The Shifting Attitudes of Acehnese towards Rohingya Refugees: Rise of Autochthony?

Naufal Rasendriya Apta Raharema

Department of Conflict and Development Studies, Faculty of Political and Social Sciences, Ghent University, Ghent/East Flanders - Belgium
Corresponding email: rasendriya@nrar.net

Abstract

Various rejections by local Acehnese, as well as netizens on social media, have emerged against the newly arrived Rohingya refugees on the beaches of Aceh. The rejection ranges from the locals' rejection of the boats to land to the forced removal of the refugees by students. This change in response from the local Acehnese community is surprising, as the local community's response to the refugees has been known to be positive since the first boat arrived. Through a qualitative analysis that connects the issue with the concept of autochthony, this research found that such concept is connected to the shifting response of the Acehnese towards the newly arrived Rohingya refugees, whereas the concept's key points of (1) protection of ancestral heritage as well as (2) fear of being contaminated by foreign influences, are prevalent in the locals' recent gestures and acts of refusals. If this attitude is maintained, it is not impossible that more discrimination towards the Rohingya refugees could take place in the near future.

Keywords: Rohingya, Refugees, Aceh, Autochthony, Racism

INTRODUCTION

Aceh, argued not to be the Rohingya's destination country, first received Rohingya refugees back in the beginning of 2007. Located on the western border of Indonesia, Aceh is known as a transit place for the refugees before continuing their journey to the neighboring Malaysia, or developed countries (Usman et al., 2023, p.118). Nevertheless, with the current situation that Malaysia has decided not to take more Rohingya refugees, Aceh might be perceived as the Rohingya refugees' final destination country, or at least that is how the Acehnese locals perceive it. The Acehnese have welcomed the Rohingya refugees positively since the first days (Usman et al., 2023), yet it appears that the locals' responses have shifted nowadays.

According to Amnesty Indonesia (2023), on the 14th and 15th of November 2023, two boats of 194 and 147 Rohingya refugees disembarked in Pidie, Aceh respectively, sources also stated that the locals welcomed these refugees with open arms and that the refugees were then relocated into shelters. Nevertheless, Amnesty Indonesia (2023) also reported that another boat carrying around 247 Rohingya refugees was prohibited from the locals in Bireun, Aceh to disembark on the 16th of November. These refugees were also previously prohibited from disembarking by the villagers of Ulee Madon, North Aceh (Detik, 2023). This refusal marks the shifting of the locals' stance on this issue, as such

refusal has also spread to other areas of Aceh. In this context, the local citizens in various cases still offer various assistance such as providing food and clothes to the refugees before asking them to return to their boats and continue their journey somewhere else. Some of the citizens in Sabang also destroyed the refugee camps in Balohan village as a form of refusal (Detik, 2023). On 10 December, more than 200 Rohingya refugees disembarked at Blang Raya beach of Pidie while 135 more arrived in Blang Ulam, Aceh Besar which the locals escorted them to the Governor's Office in Banda Aceh as the citizens refused to host (Detik, 2023).

As of the middle of December 2023, UNHCR (as cited in BBC, 2023) reported that the latest discovery of 45 male Rohingya refugees who were stranded in Kuala Idi Cut beach in East Aceh marks the tenth arrival of the influx of Rohingya refugees within one month. As for now, the number of Rohingya refugees in Aceh has reached more than 1600, including the 140 individuals who have stayed for the last one year (BBC, 2023). Most of the refugees are now being taken care of in Lhokseumawe, where the shelters are, as per the instruction of the Aceh provincial government.

Historically, the Rohingya people have lived in western Myanmar's Rakhine state for centuries, as they are also the descendants of Arab Muslim traders who had come to trade and settle around the area back in the 7th century (Parnini, 2011). Meanwhile, the ethnic group's conflict against the Myanmar government can be traced back to the Second World War. Back then, the Rohingya were among non-Buddhists who sided with the British who were retreating due to the advance of Buddhist-supported Japanese (Singh, 2014, as cited in Missbach & Stange, 2021, p.2). In 1942, Mazhar and Goraya's 2016 study (as cited in Tobing, 2018, p.159) stated that approximately 50.000 Muslims were subjected to genocide by the Buddhists. 20 years later, eradicating Rohingya Muslims' identity was among the goals of Burma's military ruler, Ne Win (Tobing, 2018, p.159). Added to that, the anti-Muslim violence as well as systemic violence against the Rohingya have taken place repeatedly in 1978, 1992, 2001, 2009, and 2012 (Zawacki, 2013, p.20).

