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Humanitarian Encounters in Post-Conflict Aceh, Indonesia

A dissertation presented

by

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to

The Department of Anthropology

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in the subject of

Social Anthropology

Harvard University  
Cambridge, Massachusetts

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Humanitarian Encounters in Post-Conflict Aceh, Indonesia**

In “Humanitarian Encounters in Post-Conflict Aceh, Indonesia,” I examine the humanitarian involvement in Aceh, Indonesia following two momentous events in Aceh’s history: the earthquake and tsunami on 26 December 2004 and the signing of the Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that brought a tentative, peaceful settlement to the Free Aceh Movement’s (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*, GAM) separatist insurgency against Indonesia on 15 August 2005. My research focuses on the international humanitarian engagement with Aceh’s peace process but frequently acknowledges the much larger and simultaneous tsunami recovery efforts along Aceh’s coasts that preceded and often overshadowed conflict recovery. Using ethnographic data based on five years working with four different international humanitarian organizations concerned with post-conflict recovery in Aceh, I address two main topics in my dissertation. The first is an insider’s perspective on the anthropology of humanitarianism. From one chapter to the next, I recreate and situate a particular humanitarian world’s relation to local structures of power and suffering that expands upon and complicates some of the prevailing debates in the anthropological literature on humanitarianism. From the unique vantage point within various humanitarian organizations, stories of Aceh’s post-conflict recovery filter through with selective and idiosyncratic ethnographic clarity. The accumulation of these stories reveals, by way of mosaic example, a logic of humanitarian intervention. The second topic I address in my dissertation is the story of Aceh’s peace process within the larger context of Indonesia’s post-New Order transition to democracy. I situate my data within a

rapidly growing literature of insightful histories and critiques of Aceh's conflict and subsequent transformations since the tsunami and the formal end of hostilities between GAM and Indonesian security forces. My focus on the ethnographic details in each chapter is set against some of the broadly taken-for-granted histories that have come to define Aceh's recent successes and failures in its transition to peace.

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## List of Acronyms

AMM	Aceh Monitoring Mission
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
BRA	<i>Badan Reintegrasi Aceh</i> (The Aceh Reintegration Agency)
BRR	<i>Badan Rehabilitasi &amp; Rekonstruksi Aceh-Nias</i> (The Aceh-Nias Reconstruction & Rehabilitation Agency)
CMI	Crisis Management Initiative, the Finland-based NGO that brokered the peace agreement between GAM and GoI.
CoHA	Cessation of Hostilities Agreement
CPCRS	Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution Studies, at Syiah Kuala University, just outside of Banda Aceh
DDR(R)	Disarmament, Demobilization, Reinsertion (and Reintegration)
DGO	Director General's Office (at IOM headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland)
DOM	<i>Daerah Operasi Militer</i> (Military Operations Zone)
EU	European Union
GAM	<i>Gerakan Aceh Merdeka</i> (Free Aceh Movement)
GoI	Government of Indonesia
GTZ	<i>Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit</i> (The German Agency for International Cooperation, Germany's international development agency)
HDC	Center for Humanitarian Dialogue
HMS	Harvard Medical School
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
ICRS	Information, Counseling, & Referral Services
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRCT	International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (international NGO based in Denmark)
IT	information technology
KPA	<i>Komite Peralihan Aceh</i> (Aceh Transitional Committee, GAM's civilian successor organization)
LNG	Liquefied Natural Gas
LOGA	Law on the Governance of Aceh
MDF	Multi-Donor Trust Fund for Aceh and Nias
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
PA	<i>Partai Aceh</i> (The Aceh Party, GAM/KPA's local political party)
PBI	Peace Brigades International
PCRPP	Post-Conflict Reintegration Program (at IOM in Aceh)
PNA	Psychosocial Needs Assessment
RATA	Rehabilitation Action for Torture Victims in Aceh (local NGO in Aceh, accredited member of IRCT)

<b>List of Acronyms (cont.)</b>	
SIRA	<i>Sentral Informasi Referendum Aceh</i> (Aceh Referendum Information Center, the largest student activist organization advocating for a referendum on Aceh's independence in the post-Suharto era) or <i>Partai Suara Independen Rakyat Aceh</i> (Independent Voice of the Acehese Party, a local political party in Aceh that contested the 2009 legislative elections)
TCC	The Carter Center
TNA	<i>Tentara Nasional Aceh</i> (Acehnese National Army)
TNI	<i>Tentara Nasional Indonesia</i> (Indonesian National Army)
ToR	Terms of Reference, a job description
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNDSS	United Nations Department of Safety and Security
UNHCR	United Nations Refugee Agency
UNV	United Nations Volunteers
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
UUPA	<i>Undang-undang Pemerintahan Aceh</i> (Law on the Governance of Aceh, LOGA)
YELPED	<i>Yayasan Ekosistem Leuser dan Pemberdayaan Ekonomi Daerah</i> , or the Leuser Ecosystem and Regional Economic Empowerment Foundation (a local NGO in Kutacane, Southeast Aceh)
WHO	World Health Organization

**Map 1: Indonesia**



**Map 2: Aceh, by Districts (*Kabupaten*) and Municipalities (*Kota*)**



**Municipalities include: Banda Aceh, Langsa, Lhokseumawe, Sabang, Subulussalam**

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My initiation into the humanitarian industry began at the International Organization for Migration (IOM). I credit Dr. Nenette Motus, Dr. Ed O'Rourke, and IOM Indonesia's Chief of Mission Steve Cook for facilitating IOM's collaboration with Harvard Medical School that first brought me to Aceh in June 2005. At my first post in Meulaboh, West Aceh, Dr. Athur Marsaulina proved an energetic and dedicated research assistant as she joined me daily at the tsunami IDP barracks. Kristin Parco administered all of IOM's Migration Health programs in Aceh and still managed to generously accommodate and protect Harvard's program and research interests. At IOM's Aceh Post-Conflict Reintegration Program, I am grateful for the camaraderie of my office mates in the "Head Shed," Aguswandi and Marianne Kearney, as well as to Saleh Amin, Bobby Anderson, Luc Chounet-Cambas, Dr. Teuku Arief Dian, Yoko Fujimura, Su Lin Lewis, Machfudzillah, Tya Maskun, Agus Muhaddar, Dr. Ibrahim Puteh, Teuku Isa Rahmadi, Irma Syafriani, and Monica Tanuhandaru. I would like to especially thank the program's first manager, Mark Knight, the anti-heroic figure of Chapter One, for supporting a robust research agenda on post-conflict recovery issues during his tenure. But above all others, my largest debt of gratitude at IOM belongs to my research assistant Hayatullah for helping plan and manage the psychosocial needs assessment in Aceh's post-conflict communities, the most difficult, exciting, and memorable field research I have ever conducted. Hayat's easy facility

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In this dissertation I situate all of these work experiences in Aceh within a lineage of anthropological scholarship and Indonesian studies. At UM I formalized my studies of Bahasa Indonesia under the instruction of Margaretha Sudarsih, in whose classroom I forged close and lasting friendships with her and fellow Indonesianists Ronit Ricci and Marina Welker. I also owe an enormous academic debt of gratitude to Professors Nancy Florida and Rudolf Mrázek, who taught me Indonesian literature and history with their own idiosyncratic passions. Rudolf's direct influence in this dissertation is self-evident in nearly every chapter, whereas Nancy's instinct for conducting close textual readings, tracing out the multivalent meanings of words and phrases, deeply and carefully informs my translations and interpretations.

A diverse group of classmates and professors at Harvard outside of my dissertation committee accompanied my initiation into anthropology and supported the development of my research interests with creativity, patience, and good humor. I reserve special thanks for Sharon Abramowitz and Adia Benton who taught me much from their prior studies of humanitarian intervention; for Professor Steve Caton whose instruction in linguistic anthropology saturates the entirety of Chapter One of this dissertation; and for Professor Karen Strassler who trusted me to teach the undergraduates in her anthropology of communication technologies course and thereby enabled my meditations on "remote fieldwork" in Chapter Two.



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for us during the itinerant years of my research and writing, but countless home-cooked meals and bottles of wine, with an abundance of cheer.

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# Introduction

## Chapter Outline:

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## 11 December 2006: Election Night in Aceh

On the evening of 11 December 2006, my housemate Hafid and I arrived at Banda Aceh's newly opened Swisbel Hotel to watch the provincial governor election returns come in from all across Aceh. Journalists, activists, intellectuals, and a wide range of campaign watchers, including political benefactors and intelligence agents, crowded the entire hotel lounge saturated with cigarette smoke and electric anticipation. In the adjacent conference rooms, "quick count" pollsters carefully collated their sample poll results and projected them onto movie screens. As the numbers settled within reasonable confidence intervals, a frenzy of journalists confirmed to their news bureaus by cellphone and text messages what the exit polls throughout the day had strongly suggested, that the former Free Aceh Movement (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*, GAM) propagandist and counter-intelligence leader, Irwandi Yusuf, won a decisive 38% plurality of votes with the runner-up, who also had ties to GAM though with an older faction, at a distant 16%.<sup>1</sup> The other five candidates backed by either the Indonesian military or national political parties all won less than eight percent of the vote confounding all conventional wisdom including expert political science analysis. The hotel turned into a red carpet of sorts, as the leading figures of the new Aceh—less than two years after the devastating Indian Ocean tsunami and just 16 months since GAM's peace agreement in Helsinki with the Indonesian government—arrived to celebrate their astonishing victory, each one surrounded by journalists to solicit their first thoughts on this historic moment.

I spent about two hours listening in on these interviews and other conversations, including a flood of text messages into *my* phone asking for the latest news, but no reaction stands out in my memory more than the usually reserved and quiet Hafid's. Over and over I

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<sup>1</sup> The election law stipulated that a runoff between the top two candidates would be held if none of the candidates earn at least 25% of the vote. Irwandi easily passed this threshold while none of the other candidates came close. If the GAM-backed candidates had not split into two factions, fielding only one candidate instead, they might easily



heard him say, with uncharacteristic enthusiasm, sometimes to himself, sometimes to me: “This is so exciting! ... I’ve never seen anything like this! ... I am so satisfied with this event. ... Who ever thought we would see this in Aceh?” Hafid comes from Bireuen, a heartland base of support for GAM during the conflict where the Indonesian military’s (TNI, *Tentara Nasional Indonesia*) counter-insurgency measures since 1989 perpetrated some of the worst human rights abuses, but he left his hometown years ago for the relative safety of Banda Aceh. He ran a small business and lived in a shop-house in the center of town near the great and historic Baiturrahman Mosque until the tsunami destroyed everything around it, and took away his wife and daughter. His son survived; Hafid sent him to study at a religious boarding school in East Java to escape the grievous trauma and ensuing humanitarian chaos in the weeks and months, then years, after the tsunami, leaving Hafid to grieve on his own. He took a job with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), where I was working from 2005 until mid-2007. In my search for affordable housing in Banda Aceh not subject to the extortionate rents the humanitarian economy inflicted upon expatriate aid workers and Indonesians alike, I ended up in a house with Hafid and several other friends from IOM. Outside the office, he spent his days hanging around our house, listening to sad love songs or talking quietly on his cellphone with a new romantic interest in Jakarta. He does not support GAM, he rarely speaks Acehnese (though it is his native language), and he did not vote in this election. Hafid was the last person I expected to take a proud interest in the election results that unfolded before us in the Swisbel lounge, and I read his reaction as a measure of the deep historic resonance of Irwandi’s momentous victory.

We ran into my friend Azwar Hasan who runs a local NGO called the Aceh Revival Forum (*Forum Bangun Aceh*). He was excited too, and came to the hotel as another curious

onlooker, but he is such an icon in the NGO world that a crowd of friends and journalists came up to solicit his opinion and collect some key quotes that he was prepared to share. Indeed he had some interesting observations, the main one being that in Indonesia's post-Suharto era of decentralization and democratization, the electorate tends to vote for the underdog and vote out the establishment. He cited President Megawati Sukarnoputri, the last and highest profile figure of political resistance during the last years of Suharto's 32 year-long dictatorship. Indonesians, Acehese included, he said, are full of sympathy (*kasihan*) for underdog candidates and vote them in to give them a chance.

