD) office, and the Police station. The election of legislative members must be repeated. More than 50 community members were arrested by police suspected of being provocateurs. During the action, 7 people were recorded dead. Some of the demonstrators must stay in prison. An executive election in South Nias was the worst contestation on the entire island in the 20 years of the Reformation. The composition of religion on Nias tends to show the dominance of Protestants and Catholics. However, a small percentage shows the existence of Islam and Buddhism. Table 3 below is the demographic composition of the religious aspects of the five regions on Nias.

Table 3. Composition of religion on Nias

Administrative regions	Moeslem	Protestants	Catholics	Buddhism
Gunungsitoli city	13,82	73,22	12,71	0,25
Nias regency	0,92	80,64	18,44	-
South Nias regency	5,24	68,93	25,83	-
North Nias regency	1,47	77,16	21,37	-
West Nias regency	1,60	81,64	16, 64	-

Source: Fieldwork data, 2018.

The phenomenon of regional formation in Nias is inseparable from the phenomenon in North Sumatra and even in Indonesia. During 1999-2018, the number of districts and cities in North Sumatra increased from 16 to 33. Apart from Nias, the formation of new areas took place in North and South Tapanuli, Dairi, Labuhanbatu, Asahan, and Deliserdang. Furthermore, North and South Tapanuli and Labuhanbatu demanded the establishment of a separate province from North Sumatra. However, the plan is still pending in line with the National Government's policy to temporarily suspend regional formation.

The formation of regions in Nias is possible for three reasons: (i) juridical, (ii) formal, and (iii) substantial. Juridical reasons refer to government regulations that regulate and enact the formation of regions in Indonesia. This juridical reason is called the choice of centralization during the New Order became decentralized in the Reformation era. This juridical reason appears from Law No. 22 of 1999 concerning Regional Government, and Government Regulation No. 129 of 2000 concerning the Requirements for the Establishment and Criteria for the Formation, Elimination, and Merger of Regions. Although the regulation on decentralization has been revised, regional formation is still possible. Revisions were made in the form of the issuance of Law No. 32 of 2004 concerning Regional Government and Regional Government No. 78 of 2007 concerning the Guidelines for Regional Formation. In addition to accelerating development, decentralization has opened opportunities for the formation of new regions, but the sharp strengthening of primordial sentiments and regionalism has become a moratorium factor since 2014.

Furthermore, there are formal reasons for regional formation. This reasoning is related to the span of controllers and the span of managerial control. For this reason, the acceleration of development is stated to be controlled and regulated through relatively short distances. This formal reason is often stated to strengthen juridical reasons, namely, one way to accelerate development in the region. In this case, a statement that is often raised is that the centralization of power in Indonesia until 1999 was a factor in the marginalization of development in the regions. Therefore, priority-based development management in the regions can only be done if the span of control and the span of managerial are in the midst of the community.

The third reason for the formation of regions in Indonesia is called a substantial reason. This reason becomes the energy that unites the population to demand the formation of a region. New regions become new political arenas in the regions. In this case, the role of local political actors to play the discourse of ethnicities is a decisive factor. This substantial reason consists of several issues, namely; (i) customs territorial rights, (ii) primordial identity borderlines, (iii) hegemonic of culture, (iv) ethnic denomination, and (v) subculture denomination. These five issues have the potential to create population awareness that is used by local actors to vent their desires. In this case, the role of regional actors is not at all aimed at upholding ethnic identity but rather creating opportunities to become executives (regents, mayors, and governors) or legislative members in their regions.

The dynamics of ethnicity in local politics in Nias occurred in the Reformation era. This dynamic is seen in the strengthening of ethnicity which is used to achieve political objectives, both internal and external. External objectives are demands that refer to the implementation of juridical and formal reasons for regional formation, namely: (i) the formation of Nias province, (ii) regional executive and legislative elections originating from fellow Nias people, (iii) accelerated development on Nias, (iv) inclusion of Nias ethnic identity in government, (v) recruitment of employees and officials from Nias people and (vi) allocation of development costs relevant to Nias culture. The internal objective is to strengthen subculture, which is to reduce the dominance of clans and territorial origins in Nias, including (i) the formation of administrative regions, (ii) the election of regents, the determination of officials and the recruitment of employees who have similar origins, (iii) clan representation in each government structure, and (4) subculture-based development in each cultural.