The Rohingya have repeatedly tried to be expelled towards the Bangladesh border, where the group was not welcomed either, by the Myanmar government. In Myanmar, the Rohingya people are referred as illegal migrants from Bangladesh, a reason for such labeling is because approximately 500.000 Bengalis tried to take refuge in Burma due to the 1971 civil war in East Pakistan (Mazhar & Goraya, 2016, as cited in Tobing, 2018, p.159). Meanwhile, those who want to return from Bangladesh to Myanmar are rejected, especially due to the 1982 Citizenship Law, replacing the 1948 Union Citizenship Act, that do not recognize Rohingya as a part of Myanmar's ethnic minorities, hence making them formally stateless and disabling the Rohingya to travel within or outside the country (Nabilah, n.d., p.38; Cheesman, 2015, as cited in Missbach & Stange, 2021, p.2).

The systemic state-sanctioned persecution of this ethnic group, carried out in various forms ranging from the destruction of mosques to murder and rape, has intensified the formation of large-scale migration waves since 2007 (Nabilah, n.d., p.38; Omi, 2011; Zawacki, 2013). The 2016's military attack by the Aung San Suu Kyi-led Myanmar army against the Rakhine's Rohingya further escalated the number. According to Wade's study

in 2019 (as cited in Missbach & Stange, 2021, p.2), violent crackdowns that are conducted periodically by the army as well, complemented by the Buddhist extremist monks-led campaigns, have argued to strategically raise anti-Islamic sentiments within the Buddhist majority population in Rakhine, hence leading to waves of large-numbered forced displacements that were extremely severe in 2012, 2015, and 2017. A textbook example of ethnic cleansing, according to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR, 2017).

As the conditions of the refugee camps in Bangladesh were deemed to be of poor quality, thousands of Rohingya have decided to continue their journey by engaging in secondary migration to other Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia. The last-mentioned country was argued to be the Rohingya refugees' top priority, where the second-largest group of Rohingya refugees is located, due to the possibility of earning income despite being undocumented (Missbach & Stange, 2021, p.2). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), two main travel routes were used by the refugees, via the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea. Nevertheless, Asrobudi's 2017 study (as cited in Usman et al., 2023, p.120) found that traveling through Malacca Strait was chosen as a new route by the Rohingya refugees due to security reasons.

Research on Rohingya refugees, such as those that have been cited above, mostly focused on the historical aspect while a few of them covered the refugees' interaction with the local communities. This research tried to fill the academical gap by analyzing the contemporary rejections of some Acehnese locals against the newly arrived Rohingya refugees through the lens of autochthony. The concept of autochthony is more familiar to be used in Africa as well as some parts of Europe, therefore this research argues that it is such a novelty to apply this concept in the Indonesian context by answering the research question of "*How does autochthony apply in Acehnese's refusal to accept recently arrived Rohingya refugees?*"

METHOD AND THEORY

This research is qualitative research in which all the data utilized were found on various sources on the internet. Information from books, journals, as well as online newspapers was gathered to analyze the current Rohingya refugee issue in Aceh. Through an analytical desk study approach, this research theoretically analyzed the gathered data and information by connecting it to the concept of autochthony. The detailed explanations within this research would be closely linked and influenced by the data as well as the theoretical framework of autochthony.

The contemporary era is the "age of migration", where there are an extraordinary number of people who left their homes in search of a better future, be it as economic or even asylum-seekers migrants (Yuval-Davis, 2013, p.54). According to Yuval-Davis (2013, p.54), the growing number of local wars is mentioned as one of the factors that push people to move somewhere else.