I agreed with Azwar to an extent, but the Aceh case must also take account of several generations of grievance and resistance against the Indonesian military and political elite in Jakarta. Throughout the day, I heard many of the young Acehese adults that I worked with, many of whom did not vote either, say that, at last, this was the referendum that Aceh has been waiting for since the fall of Suharto. Many even said, in a manner slightly beyond joking, that Aceh was now independent. In fact, Irwandi's running mate, Mohammed Nazar, had been the leader of Aceh's student-led movement for a referendum, until he was arrested when martial law was declared in May 2003. With Nazar's base of support among young educated adults and Irwandi's base of support among the rank and file of GAM's former combatants and the rural communities that supported them during the conflict, it was easy to see in retrospect how they became an unstoppable force on the ballot. More than a statement of sympathy, this election was an outright rebuke and decisive verdict against the Indonesian government, including Aceh's establishment politicians. Our psychiatrist friend at IOM stated it correctly when he said that the election declared unambiguously that using police and military force upon ordinary civilians to

bend their will toward national rule by use of extortion, intimidation, torture, disappearance, and murder has been an extraordinary failure.

The unexpected surprise of Irwandi and Nazar's victory was nothing less than a final coming out party for GAM and their sometime allies in resistance among Aceh's civil society in this so-called post-conflict era. Since the tsunami, and even after the peace agreement eight months later that established GAM's right to contest local elections without the backing of national political parties, the arrival of once exiled and hidden GAM members assuming positions of leadership in the humanitarian recovery effort and on the campaign trail still triggered an uncertain sense of the uncanny (Good 2011). Until the election conventional political wisdom could not account for this new political force, which had been denied and repressed for so long. Even the widely respected public face of the International Crisis Group (ICG) in Indonesia, Sidney Jones, utterly failed to predict Irwandi's victory.<sup>2</sup> The excitement at the Swisbel Hotel signaled a decisive turning point in the ongoing transition to peace in Aceh. History records Irwandi's election as such—indeed I view the election as a productive starting point for this dissertation—but it is harder to recall the troubling uncertainty many of us felt as we imagined the future of GAM's definitive arrival on the political scene in Aceh.

Just beneath the evening's euphoria, loud chatter and speculation throughout the room added some tension to the excitement. Azwar received a text message on his phone from his friend in Jakarta, an intelligence agent in the military, announcing his arrival in Banda Aceh on the first flight from Jakarta the next morning. He sent a second message with a cryptic pun: "I arrive at 9AM, WIB..." WIB is usually the acronym for Aceh and Jakarta's timezone [*Waktu*

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<sup>2</sup> Compare the two ICG reports Jones wrote before and after the elections (International Crisis Group 2007; 2006). In the former, she predicts a win for the national parties, not least due to GAM's internal rift that resulted in two separate GAM-backed tickets. In the latter, Jones readily admits ICG's failure to correctly assess the electorate, offers a mea culpa, and then accounts for all the ground game dynamics in Aceh that ensured Irwandi-Nazar's victory.

*Indonesia Barat*, Western Indonesia Time], but the agent concluded his text message with an alternative spelling, “*Waktu Indonesia Bubar*” [the Time of Indonesia’s Disintegration], reflecting the TNI’s and other nationalists’ paranoid certainty that GAM’s ascendancy to political office will signal Aceh’s separation from Indonesia by other means. It made Azwar (and me) feel nervous, and he wondered aloud if TNI would orchestrate a total scorched earth meltdown in Aceh, just as they did after East Timor’s referendum for independence from Indonesia.

The governor-elect himself then showed up at the hotel and the press bolted outdoors to greet him. As we watched the crowd through the glass windows—Irwandi hidden from view by the crowd—Hafid observed that “there are a lot of *intel* [intelligence agents] in this room tonight,” and a few minutes later pointed out to me “that guy over there is from *Kopassus* [TNI’s elite special forces].” I overheard a little bit of a discussion by a group of middle aged men sitting in one of the corners of the lobby, discussing the increasing likelihood that “it will be easier now to break up Aceh into smaller provinces.” With Irwandi in office, Jakarta politicians will have an incentive to encourage a divide and conquer approach to Aceh, to encourage the central highlands and the southwest coast districts of Aceh to secede and form two separate provinces apart from the north and northeast coast districts, where the majority of Aceh’s population (and GAM’s traditional base of support) lives. Hafid also pointed out one of the senior GAM leaders from Sweden, where GAM maintained their government in exile during the conflict, one of the old guard GAM leaders who supported the runner-up candidate. He was answering journalist questions eloquently in English. Aguswandi, the former leader of one of Nazar’s friendly rival organizations during the student referendum movement, had returned from his exile in London a year earlier, and as a dedicated Irwandi campaign surrogate was at the

Swisbel too speaking with reporters. Even Sidney Jones was there speculating amiably upon her failure to predict the electoral outcome.

We grew tired and slightly anxious with all the mixed messages broadcast about the room, emphasizing for us that the sudden and unexpected “return of the repressed” into the political spotlight guaranteed an uncertain future for the next few years in Aceh. But more than anything else, it was Hafid’s reaction—his repeated declarations of satisfaction with the outcome, even during our ride home, and his excited full report from the Swisbel to our other housemates—that defined for me the exhilaration we all felt upon the conclusion of Aceh’s first democratic elections of the post-conflict era. When Jones wrote ICG’s *mea culpa* analysis of the elections a few months later, she concluded with the sentiment that summarized that fateful election night:

Finally there is the question of how GAM manages the issue of self-government. Its candidates clearly tapped into a sentiment of pride in being Acehnese and yearning to be free of Jakarta’s yoke. Irwandi and his colleagues on the one hand, and President Yudhoyono’s government on the other, need to show the Acehnese that self-government, post-Helsinki, is something manifestly different from pre-Helsinki special autonomy. If all this can be achieved, the peace agreement ending the conflict in Aceh could move from being a minor miracle to a major one (International Crisis Group 2007:12).

## **Humanitarian Encounters in Post-Conflict Aceh, Indonesia**

Nearly imperceptible that night inside the Swisbel Hotel was the ongoing presence in Aceh of the largest humanitarian intervention in modern history that began with the devastating earthquake and tsunami two years prior to the election. The humanitarian absence from the lounge (with the exception of a few off-duty curious onlookers such as Hafid, Azwar, and myself) may be a testament to the mission’s commitment to an appearance of political neutrality. And yet the humanitarian encounter framed the entire affair, starting with the Swisbel Hotel itself, the first of several four-star hotels that were quickly built in Banda Aceh after the tsunami

in order to accommodate the itinerant humanitarian donors, project officers, diplomats, government officials, and researchers who were all deeply engaged in Aceh's recovery effort, first from the tsunami and then from conflict after the Helsinki peace agreement. The peace process itself might not have lasted long enough to hold these elections without the dedicated mediation of Crisis Management Initiative (CMI, the Finland-based NGO that brokered the peace talks), and the European Union (EU) and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) who jointly built the Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM) to oversee the peace agreement's implementation in Aceh up until and shortly after Irwandi's victory.

A persistent question about Aceh's peace process that enabled GAM-backed candidates to contest the governor's election in the first place is the extent to which its success may be attributed to the tsunami and the subsequent arrival of thousands of humanitarians affiliated with hundreds of relief organizations from all over the world and from around Indonesia. A common phrase with religious connotations frequently accompanied discussions among Acehnese friends of mine about the new peace: *“ada hikmah di balik bencana,”* or “there is deep wisdom behind a catastrophe,” suggesting what most people agree upon, that at the very least the tsunami generated a powerful moral force to reach a negotiated settlement and finally relieve the people of Aceh from additional suffering.

Long term observers of Aceh's conflict, however, have rightfully argued that the success of the negotiations in Helsinki was based upon years of groundwork, that the lessons learned from prior failed negotiations, and the outline of a new settlement, were already broadly agreed upon before the tsunami. Anyone who thinks that a negotiated peace was a foregone conclusion after the tsunami, they argued, need only look across the Indian Ocean at the ongoing war in Sri Lanka that ultimately came to an end with a military solution. Others point out that in addition

to the moral impetus to conclude negotiations after the tsunami, humanitarian donors at elite levels were holding out the promise of increasing much needed reconstruction funds if both sides reached an agreement, arguing that humanitarians applied political pressure not just behind the scenes but as everyday witnesses on the ground. As one of my fellow research colleagues in Aceh has argued, “the tsunami and the conflict entered into a symbiotic relationship on 26 December 2004; the tsunami inspired peace and peace was favorable for tsunami reconstruction” (Zeccola 2011:308). The facts of Aceh’s peace process are inextricably intertwined with the tsunami that interrupted but then catalyzed it.

This dissertation examines the humanitarian involvement in Aceh, Indonesia following these two momentous events in Aceh’s history: the earthquake and tsunami on 26 December 2004 and the signing of the Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that brought a tentative, peaceful settlement to GAM’s separatist insurgency against Indonesia on 15 August 2005. My research focuses on the international humanitarian engagement with Aceh’s peace process but frequently acknowledges the much larger and simultaneous tsunami recovery efforts along Aceh’s coasts that preceded and often overshadowed conflict recovery, producing what some humanitarian observers have called an “equity divide” between tsunami and conflict victims, sometimes triggering new conflicts among beneficiary communities already burdened with a prior history of violence. I use ethnographic data based on five years working with four different international humanitarian organizations (broadly defined) concerned with post-conflict recovery in Aceh to address two main topics in my dissertation, each with a corresponding set of questions and target audiences.

The first is an engagement with the emerging literature on the anthropology of humanitarianism. After years of working in Aceh during which I frequently traded my

anthropologist's hat for a practitioner's, I try to bring an insider's perspective that will expand and complicate some of the prevailing anthropological debates about humanitarianism. From one chapter to the next, I recreate and situate a particular humanitarian world's relation to local structures of power and suffering that resists concepts in the humanitarian literature such as "mobile sovereignty" without fully dispensing with them either (Pandolfi 2008; 2003). From the unique vantage point within a humanitarian organization, stories of Aceh's post-conflict recovery filter through with selective and idiosyncratic ethnographic clarity. The accumulation of these stories reveals, by way of mosaic example, a logic of humanitarian intervention, what Byron Good has called a critical (but by no means privileged) site for anthropological inquiry (Good 2010).

The second set of questions I address in my dissertation will be of interest to scholars of Indonesia and sub-national conflict, particularly those with an interest in Aceh's peace process within the larger context of Indonesia's post-New Order transition to democracy. I situate my data within a rapidly growing literature of insightful histories and critiques of Aceh's conflict and subsequent transformations since the tsunami and the formal end of hostilities between GAM and Indonesian security forces. My focus on the ethnographic details in each chapter is set against some of the broadly taken-for-granted histories that have come to define Aceh's recent successes and failures in its transition to peace. In the five header sections that follow, I first describe how I arrived in Aceh and what I did there, and then I lay out the historical and theoretical orientations for the four defining terms of my dissertation's title in the following order: "Aceh, Indonesia" "Humanitarianism," "Post-Conflict," and "Encounter."



## **How I Arrived in Aceh and What I Did There**

My commitment to Indonesian Studies began with a formative year of high school student exchange in the central Javanese city of Yogyakarta in 1989, at the height of President Suharto's New Order regime. During my undergraduate years at Harvard College and immediately after graduation, I continued my involvement with Indonesia and Southeast Asia more broadly in at least three ways. For three consecutive summers from 1993-95, and again in 1998, I worked as a research-writer and editor for the *Let's Go* series of budget travel guides in Thailand, Malaysia, Brunei, Singapore, and Indonesia. In my classwork, I returned to Indonesian Studies at any opportunity to conduct independent research in diverse fields such as demography, public health, cultural studies, and anthropology; the most important of these was an anthropology course titled "Society and History in Island Southeast Asia" taught by Mary Steedly, who would encourage me to return to Harvard to pursue a PhD six years later. Shortly after I graduated from college, I spent another year in Indonesia in West Kalimantan as a field researcher for an experimental sustainable forestry project under the direction of biological anthropologist Mark Leighton, which offered a critical perspective on Java from the outer islands of the country at the twilight of the Suharto regime.

