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The Formation of the New Autonomous Region of Papua and Welfare Guarantees in the Decentralization Policy

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ABSTRACT

The instrument for regional structuring, particularly regional expansion leading to new autonomous regions, can be seen as a rational and logical implication of decentralization implementation. Decentralization, in turn, played a pivotal role in shaping the grand design of regional planning (Desertada) up until the imposition of a regional expansion moratorium in late 2009. This research employs a qualitative methodology, a case study approach, chosen due to its adaptability and effectiveness in addressing dynamic and unpredictable social contexts. The focal point of this study revolved around the narratives underlying the formation of new autonomous regions (DOB) in Papua, particularly emphasizing the discourse on welfare. The government has actively promoted narratives of welfare motives and national strategic interests. Despite the expansion of the Papua region and the implementation of special autonomy, it is observed that these initiatives have not significantly contributed to development. Notably, the expansion process in Papua, marred by alleged procedural and material deficiencies, took place without indigenous Papuans' meaningful participation and consultation.

A. INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to develop and analyze the existing regional expansion in Papua as a setting for decentralization arrangements. Regional expansion as part of the regional structuring instrument is closely related to the welfare orientation of the region concerned. Since its inception in 1999, the decentralization policy has ushered in significant transformations in governance dynamics between national and sub-national authorities (Raza et al., 2018). This policy also confirms the national government's pursuit of a well-structured political framework governing the relationship between national and sub-national entities through decentralization mechanisms (Setiawan & Widiana, 2022). The decentralization

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policy empowers sub-national regions, providing them with opportunities to harness their inherent potential while addressing regional challenges (Ramda, 2022). However, failing to capitalize on the opportunities presented by decentralization can lead to various distortions in its implementation, accompanied by new issues and conflicts (Fiorillo et al., 2021; Pratama, 2015).

The regulation governing regional planning serves as a foundational reference for all regional governments, under the purview of the central government, to support the welfare of its people, one of which involves territorial expansion (Aziz & Eng, 2019). Notably, asymmetric decentralization persists in specific regions, including D.I.Yogyakarta, DKI Jakarta, Aceh, Papua, and West Papua (Soantahon, 2022; Diniyanto & Muhtada, 2022). Interestingly, in Papua, asymmetric decentralization, translated into special autonomy, is seen as a means to mitigate secessionist sentiments (Rubiwati, 2018). Therefore, the presence of these new autonomous regions reflects the ongoing commitment to decentralization with a focus on community welfare (Setiawan, 2022b).

The birth of various policies regarding regional expansion, culminating in the establishment of new autonomous regions, represents a logical and coherent outcome of decentralization. Records indicate that in the first decade after 1999, 205 New Autonomous Regions (DOB) were created, covering seven provinces, 398 regencies, and 98 cities, excluding the six administrative cities in DKI Jakarta. Even in the simulation carried out by the Ministry of Home Affairs of Indonesia in structuring relations between the central and the regions, it was projected that there would ideally be at least 44 provinces and 545 regencies/cities in 2025 (Duri & Rahmah, 2020).

The role of decentralization led to the grand design of regional planning (Desertada) before implementing a moratorium on regional expansion at the end of 2009. However, it ushered in a transformative approach to decentralization, aiming to redefine autonomy beyond merely creating new regions but emphasizing the role of autonomy as a tool for regional development and organization (Rohmadin, 2017). Therefore, the primary objective of this regional planning is to create opportunities for each autonomous region, based on the unique socio-political context, to encourage accelerated and sustainable prosperity within its territory (Darmawan, 2022).

The role of regional structuring as part of decentralization arrangements, which has led to the creation of new autonomous regions, continues to be implemented today. In 2022, the Legislative Body of the Indonesian House of Representatives, on April 6, 2022, approved the Draft Law (RUU) on the Provinces of Central Papua, South Papua, and Papua Mountains. This expansion automatically increased the number of provinces in Papua from initially only two to five. Interestingly, a policy paradox is created in the context of expanding the New Autonomous Region in Papua. On the one hand, this expansion can trigger a more accelerated welfare development in Papua. On the other hand, the expansion of the New Autonomous Region is feared to cause new problems and conflicts if not planned carefully. The question that then arises is how important regional development is for Papua.