Autochthony refers to "defensive identity communities", where people organized to build a shared identity due to being under various pressures due to globalization (Castelles, 1997, and Geschiere, 2009, as cited in Yuval-Davis, 2013, p.62). The concept is far beyond the boundaries of ethnicity, it is argued by Geschiere in 2009 (as cited in Yuval-Davis, 2013, p.63) to be more about how the "us" was here before the "them" arrived. Therefore, autochthony sounds more feasible to be constantly redefined by the in-group as time goes by, regulating who belongs to the "autochthone" group and who does not. In addition to that, autochthony is arguably dynamic, to the exte89nt that it allows continuous changes and redefinitions, hence "can have great mobilizing power in extremely different contexts" (Ceuppens & Geschiere, 2005, p.387). Such changes and redefinitions also apply to the out-group. Ceuppens and Geschiere (2005, p.397) found that autochthonic discourse both in Europe and Africa can easily switch from one "Other" to another, with the Muslims often considered as the ones that belong to the group in the European context.

In a practical matter, autochthonic politics is not only celebrating "the conviviality of difference", yet also carrying the claim of being "autochthone", the ones who really belong to the "soil" where the people stand now and are not tolerating the "others" (Yuval-Davis, 2013, p.62). Through this perspective, the "them" or the outgroup is perceived as threatening the locals, while the threats themselves vary depending on the combination of cultural, political, economic, or even genetic aspects (Yuval-Davis, 2013, p.62). Therefore, the relationship between the in-group, in this case are the locals or the "autochthone", against the outgroup is constructed into a "zero-sum" game (Yuval-Davis, 2013, p.63).

This research takes that autochthony is related to racism, to the extent that the latter is interwoven with ideas and feelings of autochthony, yet quite different with the 'traditional'-type of racism. Autochthony focuses more on the "them" cultures, religions, and traditions that are deemed threatening since those things could "contaminate" the in-group cultural essence (Yuval-Davis, 2013, p.63). Furthermore, Yuval-Davis (2013, p.63) also regarded autochthony as a form of temporal-territorial racialization as well as exclusion and inferiorization due to the recent arrival of specific individuals and groups in specific locations. Hence, the (1) protection of ancestral heritage as well as (2) fear of being contaminated by foreign influences are argued to be the key points that always appear in the concept's discourse (Yuval-Davis, 2013, p.64).

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

There are several main reasons why the Acehnese welcomed the Rohingya refugees as they arrived on beaches across the region. First, the existence of customary laws within the Acehnese community. Customary law is a law that is practiced within a community independently and requires no written legal aspect as that of regular law (Rahman et al., 2022, p.3). In addition to that, customary law is significantly relatable to the locals to the extent that they are understood and implemented by the locals voluntarily (Rahman et al., 2022, p.3). As the law focuses on a community level, customary law "is structured and

built on agreed values and norms that are believed by the indigenous community" (Rahman et al., 2022, p.6). Such a law is utilized by the community as a strategy to adapt to the environment so that the community can survive and live their lives properly (Rahman et al., 2022, p.6).

The Islamic teachings-based Peumulia Jamee is argued to be one of the factors that led to the Acehnese's openness towards the Rohingya refugees as basically the culture requires the Acehnese to honor every guest who comes (Listiarani, 2021, p.28). Meanwhile, there is also a customary law of the sea called hukum adat laot, which has been passed throughout generations, agreed under the customary leader called "Panglima Laot" that binds fishermen to help anyone at sea, no matter the background. According to Sulaiman's study in 2010 (as cited by Rahayu, 2023), this customary law aims to keep Aceh's marine life in line and organized. Added to that, there are also customary sanctions for those who do not obey this customary law (BBC, 2023). Nevertheless, Panglima Laot Aceh, Miftah Tjut Adek, stated that the case of Rohingya refugees is not under the 'jurisdiction' of the hukum adat laot to receive them (BBC, 2023). The law emphasizes more accidents and disasters at sea; hence the responsibility is transferred to the governments the moment the Rohingya refugees set foot on the land (BBC, 2023).