These collective travel and academic foundations in Indonesia convinced me to jointly pursue two master's degrees in Southeast Asian Studies (MA) and International Health Epidemiology (MPH) at the University of Michigan from 1998 until 2001. I formalized my fluency in Bahasa Indonesia, the national language, under the instruction of Margaretha Sudarsih, and studied the history and literature of Indonesia with professors Nancy Florida and Rudolf Mrázek, who unwittingly laid the foundations for my eventual return to Harvard to pursue a PhD in Social and Medical Anthropology at the end of 2002. With my background in

public health *and* Southeast Asian Studies, I worked closely with Professors Byron Good and Mary Steedly, who served as the co-chairs of my dissertation committee.

At the end of 2004 I had been preparing to write a dissertation prospectus about risk perception and stigma among vulnerable populations for HIV infection in East Java when the earthquake and tsunami in Aceh grabbed my attention. I considered visiting Aceh during the summer of 2005 to witness the massive changes wrought by the arrival of thousands of foreign and domestic humanitarian workers in a part of Indonesia that had been officially closed to foreigners and NGO activism since martial law was declared in May 2003, and extraordinarily difficult to visit or work there for more than a decade prior to that. I thought this would be a unique moment to do research not only on issues of humanitarian importance in a truly unprecedented natural disaster setting, but also to work in a place where very few scholars have worked in several decades.

These idle considerations suddenly turned into possibility when IOM signed an innovative, multi-year collaborative agreement with Harvard Medical School (HMS) to conduct research and advise on IOM project development for tsunami recovery programs in Aceh. Support for this agreement at IOM came primarily from the Chief of Mission in Indonesia, Steve Cook, while the primary collaborators from HMS were Professors Byron Good and Mary-Jo Good and a pediatrician named Dr. Ed O'Rourke. The HMS-IOM agreement ensured academic freedom for all Harvard researchers and supported educational opportunities for students interested in IOM's work in Aceh. These arrangements led me to apply for and accept a summer internship at IOM's field office in Meulaboh, West Aceh. While the Goods conducted a mental health needs assessment for tsunami survivors, and Dr. O'Rourke focused on health clinic construction and maternal and child health programs, my first project for IOM was a qualitative

study of the community health needs among tsunami survivors and the health personnel serving them in West Aceh. The experience proved so engrossing that I made the decision to start my fieldwork immediately and stay on with IOM as their Community Health Advisor in Meulaboh.

Our primary contacts at IOM were Dr. Nenette Motus, a doctor from the Philippines who ran IOM's migration health programs in Indonesia, and Steve Cook. Upon the signing of the Helsinki MoU in August 2005, they both informed the HMS team that there would be significant opportunities to expand IOM's migration health work into the post-conflict sector. By the end of 2005, Dr. Motus had secured a grant from the Canadian government for the Goods to lead a psychosocial needs assessment (PNA) in conflict-affected populations in Aceh.<sup>3</sup> As I describe below, the historical discourse on Aceh's conflict from both GAM and Indonesia's perspective has "culture effects" that define its object in particular ways, including territorially, which almost always defines "Aceh" with a provincial perspective. The international organizations with large project budgets, particularly in the post-conflict sector, adhere quite closely to this territorial definition and design their recovery programs accordingly, which in practical terms meant that I had to move from Meulaboh to Banda Aceh, the provincial capital, at the end of 2005 to join IOM's new Post-Conflict Reintegration Program, where I assumed a new title of Research Coordinator.

Despite my background in Indonesian studies and years of living and working there, I had never spent time in Aceh, never worked in settings of natural or man-made disaster, nor had I ever worked with a large international humanitarian organization, so in many ways this was classic, "imagine yourself suddenly set down surrounded by all your gear," first-time immersion anthropological fieldwork (Malinowski 1922:3). The difference, however, is that I was never

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<sup>3</sup> The background and main results of this project can be accessed from the following citations (Good, Good, Grayman and Lakoma 2007; 2007; Good, Good and Grayman 2010; Good, Good, Grayman and Lakoma 2006; Grayman, Good and Good 2009)

left alone to my own devices to figure out the tribe of “humanitarians” or the “Acehnese” with whom I worked. In particular my work at IOM through all of 2006 and most of 2007 featured an extraordinary amount of collaborative research with Byron and Mary-Jo Good, an experience that few graduate students are lucky enough to share with their advisors. While I was working at IOM full time on the PNA and other research projects, Byron and Mary-Jo would visit several times a year to conduct fieldwork, analyze results, write reports and project proposals, conduct trainings, and oversee IOM’s mental health intervention that eventually came out of our PNA research. The research findings and the historic peace process unfolding around us were thrilling, and every visit featured hours upon hours of discussion during long journeys by car, in hotel rooms and restaurants, at government and IOM offices throughout Aceh, and in interviews that we conducted with our international and national colleagues.

We struggled together with how to work for an organization like IOM and like any other participant-observation fieldwork, we learned on the job. With partial input from me, Mary-Jo and Byron wrote about the experience of working on the inside of a large humanitarian organization in a chapter titled “Complex Engagements: Responding to Violence in Postconflict Aceh” that we contributed to an edited volume by Didier Fassin and Mariella Pandolfi, whose work on humanitarian intervention I discuss in more detail below (Good, Good and Grayman 2010). There we describe our experiences as some of the first humanitarian researchers visiting conflict-affected communities in the remote interiors of North Aceh; the sensitive political negotiations surrounding IOM’s publication of our results; what it was like to present the results of our research in front of an audience of Indonesian police, an institution widely implicated in perpetrating the violence that our research documents; how our field research experiences led to the design of IOM’s intervention; and some preliminary thoughts on our collaboration with IOM,

reflections that I return to periodically throughout this dissertation. In short, although the PNA research does not have a starring role in this dissertation, this work stands as a reference point that has professionally, methodologically, and emotionally informed all my subsequent research projects with humanitarian organizations in Aceh. In many ways, this formative experience working on the PNA project with IOM was a radical initiation, or even a kind of interpellation, into a humanitarian subjectivity, which is an idea that I dance around with each of the following chapters and then approach a definition for in my Conclusion.

From mid-2007 through mid-2010, I pursued different projects in Aceh with other organizations, including the “Multi-Stakeholder Review of Post-Conflict Programming in Aceh,” a project led by the World Bank but implemented through a consortium of organizations, including my employer the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID). In 2009 I worked as a Long Term Election Observer for The Carter Center (TCC) during the campaign season leading up to 2009 legislative elections in Aceh and the recapitulation and dispute resolution phases afterward. For my last full time job in Aceh from mid-2009 through mid-2010 I worked at the World Bank’s Conflict and Development Program, for which I was seconded to a newly established think tank at Syiah Kuala University called the Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution Studies (CPCRS) where I helped organize and coordinate their program of research. At all the places I worked from 2005 through 2010, “the subject, method, and scope” of these humanitarian inquiries all come back to “Aceh,” and in the next section I try to unpack some of the reasons why.

## Aceh, Indonesia

In the final pages of his elegant 1969 ethnography about Aceh, *The Rope of God*, James T. Siegel leaves the reader with a stunning and dramatic final image:

Ibrahim, his knife raised, and Ismail, about to accept the blow that never falls—this is the final image. God’s mercy comes, but we see neither Ibrahim and Ismail reunited nor even Ibrahim’s arm relaxed. For the audience, the knife remains poised. Men, stripped of social distinctions, are united not because they have left the world but because they are aware of the tension between themselves and the world (Siegel 2000[1969]:274).

The audience is listening to a sermon delivered by Aceh’s most famous religious scholar and independence fighter of the 20th century, Daud Beureuèh, at a celebration of the yearly Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca. Beureuèh’s final image sets up not just the pending sacrifice of Ismail, but also implicitly includes “the pilgrims thinking of Ibrahim about to kill Ismail as well as the audience thinking of the pilgrims thinking of Ibrahim” (ibid.273). On Aceh’s most important holiday of the year, the Islamic world is united through its awareness (*akal*) of a suspended image of the ultimate destruction of worldly ties (*hawa nafsu*), a sacrificial slaughter of the son by the father. This is the stripping of social distinctions in service of God’s will, a representation of *akal*’s triumph over *hawa nafsu*, but “not directly translatable into life” because *hawa nafsu* is as much a part of man’s nature as *akal* (ibid.274). Acehnese men, Siegel concludes, are caught up in an unresolved tension—like Ibrahim’s poised knife that never falls—between the *akal* that rules their inner life through the proper application of prayer, and the *hawa nafsu* that governs their social relations.

That was in 1962, when Siegel conducted his field research. What distinguishes *The Rope of God* from other ethnographies of its time is its careful attention to historical change. For example, Siegel shows how in the 1930s the concept of *akal* was mobilized by religious scholars in Aceh not to strip the world of social relations in the interest of equality of man before God, but

as an opposite metaphor for an “age of awareness” and the dawn of a new society that emerges effortlessly when men correctly apply *akal* to their religious practice. Siegel did his original fieldwork in Aceh during a rare period of peace roughly mid-way through over one hundred years of war and violence in the region, shortly after the conclusion of the Darul Islam rebellion (led by Daud Beureuèh himself) and only a few years before the violence of 1965 against the Indonesian Communist Party, which ushered in Suharto’s New Order government in Jakarta. Almost 3,000 suspected communists in Aceh were slaughtered in 1965 and 1966 (1979:271). The rapacious and repressive policies of the Suharto regime inspired the *Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* (Free Aceh Movement, GAM) and a sporadic thirty year war against the Indonesian military and police forces resulting in the death of between 15,000 and 30,000 Acehnese civilians. The earthquake and tsunami disasters of 26 December 2004, killed at least 180,000 people in Aceh alone, bringing sudden and extraordinary changes to the social, political, economic, and geographic landscape, including the cautiously optimistic Helsinki peace agreement between GAM and Indonesia in August 2005. In the wake of protracted violence and unprecedented natural disaster, the people of Aceh now live with Islamic shariah law, officially inaugurated for the province in 2002, but never actually applied until July 2005. One can now witness in district mosques throughout Aceh the public spectacle of the whipping cane administered upon the likes of domino players who gamble for mere pennies on their bets. If we extend Beureuèh’s and Siegel’s metaphor of suspended but pending sacrifice into the early twenty-first century, the once-poised knife has decidedly come to blows—repeatedly, relentlessly, and incomprehensibly—with the people of Aceh since 1965. The interpretive framework of *akal* and *hawa nafsu* no longer seems to accommodate the state of social relations in Aceh, instead replaced by disparate religious and secular concepts such as *kiamat* (end of the world) and

*maksiat* (licentious sexual behavior); *konflik* (conflict) and *keamanan* (security); *rekonstruksi* (reconstruction) and *reintegrasi* (reintegration); *stres* (stress) and *trauma* (trauma).

### **On the Subject of “Aceh”**

Located at the northwest tip of Sumatra island, Aceh strategically faces the Indian Ocean along its west coast and the Straits of Malacca along its east. Prior to colonial penetration, Aceh’s capital at the top of the island, Kuta Radja (today’s Banda Aceh), was known as *Serambi Mekkah*, or “Mecca’s Veranda,” acknowledging Aceh’s orientation toward Islam but also the cosmopolitanism of the Acehnese sultanate whose wealth was primarily generated by engaging in and regulating overseas trade along such a strategic naval crossroads. Aceh’s sultans only had nominal control over the kingdom’s coastal vassal states ruled by regional aristocrats known as the *uleebalang*, and much less control over the vast mountainous interiors populated by highland ethnic minority groups such as the Gayo and Alas. The thirty year Dutch War destroyed the sultanate, and as the Dutch consolidated their authority across Aceh, they relied upon the regional *uleebalang* for administering the region through indirect rule. It was primarily the religious class of leaders, the *ulama*, who led rebellions against colonial rule during and after the Dutch War (Reid 1969). Upon the eve of Japanese occupation during World War II, and then again after the Japanese surrender, the *ulama* capitalized upon popular resentment of the *uleebalang*, and waged a violent social revolution that toppled the *uleebalang* aristocracy (Reid 1975; 1979). Despite a shared struggle for Indonesia’s independence after the Japanese defeat, Aceh’s new religious class of leaders frequently found themselves at odds with the more secular nationalists in Java, where there was no radical overthrow of the ruling elites (Anderson 1972). Despite its strategic location, during the colonial and postcolonial eras Aceh was relegated to the



status of a distant and isolated territory relative to the administrative and economic hub of the Dutch East Indies, and then Indonesia.