Nias people in Telukdalam and Gomo tend to be different when they look at their language symptoms [79]. However, both of them can communicate and understand each other with Nias language in the area. The same reality is true for Nias

people in North, West, and Gunungsitoli. So, even though the dialect of the language is different, all Nias people can communicate and understand each other using Nias language. The different cultural variants in Nias people are an affirmation to create new ethnic boundaries. Before regional autonomy, Nias people claimed to be homogeneous, then after decentralization, they claimed to be different.

The basis of the distinction is made by searching for cultural units as a process of identification, both objectively and subjectively [12], [14]. The search for new ethnic boundaries is carried out in line with the opportunities or opportunities that are supported by interests. However, these opportunities and interests are elitist phenomena that are read by local political actors. With his gallant, political actors campaigned for development in the name of subculture. The identity of the subculture is confirmed and stated to be different from the others. In this case, ethnicity is projected by actors as a way of gaining political, economic, and other resources. Therefore, ethnicity plays an active role in every arena such as socio-political, socio-economic, socio-religious, and socio-cultural. The use of ethnicity in each arena is highly dependent on the ability of actors to polish it so that it can be widely accepted at the grassroots level.

On Nias, the discourse on regional formation is the voice of the actors. The discourse on the formation of the first area (South Nias Regency) was aligned with the marginalization of development and the size of the island with the span of government control to Gunungsitoli (the regency capital) and Medan (the provincial capital). This discourse utilizes students in Medan and Jakarta, as well as on Nias. Many student involvements are very necessary because it is considered to represent the Reformation era. The discourse of marginalization and the need for regional formation involves local elites such as religious figures, traditional figures, youth figures, and civil servants. They become local agents who continue the discourse of marginalization and formation of the area to the grassroots. The discourse continues to be voiced through informal discussions, such as installs, markets, government offices, and other activities. In the end, this discourse was booming in the community and felt urgent.

The local elites grasped this situation and became a sponsor of intensive studies (a kind of feasibility study) before the seminar. Next, a seminar was held by inviting local, provincial and related institutions from Jakarta. This seminar certainly produced conclusions and recommendations about the need for the formation of new regions on the grounds of accelerated development and the range of managerial control. Recommendations are forwarded to the Regional Government for approval and forwarded to the Governor of North Sumatra for recommendations. Subsequently, the governor's office was forwarded to the Minister of Home Affairs in Jakarta for approval. From this office, the proposal is to continue discussions and plenary sessions in parliament.

The formation of the South Nias Regency in 2003 contained a hidden agenda to release the dominance of North Nias over South Nias. South Nias is the original area of Nias people, but the district capital is in Gunungsitoli, namely in Central Nias. At that time, the governance structure and staff recruitment were more dominated by North Nias. The dynamics of ethnicity in the first division intended to erase the northern hegemony of southern Nias. The separation of South Nias Regency marked a new era, namely the opening of new arenas and political structures on the island. However, in the 2004 regent election contest, the situation changed drastically. Gomo's domination of the Telukdalam people in South Nias had an impact on open conflict in the form of demonstrations, killings, imprisonment and the burning of offices. Anthropologically, this conflict occurred because of Telukdalam's jealousy over Gomo's dominance in the government structure. The Gomo people feel superior to Teluk Dalam because they claim to be the direct generation of Nias ancestors on the island. In this case, the clan associations in Gomo and Telukdalam played a central role in the mobilization of society in executive and legislative elections. Clans like Laia, the dominant in Gomo, became regents in South Nias.

The separation of the second area, North Nias Regency, is inseparable from the success of the formation of South Nias. These regencies are Afalu, Alasa, Talumuzoi, Lahewa, East Lahewa, Lotu, Namahalu Esiwa, Sawo, Sitolu Ori, Tugalo Oyo, and Tuhemberua. Nias people in the north feel different from Nias people in the south. The standard used as a

standard is the round shape of the traditional house *(Omohada)* which is different from the square in South Nias. Besides, subculture units such as dialects, dances, ceremonies, rites, and clans are reinforced as new social boundaries. Nias people in the north do not want to be compared to Nias people in the south who feel superior. Besides, the formation of the North Nias district also provided a place for major clans such as Zega, Hulu, Nzara, and Lase. Thus, the dynamics of ethnicity in the north of Nias become energy that unites and effectively mobilizes grassroots for regional formation as well as becoming a new structure on the island.