Second, Aceh is the only region in Indonesia where the Sharia law is applied, hence also the special status privilege granted to them. The region's dominant Muslim population, around 98%, is another factor that is argued to be among the major underlying reasons on why the refugees were welcomed with open arms (Listiarani, 2021, pp.27-28). To emphasize this point, the religion of Islam is argued by Listiarani (2021, p.27) to be one of the determinants for Indonesia, a country in which Muslims are the majority, to welcome the Rohingya refugees. Furthermore, Listiarani (2021, p.27) linked the prevalent involvement of various Islamic organizations, such as Dompet Dhuafa and Aksi Cepat Tanggap, as an example of the high level of solidarity between Indonesia and the Rohingya refugees due to the similar identity between the two. Meanwhile, a study done by Usman et al., (2023, p.119) argued that the similarity of religion, and face, between the Acehnese and Rohingya has contributed to the successful adaptation of the refugees.

Lastly, the Acehnese also understood the struggle that the Rohingya are facing now as the former has experienced two major tragedies that took place not far ago (Rahayu, 2023, pp.10-11). The Acehnese have also lived a bitter life in conflict situations, specifically during the Free Aceh Movement-led rebellion that stretched from 1976 to 2005. The rebellion also pushed many Acehnese to seek refuge in neighboring Malaysia as well as Australia (Listiarani, 2021, p.28). As the Acehnese knew exactly how severe the impact of such conflict would affect the population, it pushed the communities to welcome the refugees from Rohingya (Rahayu, 2023).

The tsunami that devastated Aceh is also argued to be another factor that construct the positive response of Acehnese towards the Rohingya refugees (Listiarani, 2021, p.28; Rahayu, 2023). To emphasize this point, the Acehnese grew into a community with a great value of sympathy as they still have a strong memory of the tsunami-caused sufferings as

well as the international aid given to them back then (Listiarani, 2021, p.28; Rahayu, 2023).

This research tried to understand the refusal of the refugees and link it with the concept of autochthony, specifically the two key points of autochthony discourse according to Yuval-Davis' 2013 study. Refusals from the locals are reported on almost in every news channel, either big or small in size, as well as all platforms of social media. The refusal shown by the locals towards the idea of accepting Rohingya refugees is a shocking phenomenon since the Acehnese's response towards the refugees has always been positive.

Protection of Ancestral Heritage

For the first key point, this research found that there are two major arguments that are used by the local communities as the basis to refuse the arrival of Rohingya refugees: (1) central-regional governments conflict in terms of budget allocation and prioritization of issues as well as (2) the Rohingya's contrasting attitudes and cultures. Furthermore, both of these arguments can be linked to this research argument. It can be linked to one of the two key points that always appear in autochthony discourse according to Yuval-Davis' study; the protection of ancestral heritage.

The first argument that is echoed by those who refuse to accept the Rohingya refugees is related to the governance sector, specifically the disparity between central and local governments. Panglima Laot Aceh Miftach Tjut Adek stated that the Rohingya refugees' issue is left to the local community without any assistance from the central government (Arief, 2023). The nonexistence of shelters was also mentioned as one of the reasons why the Acehnese in Bireuen refused to accept the refugees (Detik, 2023; Detik, 2023). A youth group named Mahasiswa Pemuda Peduli Aceh (MPPA) even asked the Aceh Government to prioritize internal problems as there are still a lot of local citizens who need government assistance, especially after the recent floods, instead of allocating the budget to taking care of the Rohingya refugees who are deemed by the students as keep on coming and causing troubles in the area (Rachmawati, 2023). In fact, the group also asked for the local government to expel the Rohingya refugees (Rachmawati, 2023). On 27 December 2023, another student group stormed a temporary shelter, a building basement, for Rohingya refugees and forced into trucks to be moved to another location in Banda Aceh (Al Jazeera, 2023; UNHCR, 2023). Al Jazeera (2023) reports that the students felt that the Rohingya were feeding over the region's deemed already scarce resources. This research argues that this struggle for budget allocation and prioritization can be linked to Ceuppens and Geschiere's (2005, p.387) argument on autochthony as "a struggle over excluding others from access to new avenues to riches and power." Interestingly, Aceh is among the very few regions in Indonesia that are granted special status. This special status entitles the region to have a special autonomy budget that is intended to enhance public welfare through infrastructure development, poverty reduction, economic empowerment, and improvements in education, healthcare, social welfare, and cultural distinctness (Suharno, 2021, p.283).