Additionally, what about implementing special autonomy inherent in Papua so far? Has the welfare of Papua been established? (Setiawan, 2022a). This is the impact that asymmetrical decentralization should ideally end in people's interest (Ramda, 2022).

This question is crucial to study how the division of territory for Papua in the asymmetric decentralization trajectory leads to prosperity. It departs from previous studies in Papua, reporting that special autonomy arrangements have not been able to spur prosperity for Papua. This means that achieving welfare is not guaranteed, and it may indirectly lead to new issues and challenges. This situation must be taken seriously because, thus far, the creation of New Autonomous Regions has been regarded as the primary mechanism for regional governance, linking national and sub-national governments. This study used the Moisiu theory approach,

stating that decentralization is interpreted as a political, fiscal, and decision-making devolution process. Decisions of the central government affect local government, and the transfer of power to the local level can make this process challenging—decentralization of power challenges monopoly decisions made by the Central Government. Therefore, decentralization has implications for creating incentives to support local economic development and national stability, all while promoting citizen participation in decision-making regarding welfare strategies (Moisiu, 2014).

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research conducted by Sulistiowati on the four functions of local government, namely public service, policy making, conflict management, and community empowerment, was successfully carried out in the new autonomous region, comparing Pringsewu and Pesawaran districts. In this context, the relatively newly formed Pringsewu Regency tends to be able to carry out government functions (Sulistiowati, 2014). However, this success cannot be generalized as in Papua because each region has different economic, social, cultural, and political settings. Even though this arrangement is intended to catch up with economic backwardness and human resource gaps, the question remains: what about Papua today? (Hayati & Ifansyah, 2019).

Meanwhile, a different study was conducted by Setiawan investigating the implementation of two decades of special autonomy in Papua, where the division of the region had no significant welfare impact. The division of West Papua from its parent territory, namely Papua, has only led to new injustices (Setiawan, 2022a), as confirmed by data from the Central Statistics Agency in 2020 and 2021. Papua and West Papua are the two provinces with the highest percentage of poverty nationally. As the parent region, Papua remains the first national position, while West Papua, divided from Papua in 2003, occupies the second national position (BPS, 2021a). Therefore, given the various problems that are feared to arise due to regional expansion, which then presents the New Autonomous Region (DOB) in the context of Papua, it is crucial to ascertain how this arrangement ensures the creation of accelerated welfare for Papua.

This research employed the theoretical approach of the decentralization concept presented by Moisiu. There is a transfer of power to the local level, which makes this process challenging to implement. The power decentralization challenges the monopoly of decision-making by the Central Government. Therefore, this decentralization has implications for creating a stable foundation for local and national economic development while simultaneously fostering citizen participation in making strategic decisions about welfare (Moisiu, 2014). Given this context, the presence of these three new autonomous regions in Papua raises questions about whether they will have similar implications if implemented with the lessons learned from the 2003 expansion of West Papua. Based on the background provided, this research is intriguing in exploring the potential future of Papua if it is divided to become a new autonomous region.

C. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative method with a case study approach. The reason for choosing this method is because the qualitative method can explain the formation of the three New Autonomous Regions in Papua and whether these arrangements guarantee the creation of accelerated prosperity. The qualitative way is highly adaptable when dealing with volatile social conditions and realities. The case study approach was selected due to its capacity for in-depth analysis. In addition, researchers collected data through comprehensive literature reviews (Creswell, 2014). Researchers utilized a variety of reliable literary sources, such as mass media, online news, journals, books, and other relevant literature, including documents and official

institutional reports concerning the history and development of the New Autonomous Region.

Furthermore, this research analyzed the data using the concept presented by Miles and Huberman, involving three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion. In the reduction stage, the researchers sifted through and selected relevant information while excluding irrelevant data to narrow the dataset, focusing on critical issues addressed in a study. During the display stage, the researcher presented the data as tables and figures to bolster the research findings. After submitting all the data, the research problem, which serves as the focal point of the study, can be comprehensively understood, and conclusions can be drawn based on the research outcomes. Therefore, the decision should be structured and systematic, featuring extensive discussion. This process aligns with the definition of operational research (Creswell, 2014). In identifying problems, researchers pinpointed disparities between inputs and outputs resulting from implementing regional expansion in Papua. Therefore, this is the research problem raised.