In nearly all his writing about Aceh, Siegel has recourse to and frequent dialog with the towering giant of Dutch colonial scholarship, Snouck Hurgronje. In 1893 Hurgronje published his encyclopedic two-volume ethnography of Aceh titled *De Atjèthers*, subsequently translated into English in 1906 as *The Acehnese* with new material on the progress of the Dutch War (Hurgronje 1906; 1906; 1893). Historian Rudolf Mrázek has jokingly referred to *The Acehnese* as a manual for Dutch soldiers on “how to sneak into Acehnese households” (class lecture, 2000). Siegel notes in the Preface to the new edition of *The Rope of God* that in the 1960s his original intention was to “show that Snouck was mistaken” (“In the era of decolonization, I was confident he had to be wrong”), but discovered to his dismay that “people who had political inclinations different from my own could be not only accurate in their facts but correct in their interpretation” (Siegel 2000[1969]:vii). The impressive qualities of Dutch scholarship on Aceh stem from its antagonism to the subject, denying Acehnese claims for themselves by establishing what is “really” the case (1979:14). The word *fanatik* entered the Indonesian language via Dutch, and it was first used to describe their assumptions about the restricted intellectual horizons of Muslims in the Indies, especially the Acehnese, who were said to be “closed in their thinking and enclosed in a world set apart” (2000[1999]:415).

Decades of war and antagonistic scholarship set in motion a discourse on Aceh that one could argue has produced a “culture effect” wherein “fanatic” and “stubborn” assume a customary reality for the majority of Indonesians, Acehnese included, when they write and talk

about “Aceh.”<sup>4</sup> I borrow the term “culture effect” from John Pemberton’s ethnography *On The Subject of “Java”* (Pemberton 1994). With careful historiographic and ethnographic detail, Pemberton reverses Clifford Geertz’s assumptions about the need for “cultural paradigms” to make sense of seemingly chaotic events in Indonesian history, such as the mismanaged “village election as a social document” that he writes about in *The Social History of an Indonesian Town* (Geertz 1965). Instead, Pemberton discerns a “culture effect” wrought by history upon the Javanese and Indonesia’s other ethnic groups that goes back to Dutch colonialism but remained a powerful tool for state rule into the postcolonial era. European concepts such as “ritual,” “culture,” and “tradition,” had a discursive effect that Javanese royals, New Order officials, and ordinary villagers internalize and reproduce eagerly to an extent that everyday practices assume a customary reality.

### **On the Subject of “Aceh, Indonesia”**

Since the subject of “Aceh” comes out of a national discourse with roots in the colonial encounter, this is also simultaneously an ethnography about “Indonesia.” Defining the separation between *adat* (custom) and Islam, and then privileging *adat* as a matter of colonial policy was Hurgronje’s enduring contribution in *The Achehnese*. Hurgronje’s conceptual apparatus is credited with helping the Dutch to finally “pacify” the Acehnese, and *adat* has ever since been a foundational legal framework for both colonial and post-colonial Indonesia until the present. Hurgronje’s enduring “Aceh,” the crucial role that Aceh plays in narratives of Indonesia’s independence struggle, and a postcolonial history of persistent Indonesian

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<sup>4</sup> In 2009, I wrote a blog post titled “Perceptions of Aceh in Yogyakarta” which remarks upon the striking durability of these discourses about Aceh that persist in Java, even in the rarified intellectual world of post-graduate studies at Yogyakarta’s elite Gadjah Mada University (Grayman 2009).

intervention in Aceh's affairs show us that Aceh and Indonesia are inseparable units of ethnographic analysis.

A recent ethnography that takes seriously the inseparability of Aceh and Indonesia is Elizabeth Drexler's appropriately titled *Aceh, Indonesia* (2008). Drexler deconstructs the genealogy of conflict in Aceh that Suharto's New Order government used to justify its interventions. Leveraging Hurgronje's characterization of the Acehnese as fanatic and rebellious, the New Order government told a story about Aceh's Darul Islam Rebellion in the 1950s, and then the first and second generations of GAM resistance as a linear history, one event leading to the next. The Indonesian military justifies its intervention against a purportedly resilient enemy, creating its object, "phantom separatists," products of the New Order's "threat perception system" that do the work of securing what Drexler argues was a fundamentally insecure state (ibid.90, 126). Her argument taps into a long tradition of scholarship on Suharto-era Indonesia that shows how the New Order routinely invented latent internal enemies to justify its strong-armed autocratic rule (Barker 1998; Kroeger 2003; Pemberton 1994; Siegel 1998). "What distinguishes the threats in Aceh," Drexler contends, "is that separatists did step up to claim the state's projected threat," and ultimately entered into a mutually beneficial (and mutually constitutive) discursive relationship with the Indonesian military, composing a bipolar portrayal of the violence in Aceh (Drexler 2008:115). Indonesian security forces defend the territorial integrity of the Indonesian state, and GAM claims sole representation of the Acehnese people, leaving no middle ground for non-violent alternatives from civil society.

Drexler examines the social life of the bipolar conflict narrative and critiques its widespread acceptance as self-evident fact because few observers took the time to closely examine the complex and contested conditions of GAM's actual emergence, much less GAM's

ideological promise of a return to Aceh's prosperous and just precolonial sultanate. She extends her critique to the international human rights investigators and peace negotiators who, in their failure to question the master narrative that sustained the conflict for so long in Aceh, only managed to perpetuate it further. When the human rights abuses perpetrated under the Suharto regime were exposed, even as part of the government's own investigation after the fall of the New Order, the failure to hold Indonesian military leaders accountable not only disproved assumptions that exposure of past violence promotes reconciliation in post-conflict settings, it also fed right into GAM's narrative that only Aceh's independence from Indonesia will free Aceh from its past and bring prosperity to its people (Drexler 2006).

Drexler's assertion that conventional histories of Aceh's conflict have contributed to its perpetuation led to an unconventional approach in writing *Aceh, Indonesia*. She asks, "How can history be written that cannot be turned into renewable ammunition in a perpetual self-renewing conflict" (2008:81)? In order to deny the fixed claims that GAM and TNI ordinarily feed to historians and political scientists, Drexler makes use of Michael Taussig's notion of "epistemic murk," a concept that other anthropologists of Indonesia have used effectively in their studies of violence (Spyer 2002; Stoler 1992). Although Taussig never defines it explicitly in his ethnography *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man*, the following passage captures the essence of epistemic murk and how it works to generate terror on the ground:

Meaning was elusive. Doubt played havoc with certainty. Perspectives were as varied as they were destructive of one another. The real was fiction and the fictional was real and the [glowing haziness of meaning] could be as powerful a force for terror as it could be for resistance. In such a world of control, clarity itself was deceptive, and attempts to explain the terror could barely be distinguished from the stories contained in those explanations – as if terror provided only inexplicable explanations of itself and thrived by so doing (Taussig 1991:127-8).

This theoretical tradition in anthropology, and in particular Drexler's use of "epistemic murk" in *Aceh, Indonesia* has been a useful rubric in my work to question the received wisdom on Aceh's conflict, and extend that critique into the post-conflict recovery period.

### **Conventional Histories of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM)**

More conventional histories of GAM's separatist rebellion and Indonesia's counter-insurgency operations explicitly recount what Drexler avoids (Reid 2006; Aspinall 2009; Davies 2006; Kell 1995; Miller 2009; Reid 2004; Robinson 1998). As this dissertation focuses on the humanitarian view during the recovery period that followed the Helsinki MoU, here I present a cursory summary of the generally agreed-upon facts of this history, while also accommodating elements that avoid feeding a strictly bipolar version of events. Whether in linear historical progression or in tenuously connected generational bursts of violence, the separatist movement that came to be known as GAM may be broadly divided into three phases, or generations. The first began with Hasan di Tiro's declaration of independence in 1976. Tiro came from a prominent family of religious leaders in Pidie district on the northeast coast of Aceh. His great-grandfather, Teungku Cik di Tiro, was a famous leader of Aceh's resistance against the Dutch, whose name now adorns street signs in cities all over Indonesia. Hasan Tiro spent most of his life abroad, starting with his post-graduate education at Columbia University. From New York, he raised funds for Daud Beureuëh's Darul Islam rebellion against Indonesia in the 1950s. When he returned to Aceh in 1974 and failed to win a contract to build one of the pipelines for Mobil's new natural gas extraction fields, he blamed Indonesia's central government in Jakarta, and began plotting Aceh's next rebellion. Tiro cultivated an ideological doctrine of Acehnese ethno-nationalism based upon a partisan and idiosyncratic version of Aceh's history, casting his

movement in secular terms that contrasted against earlier rebellions carried out in the name of Islam. Instead, Tiro argued that Aceh's primary grievance was against Indonesia, a thinly veiled Javanese neocolonial project. He cited Mobil's industrial collaboration with Pertamina, Indonesia's state owned oil and gas corporation, which provided few benefits to Aceh's people. Indonesia's transmigration program of Javanese settlers to Aceh also provided Tiro with evidence of Javanese colonialism. Consisting of less than one hundred members with few arms, little training, and virtually no grass roots support, by 1979 the Indonesian military effectively crushed Tiro's incipient movement. Tiro and the elite group of Acehnese intellectuals who survived the first wave of their rebellion moved their "government" into exile in Sweden.

The second phase of GAM's rebellion began after Tiro sent up to one thousand recruits to Libya in the mid-late 1980s, where Muammar al-Qaddafi provided sanctuary and facilities to liberation movements from around the world. From 1986 until 1989, GAM sent several waves of recruits to a camp outside of Tripoli where they received paramilitary training so that Tiro could launch a larger, more disciplined movement (Aspinall 2009:105-9). When they returned to Aceh in 1989, a number of Indonesian military soldiers defected and joined the movement, which brought additional arms and skills into GAM, and may account for their initial momentum, even though the movement still did not have grass roots support. Indonesia's counter-insurgency operations were swift and massive, beginning roughly in 1990, when the districts along Aceh's north and northeast coasts were declared a Military Operations Zone (*Daerah Operasi Militer*), lending this phase of the rebellion its commonly referenced name DOM. Several accounts note that under DOM, Indonesian security forces effectively crushed GAM a second time by 1991, but DOM remained in effect until Suharto resigned in 1998. During the DOM years Aceh's rural civilian populations endured systematic interrogation,

displacement, torture, conscription into village defense militias, sexual violence, disappearances, and extrajudicial executions.

Press freedoms and the rapid growth of civil society organizations were hallmark features of Indonesia's reform movement after the fall of the Suharto regime. In Aceh, journalists and NGO activists focused their attention on exposing the abuses that occurred under DOM, and Drexler argues that these efforts only propelled Aceh into its third and arguably most brutal phase of the conflict. The NGO community for its part championed a non-violent path to independence by means of a referendum, and many observers look back on the period from 1998 until 2003 as the Referendum Era. But despite the formal end of DOM, the violence still continued in Aceh's countryside and calls for a referendum brought emerging civil society activists to the attention of Indonesian intelligence agents and security forces as well.