From this argument, the local communities can be seen feeling entitled to the property (the land) which then leads to notions that their interests should be protected from the refugees. Again, this is quite related to Ceuppens and Geschiere's (2005, p.386) idea that the autochthony discourse involves the emphasizing of the first-comers' right to special protection against the later immigrants. In addition to that, the refugees seem not to be cared about, in line with Martinovic and Verkuyten's (2013, pp.637-638) argument that autochthony-based claims can also be used as the basis to exclude immigrants or out-groups, as means of the local community to protect Aceh from the refugees. This situation can also be related with van Klinken's (2007, p.135) take on communal violence in Central Kalimantan that there is always a possibility for ethnic chauvinism could be "invoked at any moment, because it works." In this case, the in-group might not actually exert violence towards the out-group because the latter is threatening, yet merely to show that the former is the one who 'owns' the 'land'.

Added to that, this research argues that this first argument of the Acehnese to refuse to accept Rohingya refugees is quite similar to how autochthony discourse is run in the European context. Both cases focus more on utilizing autochthony as an effort to preserve the benefits from the state only for those individuals who deserve them, those who are considered to really belong in the area. Taking an example from the Vlaams Blok's case, Ceuppens and Geschiere (2005, p.398) argues that the party has developed a 'siege mentality' as they believed that both their wealth and cultural heritage are in jeopardy due to perceived threats from "foreigners". The case mentioned in the previous sentence is relatable to the current issue in Aceh, as the 'foreigners', the Rohingya refugees are also deemed threatening the status quo of benefits or budget allocation from the government. The narrative that the Rohingya refugees are coming to Aceh on purpose, instead of being stranded, to reap the benefits from the Indonesian government would only worsen such perceived threats. However, this research thinks that the Rohingya refugees are still victims and, hence eligible to receive assistance, even if proven to be connected to human smuggling.

Second, one of the major reasons for the Acehnese to refuse to accept the Rohingya refugees is the out-group's negative attitude and behavior. Such a condition was also mentioned in Usman et al.'s study (2023, p.116) that the Rohingya refugees' attitudes and behavior are deemed as contrasting against the local community's customs. To emphasize this point, this research found that the refugees are often considered, by the locals who reject them, to be ungrateful to the local communities, rude, having a disorganized nature, and stubborn.

Usman's (2023, pp.115-116) study supported this claim as the writer also mentioned that the refugees are difficult to regulate and control to the extent that they showed rude attitudes towards the officers as well as ran away by breaking the shelters' fences. As for the recent cases, Detik (2023) reported that 23 refugees ran away from the temporary shelter in Lhokseumawe on 7 December 2023, while there were also some failed attempts. Such instances where the refugees ran away, along with them 'resisting' against the local tradition and being ungrateful, are considered "very different from the attitude of the Acehnese people or of Indonesians in general." (Usman et al., 2023, p.116)

There are also several mentions of the occurrence in which the Rohingya refugees throw away food and drink provided by the local residents (Detik, 2023). Incidents like this are felt to have hurt the hearts of local residents, because such a gesture that was intended to be based on humanity was not appreciated and escalated the locals' refusals to welcome instead.

The Rohingya refugees are also reportedly deemed to be 'abusive' in character. Acts of violence are inherent in disputes between husband and wife among the Rohingya refugees in Aceh, in which then the violent character is also emulated by the refugees' children due to it being normalized over such a long period of time (Rahman et al., 2022, p.7). This very behavior is also argued to be one of the roots of disputes between the refugees themselves as well as the Acehnese locals, as the latter perceive that the Rohingya refugees are rude, emotional, and are not in accordance with the Aceh customary law (Rahman et al., 2022, p.7).

This research argues that the factors mentioned earlier act as the basis for the Acehnese locals' arguments that Rohingya refugees have not been able to interact or have a good relationship with the community even though some have lived in the area for quite some time. This is quite contrasting with what Irwanysah & Al Asya'ari brought up in their study (2022, p.256) that the Rohingya refugees' length of period living in Indonesia is significantly influential to the success of cultural acculturation.