Furthermore, the researchers explored relevant prior literature to assess the extent to which the research problem has been addressed and to identify novel aspects for investigation. Subsequently, the author formulated a research problem statement based on the initial field data. This study collected data through secondary sources, including literature reviews and observations, which served as the research database. Data analysis and interpretation were carried out to read the study results. Finally, the researchers reported the research results and addressed the problem formulation coherently and systematically.

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Mapping the New Autonomous Region that will become the New Province of Papua: Economic-Social Setting

The expansion of this region does not escape considerations of conflict, history, culture, border areas, the nation's capital, and economic development (Permatasari, 2014; Utama, 2019; Fujikawa, 2021). Following the establishment of the New Autonomous Region of Papua, as approved by the House of Representatives in April, the government has fundamentally focused on enhancing welfare in Papua. While the historical journey in Papua has witnessed fluctuations, these endeavours were undertaken to benefit Papua. For instance, the grant of special autonomy status to Papua was established under Law No. 21 of 2001 as the foundation for its implementation (Wasistiono & Sartika, 2022). However, it was subsequently refined by Law No. 2 of 2021. The process of perfecting it could not be separated from the upheaval of Papuans seeking separation from Indonesia, an issue that persists to this day (S & Saleh, 2017). This arrangement has successfully maintained Papua's inclusion within the country, but regrettably, it has not been accompanied by the expected improvements in welfare. Hence, the partial success of this arrangement does not guarantee overall prosperity in Papua.

Interestingly, in the context of expanding three new provinces in Papua: South Papua, Central Papua, and Central Highlands Papua, the issue of welfare remains the focus of this arrangement. The government and the legislature have consistently invoked the welfare narrative to justify their policies in Papua. This becomes evident when the division of these three new provinces raises pros and cons in the community. Supporters often justify it as a means to expedite welfare improvements, while opponents perceive conflicting interests and fear it will introduce new challenges in the expanded areas. For example, special autonomy in Papua, followed by special autonomy funds, has not effectively reduced economic inequality in Papua (Tamberan et al., 2020). This raises questions about the validity of the welfare narrative. Who will truly benefit from the division of this region into the New Autonomous Region? If the Papuan people are expected to prosper, which Papuan people? The welfare narrative has consistently been used as a weapon by the power to legitimize this arrangement.

However, the intended goal of significantly improving welfare in Papua has not been realized. Poverty data within the New Autonomous Region in Papua still indicate high poverty levels, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. The Poverty Level of the Three New Autonomous Regions in Papua 2021

South Papua (Province)		Central Papua (Province)		Papua Pegunungan Tengah (Province)	
Regency/Cities	Percent	Regency/Cities	Percent	Regency/Cities	Percent
Mappi	26.05 %	Intan Jaya	41.66%	Lanny Jaya	38.73%
Asmat	24.83%	Deiyai	40.59%	Yahukimo	37.64%
Boven Digoel	19.90%	Paniai	36.59%	Nduga	37.18%
Merauke	10.1%	Puncak	36.36%	Jayawijaya	37.76%
-	-	Dogiyai	28.81%	Mamberamo Tengah	36.76%
-	-	Mimika	14.17%	Puncak Jaya	36.00%
				Yalimo	33.25%
				Tolikara	32.60%
				Nabire	23.83%

Note: if poverty is above 30%, then 1 in 3 people live in poor conditions

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics Report (March), 2021

Table 1 represents the poverty rate in Papua per March 2021, especially in the New Autonomous Region, which will be split into new provinces. Remarkably, the data reveals an alarming prevalence of poverty, with poverty rates exceeding 30% and, in some areas, approaching 40%. Intan Jaya and Deiyai have recorded the highest poverty rates among these regions. Moreover, the New Autonomous Region, soon to be divided into new provinces in Papua, also grapples with the issue of high unemployment. This challenge is closely linked to the region's elevated poverty rates, as a high unemployment rate is invariably associated with increased poverty. Consequently, the correlation between poverty and unemployment remains an intertwined and inseparable issue. Based on data released by the Central Statistics Agency, the unemployment rate in the regions that will be divided into new provinces is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Open Unemployment in the to be Expanded by New Autonomous Region of Papua 2018-2020