The legacy of human rights abuses and the freedom to publicize it finally generated the grass roots support that GAM needed to recruit heavily and expand from its base in the northeast districts to all of Aceh. In particular, GAM took advantage of two internationally brokered cease-fire agreements—the Humanitarian Pause in 2000, and the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA) in early 2003—to rapidly expand its base of support and increase its ranks. Few of the new recruits outside of GAM's heartland identified closely with Tiro's founding ideology, nor did they share the historical experience of the abuses perpetrated under DOM. GAM on the ground in the 21<sup>st</sup> century bore little resemblance to its old guard of aging leaders in Sweden. Their motives and loyalties were subject to change, especially after Indonesian security forces recommitted to a comprehensive counter-insurgency effort when President Megawati reneged on CoHA and declared martial law (known by its Indonesian acronym DM, *Darurat*

*Militer*) in May 2003, which remained effective in practice, despite a downgrade to “civil emergency” six months later, until the tsunami.

The patterns of violence during martial law broadly followed GAM’s expansion across the province, with distinct regional dynamics depending on the composition and economic interests of security forces, the pro-Indonesia militias they supported, and decentralized GAM cells all across Aceh. Both sides engaged in forced population displacement from 1999 until 2004 at a level that far exceeded the displacements during DOM, with GAM emptying entire villages of Javanese transmigrants and TNI forcing remote rural populations to leave their villages to cut off GAM’s logistical support network (Aspinall 2008). In the central highland districts of Bener Meriah and Central Aceh, both GAM and the TNI exploited ethnic divisions to pit Javanese transmigrant communities and ethnic Acehnese communities against each other, leaving the predominant highland ethnic group, the Gayo, in a precarious position because their loyalties could never be assumed by either the Javanese or Acehnese communities. In more distant districts far down the southwest coast of the province, the uncertain loyalties of new GAM troops, some recruited under duress and others with merely criminal intentions, generated fear and suspicion of turncoat informants. Furthermore, we heard on multiple occasions in widely disparate locations in the region that Indonesian security forces sent a number of gang leaders on conditional release from prisons in the neighboring province of North Sumatra to commit monstrous and spectacular acts of public violence and humiliation (Good, Good, Grayman and Lakoma 2007). When journalists and other observers of the Aceh conflict tally up their estimates of civilian casualties during the most intensive years of conflict from 1989 until 2005, they typically cite around 15,000 deaths, but in 2006 the provincial government’s own Aceh Reintegration Agency documented more than 28,000 conflict-related deaths (Frödin 2006).



As with the first and second phases of GAM's insurgency, Indonesian security forces nearly decimated GAM's third generation of fighters by the time of the tsunami. But in a detailed analysis of Jakarta's changing policies toward Aceh over the course of the four presidential administrations that followed Suharto's New Order, Michelle Miller argues that Indonesia's military offensive was not what convinced GAM to accept the Helsinki peace agreement. After all, GAM never surrendered following their effective military defeats in 1979 and 1991. Miller goes one step further and points out that "throughout Aceh's contemporary conflict, military operations were consistently the primary cause of GAM's regeneration because of the atrocities committed by Indonesian security forces against the civilian population" (Miller 2009:202). Instead, Miller credits the groundwork laid by the failed peace talks in 2000 and 2003 (which in retrospect, she argues, perhaps ought not be remembered as "failed"), the political will to reach a settlement ushered in with the inauguration of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's (SBY) and Vice-President Jusuf Kalla's new administration in 2004, and the humanitarian pressure exerted at high levels and on the ground after the tsunami.

## **Humanitarianism**

Humanitarian agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have recently become important sites for ethnographic inquiry parallel to their increasing prominence in the management of world affairs (Redfield 2012; De Waal 1997; Escobar 1995; Fassin and Pandolfi 2010; Ferguson 1990; James 2010; Malkki 1996; Redfield 2005; Riles 2000). The ethos that undergirds what Thomas Weiss calls the "classicist" model of humanitarianism—an intervention that stays neutral in local conflicts, distributes aid impartially and only with consent of local authorities, and absolutely avoids confrontation—is what most certainly kept humanitarian

representatives away from the Swisbel Hotel on the night Irwandi won his election. In this model, humanitarian action is “warranted as long as it is charitable and self-contained, defined only by the needs of victims and divorced from political objectives and conditionalities” (Weiss 1999:4). But over the past several decades the classicist model has given way to a wider spectrum of intervention models that have grown increasingly political. Political humanitarianism “refers to conscious decisions to employ humanitarian action as an integral part of an international public policy to mitigate life-threatening suffering and protect fundamental human rights in active wars,” even if it means prioritizing some victims over others, partisan allocation of aid, policy advocacy that challenges local authorities, or even overriding national sovereignty (ibid.4). In his book *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis*, David Rieff documents the consequences of this transformation in four chronological case studies—Bosnia, Rwanda, Kosovo, and Afghanistan—each one more partisan in its objectives than its predecessor (Rieff 2003). In each case, as humanitarian organizations give up their neutrality, they also trade in their autonomy for state co-optation of their missions, working hand in hand with military interventions.

In broad strokes Didier Fassin has called the increasingly values-driven model of humanitarianism “a third pillar of the prevailing governmentality norms in the world today,” the other two being neoliberalism and security (Fassin 2012). While the neoliberal and security state paradigms have come under enormous critique in the social sciences, humanitarianism escapes critical analysis because the politics of solidarity it summons for disaster victims is taken for granted (2012). Saving lives and the alleviation of suffering has become institutionalized and politicized. Humanitarianism has become a routine and often cynical justification for war, rallying a nation’s support through the manipulation of compassion. A whole apparatus of

international agencies and state ministries are devoted to humanitarianism, which Fassin calls the “deployment of moral sentiment” (2012). For the purposes of this dissertation, I use this inclusive definition of humanitarianism as the broadly defined object of study, in which local and international NGOs, bilateral and multilateral donor agencies and inter-governmental organizations (IGOs), Indonesian and foreign government agencies including their militaries, and also academic institutions and their armies of researchers, may all be said to be involved in Aceh’s humanitarian encounter. Out of so many engaged actors, my analysis privileges the role of international agencies in Aceh because that is where I worked over the course of five years, with four different organizations: the aforementioned International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), The Carter Center, and the World Bank.

The irony of a concept such as “humanitarian war,” the intermingling of biopolitics (humanitarians heal) and necropolitics (militaries kill), disturbs adherents of the classicist model of humanitarianism, but Fassin shows that the impulse to keep one politics dichotomous from the other does not hold either. Many people discerned an alliance (that technically did not exist) when the international NGO *Medicins Sans Frontieres* (MSF) in Kosovo published a report about acts of violence perpetrated by Serbians against Kosovars, that was then used by military forces as a justification for humanitarian war. Both military and humanitarian interventions operate with a similar temporality, often coming and going at the same time. Military and humanitarian organizations share similar technologies of management (the use of camps or makeshift barracks) and habitus (they both maintain distinctions from local populations).

The intermingling of the politics of life and death was especially acute and relevant in Aceh, where hundreds of international and local relief organizations, including foreign military

forces, arrived en masse to Indonesia's most sensitive and secretive security zone that was still effectively under martial law. The very first international assistance to reach some parts of Aceh's isolated coasts came from the USS Abraham Lincoln, an imposing United States Navy aircraft supercarrier that remained anchored off shore for several weeks while soldiers came by hovercraft daily to survey the damage, deliver supplies, and support the arriving civilian humanitarian groups. NGOs had access to the USS Abraham's facilities to perform emergency surgeries and other medical humanitarian services.

The question of shelter for tsunami survivors during the emergency phase produced friction between the United Nations, the Indonesian military, and survivor communities, when the military rushed to build "barracks" to house the hundreds of thousands of displaced tsunami survivors, claiming "it relates to the dignity of Indonesia." Indonesian Army Chief Major-General Bambang Darmono was quoted at the time saying that the barracks would not only make it easier to deliver aid to survivors while they waited for reconstruction to proceed, it would also be "very easy to secure them from the GAM side" (Hedman 2008:249, 260). The military-style barracks facilities, officially named Temporary Living Centers but almost always spoken of as *barak*, were already a familiar structure on the Aceh landscape, as earlier versions had already been built for Aceh's forcibly displaced populations during martial law.

### Images 0.1, 0.2, & 0.3: Humanitarian and Military Technologies of Management



The UN Basecamp (left) in Meulaboh, West Aceh in 2005 was built and managed by a Swedish NGO and available to all itinerant humanitarian workers (not just with the UN) who needed a place to stay. A tsunami survivor “barracks” (middle) just outside of Meulaboh was built by the Indonesian military (“to secure them from the GAM side”) but serviced by humanitarian agencies. A conflict era barracks (right) in Nagan Raya district (southbound from West Aceh) for forcibly displaced populations during the martial law period was also used for tsunami survivors, but one of the first to be abandoned as survivors returned to home communities. All are built as “camps” and set apart from local surrounding communities.

The international humanitarian industry’s long term involvement in Aceh’s recovery efforts, first from the tsunami and later from conflict, makes Aceh an ideal and unique setting, where humanist and militaristic approaches to recovery have intermingled, to address some of the prevailing debates in the anthropology of humanitarianism. Drawing upon the work of Arjun Appadurai and Giorgio Agamben, Mariella Pandolfi has described the humanitarian industry as “migrant sovereignties” with “an immensely powerful biopolitical force, effectively having power of life and death over millions the world over” (Agamben 2005; Pandolfi 2008; Agamben 1998; Appadurai 1996; Pandolfi 2003). Based on her fieldwork among humanitarian elites working in Albania and Kosovo, Pandolfi argues that international humanitarian organizations are driven from one place to the next by a “planetary logic” of crisis and exception that legitimizes “supracolonial” intervention with little or no regard for the political, institutional, and social actors in any one location (Pandolfi 2003:370). Indeed, the veteran expatriate staff I met working on tsunami relief during IOM’s first year of recovery efforts in Aceh would frequently recount their banal experiences in Kabul, Dili, and Baghdad with thinly described generalizations

and stereotyped comparisons, supporting Pandolfi's contention that many (though certainly not all) of these actors operate in a realm isolated from local context.

Didier Fassin and Paula Vasquez offer a contrasting take on the forms of exceptionalism that characterize humanitarian interventions in their analysis of the 1999 *Tragedia* landslide disaster in Venezuela (Fassin and Vasquez 2005). Far from deploying a planetary logic that supersedes local sovereignties, the humanitarian response in Venezuela was nothing short of a defining national event led chiefly by the Venezuelan military under direct supervision of President Chávez. Despite draconian measures, the effort—steeped in nationalist and religious sentiment—enjoyed broad support from the local population. International assistance was graciously accepted, but at an arm's length as mere “gestures of friendship” (ibid.397). Fassin and Vasquez conclude that anthropology's critique of humanitarianism must make both historic and ethnographic sense of singular situations that acknowledge global forces such as the mobile elites described by Pandolfi but also identify local forms of organization and sentiment that sidestep totalizing discourses of exception.

International humanitarian organizations, whether NGOs or UN agencies, are accustomed to working in settings of failed states where they implement new forms of governance that may disrupt local norms (Hancock 1992; Holzgrefe and Keohane 2003; Maren 1997; Rieff 2003). The number of international organizations that were granted access to work in Aceh immediately after a natural disaster of unprecedented proportions would have exceeded any government's attempts to efficiently manage the effort, which leaves room for Pandolfi's planetary logics of crisis and intervention to touch ground in Aceh.<sup>5</sup> But like Fassin and Vasquez found in Venezuela, by the time Byron, Mary-Jo, and I arrived in Aceh to work with IOM in June 2005,

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<sup>5</sup> By the end of February 2005, just two months after the tsunami, the UN's Humanitarian Information Center in Banda Aceh listed 320 organizations working in Aceh (Hedman 2008:257).

we found humanitarians working in a setting where the state actively oversaw and coordinated much of the tsunami relief efforts (Good, Good and Grayman 2010:262). The United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) coordinated closely with the Indonesian military to establish nightly curfews for the humanitarian community as well as demarcate the conflict area “black zones” where NGOs were forbidden to travel or provide assistance. In addition to donor restrictions on how NGOs could disburse their aid to only tsunami survivors, this early collaboration between humanitarian agencies and Indonesian security forces established the baseline structural conditions that resulted in what some organizations critiqued as an “equity divide” in the availability of aid between tsunami and conflict affected populations in Aceh (Waizenegger and Hyndman 2010; Zeccola 2011).