Fear of Being Contaminated by Foreign Influences

As for the second key point, this research considers the massive spread of hateful narratives and hoaxes on social media, ranging from news sources to various social media platforms such as X, as a form of the second key point in Yuval-Davis' concept of autochthony; the fear of being contaminated by foreign influences. These negative narratives, not all of which are based on real facts on the ground, are considered by this research to jeopardize the safety of Rohingya refugees. This research argues that these widespread narratives are either related to or can contribute to the growing of autochthonous politics in the area.

The negative narratives are considered by this research to revolve around the racialization of the Aceh region, emphasizing it to be under threat of the Rohingya refugees who are trying to reap benefits from it. To emphasize this point, this research links the current condition with Yuval-Davis' (2013, p.64) take on the concept of autochthony which he understands it as "a form of temporal-territorial racialization, of exclusion and inferiorization that are the outcome of the relative new presence of particular people and collectivities in particular places." Several online posts show videos of South Asian people and depicting it as how Aceh would look like in the future as a consequence of accepting Rohingya refugees, as well as hoaxes that claim that the refugees are asking for free housing and food while many locals are still starving and have to work hard to get it.

Although the anti-Rohingya refugees' cluster is actually smaller than the pro ones, the impact is very significant considering that these narratives are spread by anonymous

accounts that already have many followers (BBC, 2023). As a consequence, the UNHCR for Indonesia feels quite troubled by these narratives as they are trying to stabilize the situation in Aceh (BBC, 2023). The writer of this research personally confirms that the accounts spreading negative narratives related to the Rohingya refugees are often vague in nature and anonymous, yet they can generate noticeable responses be it from real accounts or bots. These narratives are argued by Ismail Fahmi (as cited in BBC, 2023) to be used then to ignite horizontal conflict between fellow Muslims.

This research also thinks that these narratives are still related to the Indonesian 2024 election, as it is also reported by BBC (2023) that they were politicized and used to attack one of the presidential candidates, Anies Baswedan, who said in a clipped video that he accepted Rohingya refugees in Indonesia. Hence, these accounts and bots who can frame the refugee issue in a way that resonates with the general public, are argued to be among the key mobilization actors in this case, despite probably indirectly. According to Snow, Benford, and their colleagues (as cited in van Klinken, 2007, p.69), these mobilization actors' role is to identify issues, suggest solutions, and rally support. Furthermore, the public is likely to resonate with this approach if it aligns with their core beliefs, in which then results in a feeling that the public can do something about the 'lack of justice' that is perceived as the root of the current issue (van Klinken, 2007, p.69) Securitization and politicization of refugee issues are not new in the world of politics, many politicians from various parts of the world have succeeded in gaining many votes by creating fear of and demonizing out-groups as a threat to local communities.

A few years ago, the spread of hoaxes and hate narratives like this also happened in Malaysia where Rohingya refugees were said to be trying to get citizen status in Malaysia. The spread of this narrative triggered a major hate campaign against Rohingya refugees (BBC, 2023). People who believe the negative narratives circulating without crosschecking first can generate more negative responses against the refugees, including violence in the forms of racist and ethnically discriminatory attacks. These attacks can occur physically or be done on the internet. Worse, the negative response may be justified as a response to the threat of foreign contamination and fueled racism as well as racial-motivated violence. In contemporary societies, racism is often associated with the presence of ethnic minorities who are deemed 'questioning', among other things, the nation-state's ideologies, ideas, identity, and culture (De Haas et al., 2019, p.79).

This research argues that these widespread of negative narratives and hoaxes against the Rohingya refugees are indeed a clear sign of autochthonous politics. The basis of this argument is that the negative narratives involve prejudices towards the out-group, the refugees, who are perceived as encroaching (Martinovic & Verkuyten, 2013, p.639). To emphasize this point, Martinovic and Verkuyten (2013, p.369) further explained the idea of out-group encroachment by combining the in-group's feeling of 'proprietary claims to areas of privilege' and their fear that the out-group is threatening the position and power of the majority.