South Papua Province			Central Papua Province			Provinsi Papua Pegunungan Tengah					
Regency/Cities	2018 (%)	2019 (%)	2020 (%)	Regency/Cities	2018 (%)	2019 (%)	2020 (%)	Regency/Cities	2018 (%)	2019 (%)	2020 (%)
Mappi	2.88	4.51	5.77	Intan Jaya	0.51	0.00	1.22	Lanny Jaya	0.69	0.12	0.90
Asmat	0.49	1.06	2.38	Deiyai	0.59	0.22	0.41	Yahukimo	0.86	2.01	3.88
Boven Digoel	3.49	3.08	8.09	Paniai	0.60	0.66	0.83	Nduga	0.59	1.03	0.93
Merauke	1.72	2.61	3.43	Puncak	0.90	0.00	0.56	Jayawijaya	0.65	2.39	2.51
				Dogiyai	1.26	0.11	0.21	Mamberamo Tengah	0.31	0.71	0.80
				Mimika	8.30	7.51	7.80	Puncak Jaya	0.91	1.78	1.50
								Yalimo	0.84	0.64	0.86
								Tolikara	0.17	1.30	1.07
								Nabire	7.22	6.31	6.65
The total includes districts/cities in Papua				2018		2019		2020			
				3.20		3.65		4.28			

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics Report 2018-2020

Table 2 shows the open unemployment in areas that will be expanded into new provinces based on the New Autonomous Regions agreed upon in the Legislative Body meeting a few months ago. If you look at the actual conditions, unemployment in the new provinces in the 2018-2020 period remains high, and some districts/cities experience an increasing trend every year, for example, the Mappi region reaching 5.77% in 2020. Not to mention that several other areas are also experiencing the same escalation. Even in Mimika, it reached 7.80% by 2020.

This situation undoubtedly warrants careful consideration and comprehensive mapping in the event of a division in Papua. Drawing insights from the historical experience of regional expansion through establishing the New Autonomous Region in Papua, particularly in the context of West Papua, offers invaluable lessons. The division of West Papua from Papua in 2003 exemplifies a new pattern of inequality. It underscores the importance of prioritizing the welfare of the people while adhering to the principles of prudence. Evaluating the prevailing conditions and assessing the human resources, infrastructure, and other pertinent aspects is imperative. Regional expansion should no longer solely focus on quantity; instead, it should embrace quality considerations and the extent of governance. Additionally, the possibility of amalgamation as a tool for regional arrangement should be contemplated, especially if it holds greater promise for advancing welfare than expansion.

Decentralization: Between Challenges and Opportunities

Decentralization is one of developing countries' most popular public sector reform strategies (Smoke, 2015). The decentralized system guarantees increased government accountability and efficiency by granting authority and strengthening local government capacity. The government can bring public services closer, provide a more expansive space for participation, and adapt development plans to the community's needs. By granting authority to a smaller level of government, the government will be more responsive in meeting public needs and improving welfare. Based on the literature review, decentralization can increase interest, but on the other hand, it can also cause development inequality (Canare, 2021a). Decentralization can improve welfare with certain conditions, namely good governance, accountability, and the quality of public institutions (Kim, 2018; Canare, 2021b). One of the logical consequences of the decentralized system is to create smaller, distributed government units to bring public services closer together through regional expansion. Indonesia's demographic conditions and the problem of affordability of government services are the main reasons for forming a new autonomous region (Cahyadi & Kurniawan, 2021). Indonesia also has islands with large forest areas but low population densities, such as the islands of Kalimantan and Papua. This condition has implications for the difficulty of the community in accessing government and public services. Therefore, forming a new autonomous region is believed to be a solution and positively impact development (Muksin et al., 2021).

One of the initiations of the New Autonomous Region is the province's expansion on the island of Papua. The House of Representatives plans to establish a new autonomous region based on Law Number 2 of 2021 concerning Special Autonomy for the Papua Province with three new provinces: Central Papua Province, South Papua, and Central Highlands Papua (Kementerian Dalam Negeri, 2022). One of the main narratives underlying the formation of new autonomous regions (DOB) in Papua is welfare. Welfare motives and discourses of national strategic interest are the narratives of the government. The outcomes of a government-conducted survey among Papuan residents indicate that the territorial expansion in Papua can create opportunities for indigenous Papuans to assume government roles and could lead to enhancements in the economy, educational standards, and healthcare services (BBC, 2021). In the context of welfare, expanding the Papua region and implementing special autonomy have not significantly contributed to development. According to the Human Development Index

released by the Central Statistics Agency for 2010-2021, the provinces of Papua and West Papua are consistently ranked the lowest nationally, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Human Development Index of Papua and West Papua 2010-2021