By mid-April 2005, President Yudhoyono established a temporary ministerial-level agency based in Banda Aceh that exclusively coordinated and channeled all aid for post-tsunami rehabilitation and reconstruction (known by its Indonesian acronym BRR, *Badan Rehabilitasi dan Rekonstruksi*), headed by his close confidante Kuntoro Mangkusubroto who reported directly to him. The establishment of BRR was preceded by an astonishing outpouring of emotion throughout Indonesia that, following Fassin’s definition of humanitarianism as the deployment of moral sentiment, certainly justified BRR’s existence. Mary-Jo and Byron Good recall the pervasive Indonesian mass media during their visit to Java and Bali in January 2005, immediately after the tsunami:

Indonesia’s Metro TV featured round-the-clock coverage of an endless loop of video taken by a wedding videographer as he struggled to escape the rising water twisting houses, vehicles and people into its blackness; videos and photos sent by private citizens and string reporters conveyed early forays into this devastated land while a newly composed song, “*Indonesia menangis*,” “Indonesia cries (or grieves)” became the disaster’s theme (Good, Good and Grayman 2010:243-44).

It was precisely this “outpouring of Indonesian sentiments following the tsunami” Mary-Jo and Byron Good argue, that first “allowed for a significant change in center-periphery relations” (Good and Good 2013:207). From East Java in January 2005, Siegel reports:

One could not avoid people, most of them young, from various organizations, collecting for relief. They held out containers in which to put one’s contributions. Often enough, pasted onto these containers was a handwritten sign, “*Peduli Aceh*,” “Pay Attention to Aceh.” As though in acknowledgment that Aceh had received little attention previously (Siegel 2005:166).

Dozens of Indonesian NGOs, mostly from Java, opened branch offices in Aceh after the tsunami. These efforts—the pronounced outpouring of emotion, the acknowledgement of Aceh through acts of humanitarian charity, the deployment of Indonesian NGOs and other civil society organizations to Aceh, and the establishment of BRR—highlight the ways in which the natural disaster in Aceh was a humanitarian event of enormous *national* significance. They all follow a gradient of long-established political and economic center-periphery relations in Indonesia that initially led to Aceh’s regional rebellion, but these efforts after the tsunami served to assert a more humane claim for Indonesia’s national and territorial integrity. The humanitarian emergency brought Aceh back to Indonesia for Indonesians, but the question of whether the humanitarian encounter brought Indonesia back to the Acehnese deserves further exploration. These intimately linked local and national dynamics further illustrate my contention above that Aceh and Indonesia are inseparable units of ethnographic analysis; they do not negate but certainly delimit and complicate the impact of Pandolfi’s planetary logics of humanitarianism.



**Images 0.4 & 0.5: Humanitarianism and the Appeal to Moral Sentiment**



**Left: Street art in Meulaboh, West Aceh in 2005 makes an appeal to humanitarian sentiment**

**Right: Humanitarian sentiment brought Aceh back to Indonesia for Indonesians. This image, titled “Indonesia Menangis” (Indonesia Cries, or Grieves), featuring the white text “They are also a part of us” superimposed upon the green geographic outline of Aceh province on a red background, was posted to an online forum by a graphic artist based in Jakarta just four days after the tsunami.<sup>6</sup> White and red are the colors of the Indonesian national flag, while green is a color typically associated with Islam.**

State supervision and intervention in the international humanitarian efforts in Aceh are just one of several resistances that complicate the mobile sovereignty concept, and this dissertation focuses closely upon those resistances on the ground. Chapter One in particular reveals how—through a close look at the use of email—a large international organization such as IOM betrays a tendency toward an aloof sovereignty from local settings, but faces resistance and friction from staff, beneficiaries of humanitarian aid, and local government hosts. The chapters that follow draw out these interactions and their implications further, through fieldwork and

<sup>6</sup> <http://megaloman2002.deviantart.com/art/indonesia-menangis-13621954>  
Accessed on 5 November 2012.

personal relationships, and show that despite an instinctive impulse toward flight from the local, the humanitarian apparatus has investments and commitments that keep it connected to Aceh, even after they have physically left for the next crisis event somewhere else. Implicit here is Anna Tsing's use of the friction metaphor to attend ethnographically to global interconnections: "A wheel turns because of its encounter with the surface of the road; spinning in the air it goes nowhere" (Tsing 2005:5). The untethered mobile sovereign agents of humanitarianism that Pandolfi writes about stop at the level of theoretical construct. Once the mobile sovereign engages on local ground, theory becomes practically effective through friction, but that very engagement turns it into something else, especially in settings with pre-existing and strongly contested sovereignties, which leads us directly to a discussion of the post-conflict situation in Aceh. "Our analyses," as the Goods and I wrote in the "Complex Emergencies" chapter,

should not take at face value the immodest claims to sovereignty of many humanitarian actors. Aceh experienced an intense struggle for sovereignty between the central government and GAM... and today, largely as a result of the tsunami and the influx of external actors, Aceh is a laboratory for working out new forms of governance, particularly in relations between the Indonesian center and provincial authorities, political parties, and civil society. *Humanitarian organizations have extraordinarily limited sovereignty in this setting. They often appear profoundly powerless and largely irrelevant to the dynamics of local struggles, unable to effect the forms of governance to which they are committed.* We should take care analytically to avoid elevating their status to that to which they aspire (Good, Good and Grayman 2010:266, emphasis added).

## **Post-Conflict**

### **The Helsinki MoU Marks the Beginning of Aceh's Post-Conflict Era**

Humanitarian and security-sector organizations use the term "post-conflict" to designate the period of time after a war when former combatants transition to civilian life and conflict-affected populations recover their health, livelihoods, assets, and infrastructure. As noted above, significant progress toward a peace agreement had already been made prior to the tsunami, but it

was the cautiously optimistic signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in Helsinki on 15 August 2005 that has become the historic reference point that begins Aceh's post-conflict era. CMI, the Finland-based NGO headed by the former president of Finland, Martti Ahtisaari, facilitated the peace talks between GAM and the Government of Indonesia (GoI) in Helsinki with a different approach than was used by the Swiss-based NGO, the Center for Humanitarian Dialogue (HDC), which facilitated the Humanitarian Pause and the CoHA before the tsunami (Aspinall 2005).<sup>7</sup> Whereas prior efforts under HDC arranged for ceasefires on the ground in Aceh before open-ended negotiations even began, Ahtisaari reversed the formula, famously stating that "nothing is agreed until everything is agreed," requiring both sides to agree to the broad outlines of the MoU before a ceasefire could be put into effect. Both sides eventually made major concessions. While a few key representatives from Aceh's civil society participated in the Helsinki negotiations, it must be emphasized that the two signatories of the MoU were GoI and GAM. Some of the key provisions that were agreed to in the MoU include the following:

- GAM relinquished their independence demands in exchange for self-government within the framework of the unitary state of the Republic of Indonesia.
- GoI would allow the formation of local political parties to contest provincial, district (*kabupaten*), and municipal elections in Aceh.
- The people of Aceh have the right to nominate independent candidates to run for office without the backing of established political parties.
- The EU together with ASEAN will form a neutral third party group, the Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM) that monitors the implementation of the MoU until the governor's election.
- GoI will remove all of their so-called inorganic forces (security forces imported to Aceh from other parts of Indonesia during the martial law period) before the end of 2005.
- GAM will handover 840 functional weapons to AMM monitors who will publicly destroy them.
- GoI will provide assistance for the reinsertion and reintegration of 3,000 GAM ex-combatants and 2,000 amnestied prisoners.

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<sup>7</sup> The following summary of the Helsinki MoU is drawn from (Aspinall 2005).

- Transitional justice mechanisms that address past human rights violations will be implemented, in particular a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and reparations for conflict victims.
- GAM will nominate representatives to participate fully at all levels in the commission established to conduct the post-tsunami reconstruction (BRR).
- A vast increase in revenues from natural resource extraction industries in Aceh will redound back to Aceh's provincial and district governments.
- General provisions in the MoU would be clarified and ratified by the Indonesian parliament in a Law on the Governance of Aceh (LOGA).

### **Aceh as Laboratory for New Modes of Governance**

If the international and national humanitarian response to the tsunami brought significant changes to Aceh's relationship to Jakarta, then the MoU (and subsequent LOGA) delivered changes that went far beyond the realm of temporary (albeit powerful) institutions such as BRR and the fast-paced and affect-laden humanitarian imperative. Surveying the pioneering innovations in the relationship between Aceh and Jakarta brought about by the tsunami and peace process, Mary-Jo and Byron Good suggest that "Aceh has emerged as a kind of laboratory for new forms of governance, undertaken in the context of a broader process of decentralization launched during the presidency of B.J. Habibie" (Good and Good 2013:206). The two most groundbreaking innovations were the electoral provisions that allow for both independent candidates and local political parties, the first of their kind for Indonesia. The MoU and LOGA provision for allowing independent candidates served as a precedent that was taken up by Indonesia's Constitutional Court, which then amended the 2004 national law on regional elections to allow for independent candidates nationwide (ibid.206; Miller 2009:168).

Although it precedes the MoU by a few years, Aceh has also been a pioneer in the implementation of Islamic law, and several articles in the MoU and LOGA reaffirm Aceh's special autonomy on matters of religious law at the provincial level. As the Goods note, the implementation of shariah law was "undertaken for complex political reasons in the midst of the

conflict, against the wishes of many, perhaps a majority of Acehnese,” but nevertheless has provided a model that has been closely watched throughout Indonesia (Good and Good 2013:206). Following Aceh, dozens of district and municipal governments have passed their own *peraturan daerah* (*perda*, regional regulations) grounded in principles of Islamic law.

The MoU also led to the establishment of institutions that formally brought international, national, and provincial groups to the table to monitor the ongoing implementation of the peace process. The EU and ASEAN establishment of AMM, which allowed international observers to oversee the first year and a half of the peace process, would have been unthinkable before the tsunami. For their part, the Indonesian military established the Forum for Communication and Coordination (FKK), “which provided a formal central government and military representation in the peace negotiations” (ibid.205). In our (myself and the Goods) experience working at IOM, and then again when I was working for The Carter Center, we found FKK to be far more intimately involved in and responsive to the day-to-day aspects of the peace process than the local military command. FKK and AMM collaborated closely with the provincial government’s own representative institution for managing the peace process, the *Badan Reintegrasi Aceh* (BRA, The Aceh Reintegration Agency) that reported directly to the governor, modeled loosely on the national level BRR that reported directly to the president. Though not always working comprehensively, harmoniously, or with consistent vision, these institutions mapped out and brought together an elite group of former adversaries, donors, humanitarians, and local civil society activists that provided a framework to implement the MoU and ensure its success (Barron and Burke 2008). The Goods suggest, in conclusion, that the Acehnese “are participating in a precarious but exciting experiment as they redefine their political subjectivity, from having been

activists, combatants, or exiles during the conflict to becoming active participants in new forms of governing Aceh” (Good and Good 2013:206).