The separation of the third area is West Nias Regency in 2008. The regency is a combination of the Nias and outer islands in the western part of Nias. Its territory consists of Lahomi, Lolofitu Moi, Mandrehe, West Mandrehe, North Mandrehe, Moro'o, Sirombu, and Ulu Moro'o. The formation of this area was motivated by the formation of the two previous districts. In addition to juridical and formal reasons, substantial reasons for regional formation also occur in this area. The cultural variant, the subculture, is the basis for identifying and determining territorial and ethnic boundaries. This subculture affirmation was welcomed by the grassroots who facilitated the formation of new areas on the island. The formation of this new region also created a place for clans such as Gulo, Daeli, Waruwu, Hia, and others in the governance structure.

The separation of the fourth area was Gunungsitoli City in 2008. The city area consists of Gunungsitoli, Gunungsitoli Alo'oa, West Gunungsitoli, Gunungsitoli Idanoi, South Gunungsitoli, and North Gunungsitoli. The basis for the formation of this area is (i) redefinition of the subculture, especially the Sitolutua clan namely Harefa, Zebua, and Telaumbanua, which became structures in the new political territory. This redefinition refers to the disbanding of clans in this area on the island of Nias if they do not form new political territories. The next reason is (ii) the planned formation of Nias Province. This formation was motivated by the juridical reasons for the formation of the provinces namely 4 districts and 1 city. Therefore, regional political actors work together with government elites to discuss the formation of Nias Province. Gunungsitoli is promoted as a candidate for the provincial capital because it has the infrastructure in the form of ports and airports. Besides, Gunungsitoli is the most developed region in the whole island. The plan for the formation of the Nias Province was motivated by the discourse on the formation of the Tapanuli Province which had been discussed since 2005 which referred to the historical aspect of the Tapanuli Residency [91].

Nias Regency is a parent area on Nias Island. This Regency has been formed since 1918 in the era of colonialism. Since 1945, Nias has become regency in North Sumatra with its capital at Gunungsitoli. However, in line with the determination of Gunungsitoli as a city, the capital of Nias Regency was moved to Gido. The regency consists of Bawolato, Botomuzoi, Gido, Hili Serangkai, Hiliduho, Idanagawo, Ma'u, Somolo-Molo, Ulugawo, and Sogae'adu. Since its establishment as a district, the government structure has been dominated by the Laoli, Bahea, Lafau, Mendrofa and Zega clans. This clan is the main clan in districts such as Telukdalam, Gunungsitoli, Tuhemberua, and Mandrehe.

Elite and actor competition on Nias began to be felt since 2003. This competition occurred because of the opening of opportunities to form new regions as well as a new political arena in the region. At the same time, actors from the subculture and clan territories who felt marginalized had the opportunity to rise on the political stage. The political deprivation that was felt before decentralization was only represented in the governance system with a new regional structure. In this new region, new government and political institutions were formed namely the executive, legislative, political parties, recruitment of regional employees, allocation of material resources, new investors and partners, as well as the institutionalization of new social attributes. With the formation of new territories, local actors can reach power and politics in their respective regions.

This fact can be seen from the clans of the regional government and officials who represent the clans in their respective regions. The pioneers in the formation of this region, because of their contribution, had the desire to be both executive and legislative. This desire has an impact on the solidity of the pioneers after the formation of the region. In South Nias, for example, fellow pioneers contested for legislative and executive positions. The election results were sued in court in

Gunungsitoli. Finally, even this pioneering solidarity broke up. The same fact occurs in West Nias, where fellow regional formation pioneers become opponents in the executive and legislative contestation. Feeling dissatisfied with the election results, making them hostile to each other.