Province	Years																							
	2010		2011		2012		2013		2014		2015		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021	
	N	P	N	P	N	P	N	P	N	P	N	P	N	P	N	P	N	P	N	P	N	P	N	P
Papua Barat	59.60	33	59.60	33	60.30	33	60.91	33	61.28	33	61.73	33	62.21	33	62.99	33	63.74	33	64.70	33	65.09	33	65.26	33
Papua	54.45	34	54.45	34	55.55	34	56.25	34	56.75	34	57.25	34	58.05	34	59.09	34	60.06	34	60.84	34	60.44	34	60.62	34
Indonesia	66.53		66.53		67.70		68.31		68.90		69.55		70.18		70.81		71.39		71.92		71.94		72.29	

N: IPM Value; P: National Rank

Source: (BPS, 2022b)

Considering various macro welfare indicators such as the economy, education, and health services in the provinces of Papua and West Papua, it is evident that they still lag behind national standards. Consequently, the aspirations of enhancing welfare through decentralization efforts have fallen short of expectations (Latupeirissa et al., 2021). Regarding indicators, the Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP) of the Papua region is also the lowest in Indonesia, as illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4. Gross Regional Domestic Product (Billion Rupiah)

Regional	Years				
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Jawa	7.383.228	8.021.910	8.753.885	9.450.881	9.273.311
Sumatera	2.781.629	2.986.643	3.227.944	3.413.327	3.371.978
Kalimantan	994.344	131.246	1.225.486	1.291.411	1.253.209
Sulawesi	762.290	841.115	947.679	103.972	1.052.038
Bali and Nusa Tenggara	394.297	427.618	456.435	491.289	464.242
Maluku and Papua	306.045	332.878	369.761	359.701	370.901

Source: (BPS, 2021b).

The empirical data shows that development indicators in Papua remain the lowest in Indonesia. The results of a study comparing the welfare conditions of Papua before and after the division of the provinces of Papua and West Papua concluded that the division did not affect the growth of per-capita income. Generally, it could reduce poverty and inequality, but the living conditions of the people of Papua remain far behind (Latupeirissa et al., 2021; Nurmasari & Hafis, 2019). If viewed in more detail from the aspect of district-scale regional development, the new autonomous region to be formed is partly a poverty enclave with the lowest human development index in Papua. In addition, Table 5 shows that most districts designated as new provinces are underdeveloped.

Table 5. Human Development Index of Districts in Papua Province and the Status of Lagging Regions

New Autonomous Region	Regency	Years						Lagging Status
		2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	
Papua Selatan	Mappi	56.54	57.10	57.72	58.30	58.15	58.70	Lagging
	Asmat	47.31	48.49	49.37	50.37	50.55	51.29	Lagging
	Boven Digoel	59.35	60.14	60.83	61.51	61.53	61.62	Lagging
	Merauke	68.09	68.64	69.38	69.98	70.09	70.49	Unlagging
Papua Tengah	Intan Jaya	44.82	45.68	46.55	47.51	47.79	48.34	Lagging

	Deiyai	48.50	49.07	49.55	50.11	49.46	49.96	Lagging
	Paniai	54.34	54.91	55.83	56.58	56.31	56.70	Lagging
	Puncak	39.96	41.06	41.81	42.70	43.04	43.17	Lagging
	Dogiyai	53.32	54.04	54.44	55.41	54.84	55.00	Lagging
	Mimika	71.64	72.42	73.15	74.13	74.19	74.48	Unlagging
Papua Pegunungan Tengah	Lanny Jaya	45.16	46.49	47.34	48.00	47.86	48.68	Lagging
	Yahukimo	47.13	47.95	48.51	49.25	49.37	49.48	Lagging
	Nduga	26.56	27.87	29.42	30.75	31.55	32.84	Lagging
	Jayawijaya	54.96	55.99	56.82	57.79	58.03	58.67	Lagging
	Memberamo Tengah	44.15	45.50	46.41	47.23	47.57	48.32	Lagging
	Puncak Jaya	45.49	46.57	47.39	48.33	48.37	48.99	Lagging
	Yalimo	44.95	46.19	47.13	48.08	48.34	49.01	Lagging
	Tolikara	47.11	47.89	48.85	49.68	49.50	49.60	Lagging
	Nabire	66.64	67.11	67.70	68.53	68.83	69.15	Lagging
		Papua's Human Development Index Average	58.05	59.09	60.06	60.84	60.44	60.62

Lagging status based on Presidential Regulation No. 63 of 2020 concerning the Determination of Disadvantaged Regions for 2020-2024.