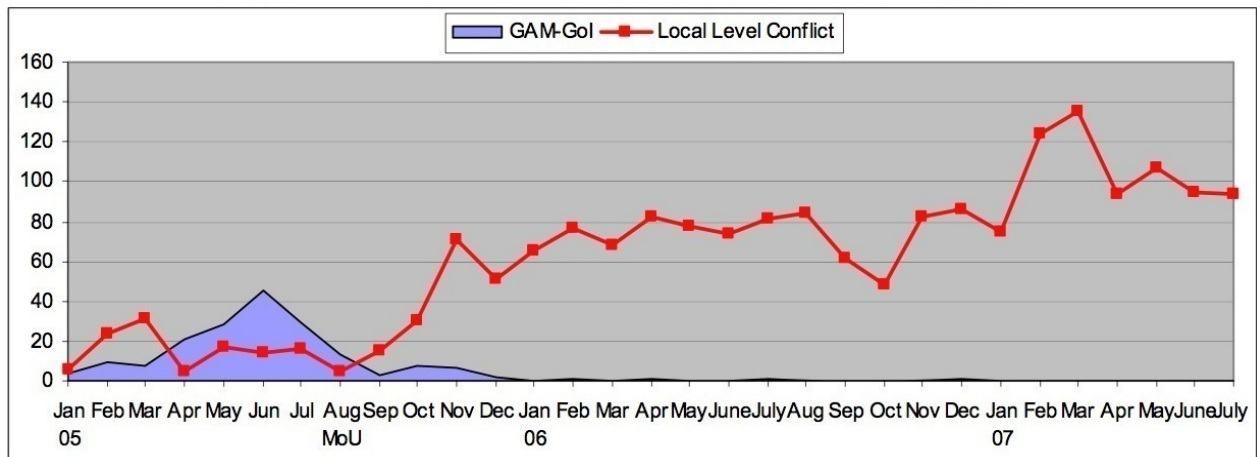
### **Counting Conflicts**

One of the larger international actors involved in supporting the peace process in Aceh was the World Bank. Immediately after the tsunami, The World Bank’s Indonesia mission opened up an office in Banda Aceh where the Bank’s Conflict and Development Program started an ambitious program of research in Aceh that lasted until mid-2009. The centerpiece of the program was the widely disseminated monthly (and later bi-monthly) *Aceh Conflict Monitoring Update* reports, which proved to be a useful resource for humanitarian organizations working in Aceh, donor agencies, academic researchers, and foreign diplomats based in Jakarta. The reports combined quantitative and qualitative methods, and each report’s narrative was typically built around data gathered from the Conflict and Development Program’s conflict mapping methodology that used newspaper reports to monitor the frequency, distribution, and types of conflicts from all over Aceh (Barron and Sharpe 2005).<sup>8</sup> Each report featured a graph that kept track of conflict events as they were reported in Aceh’s newspapers, such as the following example drawn from the June-July 2007 report:

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<sup>8</sup> Barron and Sharpe (2005) not only describe the methodology used for mapping conflicts through newspaper monitoring, but also acknowledge the method’s shortcomings. The authors argue that no single methodology could possibly ever monitor the incidence of conflict with total accuracy, but when complemented with additional qualitative field research, the newspaper monitoring methodology at least provides a baseline of comparative data over time.

**Figure 0.1: GAM-GoI and Local Level Conflicts by Month**



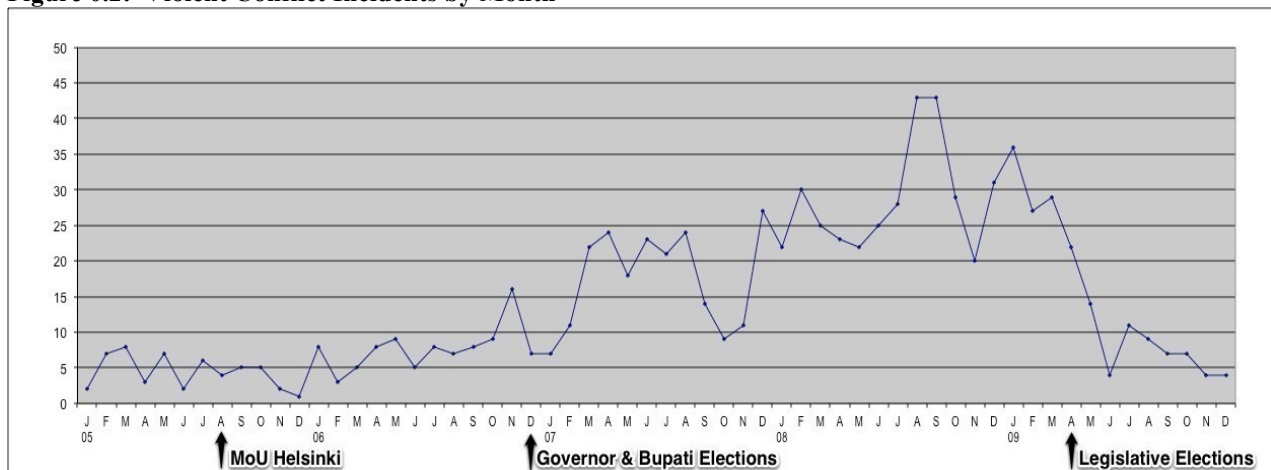
Source: (World Bank 2007)

The June-July 2007 Aceh Conflict Monitoring Update was the last of these reports to distinguish conflicts between GAM and the Government of Indonesia (GoI) as shown in blue on the left side of graph, from what the World Bank called “local level conflicts” as shown in red, because the distinction was technically no longer relevant in Aceh’s “post-conflict” era. “Local level conflict” refers to any reported conflict event—violent or non-violent—between two parties in Aceh’s local newspapers. GAM-GoI conflicts taper off rapidly after June 2005, when GoI formally renounced the Civil Emergency status that had prevailed since May 2004 due to progress made during the ongoing peace negotiations in Helsinki. GAM-GoI conflicts all but disappear at the end of 2005 for two reasons. First, by the end of 2005, GoI had removed the last of their inorganic forces, as agreed to in the Helsinki MoU. Second, on 27 December 2005, one day after the first year anniversary of the tsunami, GAM officially demobilized its armed forces, and announced the formation of a civilian organization called the *Komite Peralihan Aceh* (Aceh Transitional Committee, KPA), which would henceforth represent the interests of GAM ex-combatants. In a strict technical sense, at the start of 2006 almost none of the documented conflict events reported in newspapers could be coded as GAM-GoI conflicts, even if the

increasing incidence of generically coded “local level conflict” events were mostly perpetrated by KPA members or other persons with historical ties to the conflict such as members of pro-Indonesia militias or the national police force.

When The World Bank ended its intensive research efforts in Aceh, the Conflict and Development Program handed over its conflict monitoring database and research capacity to the newly established Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution Studies (CPCRS) at Syiah Kuala University, where I worked as a Bank consultant from mid-2009 until mid-2010 as the “Aceh Conflict Research and Capacity Building Coordinator.” During this time I wrote two more monitoring reports for CPCRS, newly renamed the *Aceh Peace Monitoring Update* (Grayman 2009). The following graph does not appear in the CPCRS reports, but I generated it from the same conflict monitoring database to show the incidence of violent conflict events per month from January 2005 until December 2009:

**Figure 0.2: Violent Conflict Incidents by Month**



Source: Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution Studies, Syiah Kuala University<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The data reported by the red line in Figure 1 should not be conflated with the data reported in Figure 2. The conflict monitoring methodology defined “local level conflict” differently than “violent conflict incidents,” so the data points for overlapping months will not be the same. Despite the different definitions, they both reflect the same general trend, a steady increase in conflict events that spikes rapidly after Irwandi’s election and their rapid reduction after *Partai Aceh*’s victory in 2009.



The vertical arrows along the timeline point to benchmark moments in the peace process: the signing of the MoU in August 2005, the election of Governor Irwandi and several GAM-backed district heads (*bupati*) across Aceh in December 2006, and the legislative elections in April 2009 when the GAM-affiliated local political party, *Partai Aceh*, won the most seats in the provincial assembly and many district assemblies across Aceh.

One reason why I use Irwandi's victory in December 2006 and *Partai Aceh*'s victories in April of both 2009 and 2012 to bookend this dissertation in the Introduction and Conclusion respectively is because the highest levels of violence since the tsunami took place in between them, highlighting the troublesome designation of these years as Aceh's post-conflict era. Without question, the departure of the inorganic troops from their village posts all across Aceh at the end of 2005 finally removed the everyday extortion and terror that characterized the conflict for the vast majority of Acehnese civilians. But as the graph shows, violent incidents continued through 2009 (not shown in the graph: another return to violence in advance of the next governor's election in 2012). Intimidation and extortion from KPA and other conflict-era groups proved to be an enormous barrier to humanitarian organizations working in both tsunami and conflict areas throughout Aceh. Parochial local conflicts that cleave along well-established conflict-era identities have been an unnerving source of frustration for recovery efforts, and occasionally threatening to the entire peace. But despite these threats, the peace agreement has held in part because the MoU allowed for the new and innovative governing structures described by Good and Good above that put former opponents at high levels into routine, if at first unwilling, conversation with one another, enabling rapid interventions that prevented local spoiler events from becoming more widespread.

The graph above provides a starting point for appreciating what Henrik Vigh has written about the chronicity of crisis: “Instead of placing crisis *in* context I argue that we need to see crisis *as* context—as a terrain of action and meaning—thereby opening up the field to ethnographic investigation,” to look at crisis not only as a singular rupturing event, like the tsunami, but as an ongoing experience (Vigh 2008:5, italics mine). For this reason, I prefer to use the term “post-MoU,” because it acknowledges the MoU as an important benchmark that triggered important changes in governance at elite levels as well as qualitative improvements in everyday life for most people in Aceh without incorrectly implying that the last shot has been fired. Nevertheless I retain “post-conflict” in my dissertation title for wider readership accessibility, as the term has become a humanitarian industry standard, and as far as comparative post-conflict humanitarian interventions go, Aceh has been widely considered a success.

### **Counting Combatants**

Even before the tsunami, IOM already had a presence in Aceh providing support to the Indonesian government with the relocation of communities that were forcibly displaced from their villages by the Indonesian military during its massive counter-insurgency operations against GAM during the martial law period.<sup>10</sup> Given this earlier and trusted relationship with the Indonesian government, IOM was not only able to provide some of the largest recovery and reconstruction assistance after the tsunami, they were also well-positioned to provide technical post-conflict reintegration assistance for GAM ex-combatants and amnestied prisoners, as well as recovery assistance for the worst conflict-affected communities. According to Steve Cook (personal communication with Byron Good), during the Helsinki peace negotiations IOM

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<sup>10</sup> To be fair, GAM was also forcibly displacing village populations at this time as well, especially the transmigrant communities from Java, but since IOM only collaborates with host governments, I believe they only focused on assisting the populations that were displaced by the Indonesian military.

advised the Indonesian Ministry of Law and Human Rights (in Jakarta) on the types of post-conflict assistance that the Indonesian government might provide to GAM as part of their peace dividend. For this, IOM had recourse to the reigning post-conflict paradigm the United Nations and other humanitarian organizations apply in conflict recovery settings around the world that feature four ubiquitous terms: disarmament, demobilization, reinsertion and reintegration. The acronym DDR is another industry standard.

Mark Knight, a DDR expert who managed IOM's Aceh Post-Conflict Reintegration Program (PCRIP) where I worked, defines each of the DDR terms as they apply in the context of peace processes:

Disarmament: the collection, control and disposal of small arms and light weapons and the development of responsible arms management programs in a post-conflict context.

Demobilization: a planned process by which the armed force of the government and/or opposition or factional forces either downsize or completely disband.

Reinsertion or Reintegration: Having been demobilized and transported to their community of choice, the former combatants and their families must establish themselves in a civilian environment, and reinsertion assistance, which is intended to ameliorate the process, often includes post-discharge orientation, food assistance, health and education support and a cash allowance. Reintegration is the process whereby former combatants and their families are integrated into the social, economic and political life of (civilian) communities (Knight and Özerdem 2004:499-500).

In the paper quoted above, Knight intentionally switches between the acronyms DDR and DDDR in order to highlight the ambiguities and shortcomings that characterize the reinsertion and reintegration phases of a managed peace process, which take years of effort compared to the weeks or months of time required for the initial disarmament and demobilization, and typically end with donor fatigue. Post-MoU Aceh illustrates this problem well, as many of the stories in the following chapters show, but in short, by the end of 2005 GAM had successfully disarmed and demobilized according to the terms of the MoU, with facilitation from AMM monitors. Disarmament and demobilization are relatively technocratic exercises, concerned with the counting and collection of weapons and the enrollment of ex-prisoners and ex-combatants

(ibid.499; Theidon 2007:66). Reinsertion and reintegration programs for the 2,000 amnestied prisoners specified in the MoU also went smoothly during the first two years after the MoU. Providing for these 2,000 amnestied prisoners, however, was a comparatively easy exercise because their numbers and identities were already known by both sides, whereas accounting for the reinsertion and reintegration of 3,000 ex-combatants, also specified in the MoU, proved to be a challenging delay to the peace process, and to IOM's program in particular.