The description above, the dynamics of ethnicity in local politics on Nias moves from a small unit of inter-village sentiment constructed to achieve a greater goal of regional formation and opportunities to become structures in the region. The inter-villages sentiment is implemented in the phrase *bo'o Mbanua, bo'o Mbowo* or different villages, different customs. Each village *(mbanua)* becomes an area that is incorporated in *ori* (sub-district), which is the unity of several villages. In the five administrative regions on Nias, the phenomenon of the formation of new *mbanua* and *ori* is the fact. This phenomenon is carried out to meet the legal requirements that each district can be formed if there are 4-5 districts. Figure 2 below is the identification process to claim ethnic territory.
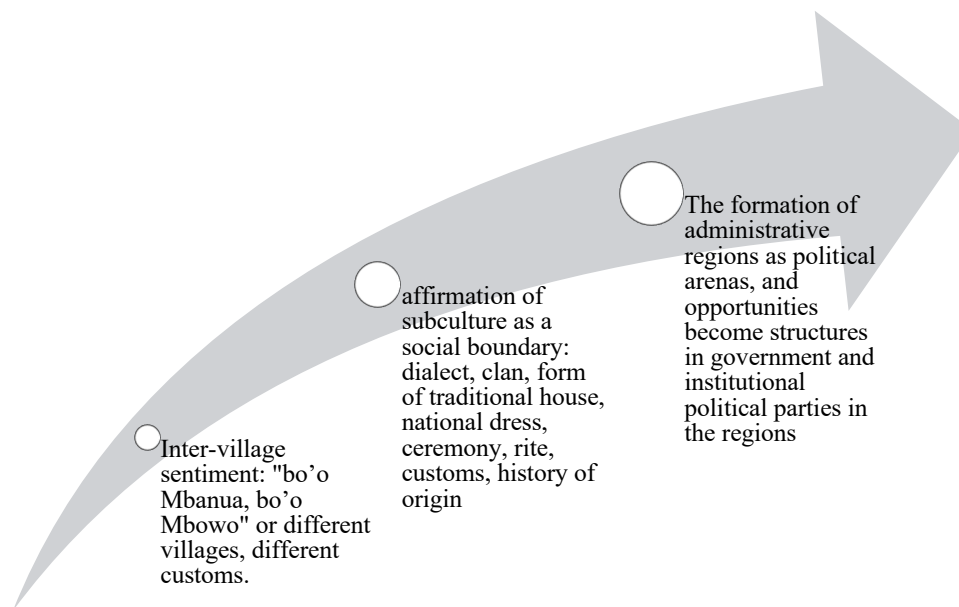

Fig. 2 The dynamics of ethnicity on Nias

The utilization of inter-village sentiments is very effective on Nias to form a new administrative area. This fact can be manifested for several reasons: (i) the ability of actors to package the discourse of differentiation between villages, (ii) the success of the actors instill the importance of the discourse of regional formation at the grass-root level as a way of highlighting their identity, and (iii) elitist support (government, figures youth, community leaders, religious leaders, clan associations) that only the formation of regions is capable of answering the exclusion of regional identity and marginality. The inter-village sentiment is the basis of identity construction to distinguish it from other villages. Each village that has a subculture equation is combined into one administrative area. The rejection of one village against integration could have happened like in South and North Nias. However, the dominance of the influence of actors or elites, even that rejection can be resolved.

Comparing the findings of this study with the previous state of the arts concludes that ethnicity does not refer to primordial boundaries as stated by Shils, Geertz, and others. However, ethnicity is a dynamic that is constantly being constructed according to ethnicity situations that present an opportunity and interest structure. In this case, ethnicity is Hale's stated social radar which is used to interpret the social world, namely power, economy and politics represented through the formation of new regions. The cultural variant, the subculture, shows the dynamism of primordial attributes that is expanding. This attribute is not static, given or permanent, but is formed according to the wishes of the actor or elite who read the opportunities behind the reconstruction effort. The construction of subculture attributes aims to form awareness of members who are different from the others. Grassroots acceptance of this construction effort makes it easy for actors to mobilize them according to the wishes of the actors. Thus, ethnicity is a social reference, a source of

motivation and behavior to interpret the social world that is used to mobilize grassroots according to the political objectives of the actor.

Based on the description above, the findings of this study conclude that inter-village sentiment is a construction of subculture. The inter-village sentiment is the reconstruction of subculture as a basis for identifying membership. The standard of identification is cultural variants. Inter-village sentiment illustrates the political deprivation felt by actors who are not represented in a single government system. The inter-village sentiment is a representation of the dynamics of ethnicity in the form of searching and affirming ethnic social boundaries to the identity of the subculture that demands recognition. In the end, the recognition of the new social identity of this subculture was answered through the formation of a new government area. This new territory becomes a new political arena where every local actor or elite can enter into the structure of government that is formed.

VI. SUMMARY AND CONTRIBUTION

Decentralization on Nias Island had an impact on strengthening inter-village sentiments. The sentiment was used for the separation of districts and the election regents. The inter-villages sentiments are summarized in different villages, different customs. This difference forms the basis of identity construction to create hegemony to support the formation of regions as a new political arena. The inter-villages sentiment is a hegemony of identity-based on subculture; a cultural region containing primordial cultural variants. Subculture identity is a further development of primordial identity in each cultural area as a basis for constructing new social boundaries. This study concludes three important points; the dynamics of ethnicity developing from subculture identities that do not refer to primordial identities, local actors are constructing figures according to estimates of expected economic and political opportunities, and the construction of ethnicity is carried out to create political arenas namely regional formation and the opportunity to become an executive or legislative in the region. Finally, ethnicity is a mobilization tool to demand the political interests of actors through the formation of regions.

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