According to Frazer and Hutchings (2019), an action is justified if its outcomes are good, hence even the violent ones might be justified if it acts as the means to bring good and eliminate evil. Furthermore, these violent actions, are often deemed necessary to be done in order to maintain the status quo, the current social structure, against those who

challenge it (Frazer & Hutchings, 2019). The danger is that these narratives might reinforce autochthonous politics with the issuance of new laws related to refugees, which may worsen the conditions experienced by refugees. As mentioned in Listiarani's study (2021, p.27), public opinion holds an important role in the formation of foreign policy in a country that adheres to a democratic system of government.

In terms of the recent arrivals, the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that Indonesia is not under any obligation to accommodate Rohingya refugees, or even any refugees at all. Not being a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention, the country does not have the obligation and capacity to accommodate, let alone provide a permanent solution for the refugees. In addition to that, all of Indonesia's policies related to the Rohingya refugees, including the provision of shelters, are said to be only for humanitarian reasons (Detik, 2023b). However, the argument that Indonesia did not ratify the 1951 Refugee Convention is considered an outdated argument. The main reason is because there is a Presidential Regulation (Perpres) No. 125 of 2016 concerning the handling of refugees from abroad, which prioritizes rescue. In this regulation, it clearly explains that refugees arriving from abroad must go through the "discovery, shelter, and security" stages and also arranges which institutions or bodies that will be in charge of the refugees as well as the locations of (temporary) shelters (BBC, 2023a). Yet, harsh measures in the form of pushbacks at sea and humanitarian abandonment took place on 29 December 2023 when the Indonesian Navy repelled a boat carrying Rohingya refugees as it neared the Aceh coast due to "resentment among some residents about a sudden increase in boat arrivals". This move may be taken to deter, exclude, and control through mental and physical exhaustion of individuals, hence preventing more from coming and encouraging them to leave sooner (Welander, 2021, p.29). All in all, the regulation is still deemed not comprehensive enough as it does not regulate the authority of local governments regarding the use of budgets and the search for aid funds (BBC, 2023a), hence probably the narratives from the locals asking the funds to be allocated to domestic issues instead.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the shifting response of the Acehnese towards the newly arrived Rohingya refugees is connected to the concept of autochthony. Both key points of the concept's discourse; the protection of ancestral heritage and the fear of being contaminated by foreign influences, can be found in the recent gestures and acts of refusals by some Acehnese. The issue, or perhaps failure, of decentralization is considered by this research as one of the triggers in the implementation of autochthonous politics in the case of the recently-arrived Rohingya refugees in Aceh. Despite previously accepting the refugees due to the region's customary laws, Islamic identity, and shared struggle historically, some incidents from the past involving the refugees and the local community are used by the Acehnese to conclude that it seems that the Rohingya refugees have failed to successfully interact even though they have lived here for a long time. Emphasizing this, the refugees' attitude, and behavior -ungrateful to the locals, rude, disorganized nature, and stubbornness- are deemed to be in contrast to the local Acehnese community's customs, values, and identity. Through the lens of autochthony, this research concludes that the

locals' discontent towards those behaviors led to a feeling that the refugees are threatening the status quo, the social structure in the region.

This research also concludes that the presence of hoaxes and negative narratives exacerbates this problem, especially since the discourse of autochthony allows constant changes and redefinitions for both the in-group and out-group. It is not impossible that if autochthonous politics become more prevalent, more discrimination towards the Rohingya could take place. Furthermore, this research argues that such actions could be done both by the Acehnese citizens as well as the Indonesian government as a structural political body. However, this research realizes that the issue of massive rejection is still new, and the possibility of future developments is still quite large. Therefore, future research can explore more about this issue, especially regarding its relationship with the 2024's Indonesian Election.

As for the legal context, this research recommends that the Indonesian government should have a more comprehensive regulation in terms of refugee management, or probably by ratifying the Convention on Refugees of 1951, as (1) the Indonesian government is often deemed as having no responsibility on legal basis to take care of the refugees and (2) the Acehnese local community feel burdened by the issue as the central government is perceived as merely dumping the responsibility to the local governments. Internationally, it is crucial for Indonesia to step up especially since the archipelago state was re-elected as a member of the UN Human Rights Council with significant votes in October 2023.

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