Source: (BPS, 2022a).

Of the target districts/cities targeted to be part of the new province, only four sections have a Human Development Index above the Papuan province average, especially Papua province, the province with the lowest HDI in Indonesia. Based on Presidential Regulation Number 63 of 2020 concerning the Determination of Underdeveloped Regions for 2020-2024, it is stated that the determination of disadvantaged regions is the result of calculating a composite index based on the criteria of the community's economy, human resources, facilities and infrastructure, regional financial capacity, accessibility, and regional characteristics. Based on the data concerning the positions and levels of underdevelopment, it is apparent that only the Merauke and Mimika districts are not underdeveloped. Consequently, it can be deduced that nearly 90% of the sections within the new autonomous regions are classified as underdeveloped areas, lacking sufficient development capacity, governance, and resources typical of new autonomous regions.

Regional Expansion and Papua Welfare Guarantee

In the context of regional expansion, welfare guarantees are too early to be presented as a basis for public policy. If the main objective of regional development is a service approach and welfare improvement, the calculation of economic potential and governance capacity needs to be the primary consideration (Cahyadi & Kurniawan, 2021). If you study the results of the expansion of Papua, which has lasted for several decades, macro indicators show development stagnation with an insignificant increase in progress. Therefore, it is natural for the expansion initiative to be seen as a political rather than a development strategy (Muksin et al., 2021). Welfare projections through regional expansion may occur under certain conditions, considering the potential of Papua's abundant natural resources. However, on the contrary, decentralization can also create opportunities for the emergence of local, political, and business elite groups that form power alliances, which can be counterproductive to the welfare objectives (Andrias, 2019).

The regional expansion policy is not the only welfare instrument that must be enforced. In many developing countries, the decentralized system triggers new political, fiscal, and administrative problems. The average implementation of decentralization is strongly influenced by institutional capacity; decentralization policies often experience problems and are counterproductive to welfare because the power and performance of the organization and institutional governance remain too weak. The design for regional expansion should not be carried out in a hurry or based solely on the juridical aspect (the mandate of the Papua Special Autonomy Law) alone. There are many factors in designing expansion to achieve prosperity. Expansion is not the best way, but it is part of a strategy to increase the capability and effectiveness of state administration. Suppose the welfare narrative is the main focus in expanding the Papua region. In that case, several considerations must be taken into account,

including the capacity and capability of the local government to implement good governance, potential regional income, and the ability of the region to finance its government (Canare, 2021b). Moreover, the ability to manage potential in the area is crucial. Strengthening the system's capacity and financial management and distributing regional wealth for welfare are also essential aspects to consider (Prabowo et al., 2021).

Besides the welfare aspect, regional expansion has the potential to cause conflict. The development of the territory must have strong legitimacy from the community; the growth is a shared aspiration far from the interests of groups, tribes, and political elites. In the case of the expansion of the Papua, which was allegedly procedurally flawed and materially flawed, the plan for the development of the three provinces in Papua was discussed without participation and consultation with indigenous Papuans, at least the Papuan People's Assembly (MRP). In addition, Law No. 2 of 2021 concerning Special Autonomy for the Papua Province, the material of which is being examined by the Constitutional Court (CNN, 2022).

Is the Expansion of Territories the Amalgamation of Conflict?

Decentralization is one of the stabilization strategies. Studies showed that decentralization can prevent and reduce conflicts, especially those caused by ethnic problems (Edwards & Yilmaz, 2016). However, in the context of Papua, the decentralization implemented resulted in a different outcome because the decentralization failed to accommodate the interests of the Papuan people, both in terms of welfare and conflict resolution with separatist groups in Papua (Lele, 2021). Furthermore, the inequality of regional capacity after decentralization in Indonesia has increased the intensity of conflict, especially those motivated by social and economic discrimination (Azis & Pratama, 2020).

The negative impact of decentralization lies in its tendency to provoke regional and spatial conflicts. These conflicts arise from imbalances in capacity among the divided regions and the potential for power conflicts, mainly related to political motives and the control of resources by local elites within the new areas. Additionally, the expansion policy of the New Autonomous Region of Papua appears to be more politically motivated than serving as a development strategy (Muksin et al., 2021).

Potential conflicts that may arise during forming a new autonomous region in Papua include political conflicts at both central and local levels, historical separatist conflicts in the Papua Region, disputes related to resource management and wealth distribution, and conflicts arising from regional and governance disparities. Firstly, political disagreements have emerged in the division process, particularly concerning issues of participation. The lack of involvement of indigenous Papuans caused public distrust and led to various actions against the division of land (CNN, 2022). Muksin et al. (2021) argued that the division of Papua is fraught with the motive of the interests of the political elite to gain position and power, potentially creating conflicts of interest between these elites and the local communities. Such political strife will continue to develop along with changes in local and national political structure. Secondly, addressing separatist disputes has been one of the primary objectives of decentralization and implementing special autonomy in Papua, aiming to mitigate separatist tensions (Nurmasari & Hafis, 2019).

The expansion plan, particularly in the Central Highlands province of Papua, lies at the heart of the ongoing conflict in Papua. This prolonged conflict, which has yet to subside, can escalate further if the expansion proceeds without the involvement of separatist groups who control parts of central Papua. Thirdly, there are concerns about resource conflicts and the distribution of wealth. The expansion in Papua is expected to create local oligarchic alliances and the emergence of a new middle class (Suryawan, 2018). In this context, conflicts may arise over resource control and the involvement of external parties attempting to exploit Papua's

wealth through collaboration with local elites and oligarchs within the new autonomous region. Fourthly, conflicts stemming from regional disparities and financial governance issues are common in newly created areas following division. These new regions, lacking institutional governance capacity and revenue potential, often burden the higher-level government units and can become embroiled in protracted bureaucratic conflicts. Fiscal decentralization can also trigger conflicts, particularly regarding the allocation of funds and disputes related to regional revenue sources, including taxes and levies (Sugiyanto et al., 2018).

E. CONCLUSION

One of the fundamental substances of regional expansion is to enhance the community's welfare and ensure improvements in government services, both in quality and quantity, within the New Autonomous Region. This expansion lacks conflict-related considerations, historical and cultural factors, border regions, the nation's capital, and economic development. The decision to divide the New Autonomous Region of Papua, recently approved by the House of Representatives in April, fundamentally underscores the government's commitment to improving welfare in Papua. Although the journey in Papua has historically experienced a fluctuating course, these efforts have consistently been made with the well-being of Papua in mind. The provision of special autonomy status to Papua, initially established under the legal framework of Law Number 21 of 2001, served as the foundation for implementing special autonomy. However, this framework underwent further refinement with the enactment of Law Number 2 of 2021. On the contrary, those who opposed the division were concerned that it could introduce new challenges to the expanded region. For example, special autonomy in Papua, followed by special autonomy funds, has not reduced economic inequality.

The narrative of welfare has consistently been employed as a means for those in power to legitimize this arrangement. However, it becomes evident that the intended welfare enhancement in Papua has not materialized significantly. Poverty rates in the New Autonomous Region in Papua remain notably high. The data indicates that the poverty rate is alarmingly high, exceeding 30% in some areas, with certain regions reaching 40%. One of the initiations of the New Autonomous Region is the province's expansion on the island of Papua. The House of Representatives plans to establish a new autonomous region based on Law Number 2 of 2021 concerning Special Autonomy for the Papua Province with three new provinces: Central Papua Province, South Papua, and Central Highlands Papua. One of the main narratives underlying the formation of a new autonomous region in Papua is welfare. The results of a government-conducted survey with Papuans indicated that the division of territory in Papua would create opportunities for indigenous Papuans to assume government positions and potentially enhance the economy, the quality of education and health services. From the welfare perspective, expanding the Papua region and implementing special autonomy have not significantly contributed to development.

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All authors contributed substantially to the methods, ways, and intellectual content of the review and writing until the finalization of the article.

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