Following three months of "technical coordination dialogue" between IOM, GAM, and the Indonesian government after GAM formally demobilized at the end of 2005, on 21 March 2006 Mark Knight sent an exasperated update by email to his PCRCP managers:

The most pressing issue remains the will of the leadership of GAM to register with the program, their 3,000 ex-combatants. As you know we have been up the hills and through the valleys on this one. Their request to register, and our subsequent plan to do so, was postponed by them within two days of the registration beginning.

Despite Mark's best efforts to creatively guarantee the 3,000 beneficiaries' confidentiality, GAM leaders would not hand over to IOM a list of ex-combatant names for registration and reintegration assistance. There were several reasons for this. First, the reintegration concept that guided the post-conflict programs of both IOM and the Indonesian government assumed that GAM stood apart from the Acehnese people and needed to be reintegrated. Former GAM combatants found this offensive because they claim that they never left their communities, whose members in most rural areas stood side-by-side with the combatants in their struggle. A representation of GAM in the form of a written list of 3,000 names posed a troubling objectification that reified the reintegration concept because it represented GAM as something apart from Aceh, in a dangerously sensible, graphic form. It was a dangerous proposition for GAM because the list was not only GAM's final bargaining chip to secure the peace with favorable terms, but also identified 3,000 Acehnese combatants to the Indonesian security

apparatus should the peace process ever break down, putting 3,000 lives and the lives of 3,000 families at risk.<sup>11</sup>

The reintegration of ex-combatants in any DDR program will always be the yardstick by which the success of the program will be measured, and yet there is wide agreement in the DDR community that reintegration is the weakest link in the DDR chain, not least because the DDR model fails to consider matters of local significance such as GAM's very refusal to acknowledge the need for reintegration (Knight and Özerdem 2004; Theidon 2007). As Kimberly Theidon notes, "unlike disarmament and demobilization, reintegration cannot be imposed or centralized" (ibid.66). One reason why reintegration outcomes are so dispiriting is that the concept itself has a vague and imprecise definition. In one definition, the United Nations defines reintegration as a socioeconomic process, not unlike how Knight and Theidon have described it:

Reintegration is the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income. Reintegration is essentially a social and economic process with an open time-frame, primarily taking place in communities at the local level. It is part of the general development of a country and a national responsibility, and often necessitates long-term external assistance.<sup>12</sup>

But UN organizations have also defined reintegration as a matter of security, primarily to "deal with the post-conflict security problems that arise when ex-combatants are left without livelihoods or support networks, other than their former comrades, during the vital transition period from conflict to peace and development."<sup>13</sup> Humanitarian agencies that want to support post-conflict reintegration work are faced with an overly expansive and unfocused definition in

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<sup>11</sup> Apart from these *realpolitik* considerations to withhold the list of 3,000 names, the fear of lists has "a mythical cast" in Indonesian historiography. For a discussion of how the imagining of the Indonesian Communist Party's phantom lists of people that they were planning to murder was used as a justification to massacre its members in Aceh (and elsewhere), see (Siegel 1979:277-82). In Aceh's post-conflict situation in early 2006, GAM had an interest in controlling which written documents are issued, ensuring that those lists and letters with irrelevant reference (such as Hasan di Tiro's questionable genealogy of sultans that lead to him) are available and acceptable, but also ensuring that dangerously sensible lists (such as the 3,000 combatants) remain illegible and under their control, the imagining of which in turn has the power to inspire fear in others.

<sup>12</sup> UN Secretary-General, note to the General Assembly, A/C.5/59/31, May 2005.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.unddr.org>

which reintegration “has come to encompass political, socioeconomic, humanitarian, and security goals” (Jennings 2008).

Anthropologist Leena Avonius argues that without a clear set of guidelines, the goals and strategies of reintegration should be clearly defined at the start and open to revision later on in every context where reintegration programs are implemented (Avonius 2012:11).<sup>14</sup> In Aceh, IOM was one of the first international agencies directly involved in DDR efforts on the ground, available within days of the MoU agreement to assist with the rapid logistics of releasing, registering, and reinserting 2,000 amnestied prisoners into their home communities. From there, IOM secured agreements with the Indonesian government to develop a comprehensive Post-Conflict Reintegration Program (PCRP). But apart from IOM, a number of donor agencies got involved in planning or supporting reintegration programs of their own in Aceh, and there was little coordination among them. Another major player supporting DDR efforts in Aceh was The World Bank, as their Conflict and Development Program’s conflict monitoring updates and other research projects would suggest, and a quick comparison between the IOM and World Bank approaches to reintegration underscores their differences. The first phase of IOM’s program supported a reintegration model tailored to individual ex-prisoners and ex-combatants, providing reinsertion and vocational assistance one client at a time. The World Bank supported a community-based model in which selected villages developed their own priorities and selection criteria for distributing aid (Barron, Humphreys, Paler and Weinstein 2009). Aceh’s provincial government also opened their own agency, the *Badan Reintegrasi Aceh* (BRA, The Aceh Reintegration Agency) that reported directly to the governor, modeled loosely on the national level BRR that reported directly to the president, but it suffered from a revolving door of leaders,

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<sup>14</sup> My summary of reintegration as a concept in the humanitarian industry and how it has come to be understood in Aceh is drawn in part from this as yet unpublished Avonius manuscript.

each with their own vision for what DDR in Aceh should look like and each with their own alliances with the international agencies that were there to support BRA.

In her essay titled “From Reintegration to *Reintegrasi*,” Avonius briefly tells the story of how Aceh’s DDR programs suffered from a lack of coordination and fell into many of the commonly critiqued traps that DDR experts have identified. In the absence of a coordinated and iteratively managed reintegration agenda, Avonius shows how a specifically Indonesian version of the concept, *reintegrasi*, came to reign at BRA and the donors that supported it. Avonius summarizes what *reintegrasi* has come to mean in Aceh, providing an instructive example of how theoretical models advanced by the global humanitarian industry change when they travel, when supposed mobile sovereigns make their landings on local terrain:

The concept of reintegration has become localized in Aceh in at least three ways. First, *reintegrasi*, the Indonesian translation of ‘reintegration,’ has come to refer to post-conflict assistance [*bantuan*] in general rather than assistance targeted to former combatants, which is the global definition of the term. Wide and vague categorization of target groups has left conceptualization of reintegration in Aceh weak. Second, the assistance has been economic, given either in cash or in kind. Hardly any reference has been made to the transformative aspects of reintegration that would bring about socio-economic changes or introduce psychosocial changes amongst former combatants. And third, the networks and GAM structures have remained intact, and while they have been turned to ‘civilian’ structures, they effectively keep up the distinctions between ‘GAM’ and ‘non-GAM’ groups in the society (Avonius 2012:11).

One of the most common responses when soliciting opinions about the peace process, whether among rural-based survivors of the conflict or urban civil society activists, many of whom risked their lives or served jail time during the Referendum Era, is that no one ever asked them what they think the terms of the peace should be. “Frequently,” Theidon writes,

peace processes, democratic transitions, and processes of ‘national reconciliation’ are little more than the restructuring of elite pacts of governability and domination. In these superficial forms of reconciliation, the dialogue involves the same interlocutors, the same silences and the same exclusionary logics that existed previously (Theidon 2007:89).

As the story of Aceh’s peace process unfolds in the pages of this dissertation, from Irwandi’s election in 2006 up through the legislative elections of 2009, and toward the next governor’s

election in 2012, we observe a consolidation of powerful interests and alliances that some (but not many) could foresee when the two signatory parties of the MoU were only GAM and the Indonesian government, despite the contributions and crippling losses suffered by civil society activists and rural families alike.

A troubling question arises about the role of humanitarian organizations in this trend: to what extent are the international mobile sovereigns that deliver DDR programs around the world complicit in these “elite pacts of governability and domination?” In the editor’s Introduction to a recent volume titled *Conflict, Violence, and Displacement in Indonesia*, Eva-Lotta Hedman offers a strident critique:

The mobilization of a massive transnational “humanitarian” machinery, with its own considerable complex of national and international, governmental and non-governmental, resources, networks, and discourses, has propelled an entire industry focused on “conflict and violence in Indonesia,” including the so-called mapping of conflict and violence, the search for conflict intervention mechanisms, and the design of peace and conflict resolution programs (Hedman 2008:27).

Hedman, quoting from Paul Brass’ book *Theft of an Idol: Text and Context in the Representation of Collective Violence* (1997), contends that the efforts of this massive transnational humanitarian machinery reflect and reproduce “a more pervasive conflict/violence discourse ‘grounded in a set of institutions that promotes its persistence’” (Hedman 2008:27). Brass’ book shows how governments and media tend to interpret and portray violent events in ways that support existing relations of power in state and society, and in turn become useful for upholding dominant ideologies. The incessant talk about violence and its implications “promotes its persistence” rather than its reduction, which takes us back to Drexler’s same argument in her ethnography about Aceh, only this time the gaze is fixed squarely upon organizations such as IOM and The World Bank as they register so many amnestied prisoners and produce their monthly conflict monitoring updates.



As a participant-observer in the production of documents such as the *Aceh Peace Monitoring Update*, I can confirm that any bias away from our efforts at neutrality and autonomy accommodates the powerful over the weak. When the World Bank handed over its conflict monitoring database to CPCRS, the director of the young think tank, who was also one of the vice rectors of Syiah Kuala University, insisted that the title of our monthly updates switch from conflict to peace monitoring because, he said, “the conflict is over.” And when the Indonesian Department of Foreign Affairs, in one of its occasional fits of nationalist sentiment vaguely accused the World Bank of meddling in Indonesia’s politics instead of its development, my boss at the Bank gently urged me to self-censor some of the analysis I had written about the connections between President Yudhoyono’s landslide reelection in Aceh, where he won more than 93% of the vote in July 2009, and *Partai Aceh*’s landslide in the provincial and district legislative elections only three months earlier.

My dissertation does not dismiss the structural critiques launched by Pandolfi, Drexler, Hedman, and Brass, but I would like to balance their interventions with one of my own. In many ways their arguments rest upon a straw man figure of the faceless Humanitarian or any other universal figure of sovereignty that represents the existing relations of power in state and society, and if that is your image, then organizations like The World Bank are the easiest, most obvious targets. In that conversation, by their set up, structure beats agency every time. My research responds to these strident critiques from the vantage of having worked on the inside of humanitarian organizations concerned with conflict and recovery. Humanitarians, expatriate and local, it turns out, each have their own lives, frustrations, and even moral commitments, as well as experiences, that are ethnographically rich, and that is something still missing from this

critical literature. This leads me directly to the fourth and final defining term of my dissertation's title, the humanitarian "encounter."

## **Encounters**

### **Expatriate Humanitarians**

I have never traveled as much—by air and by car—as when I worked for humanitarian organizations in Aceh, Indonesia. On one of my frequent flights home to New York at the end of April 2006, I sat by coincidence next to Imogen Wall, a British journalist who had been working as the communications director for the United Nations Development Program's (UNDP) office in Banda Aceh since March 2005. We recognized each other, for we had many mutual friends among the expatriate community in Banda Aceh, but we had never been formally introduced. She was going to a conference about the "tsunami response" at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. It was a fortuitous seating arrangement and after a comedic "Aren't you...?" and "Haven't I seen you..." exchange, we spoke for hours about our experiences working in Aceh, discovering our mutual acquaintances and trading tips that ranged from where to find the best fish in town to how to keep your organization in the good graces of the Indonesian government.

In many ways, our flight together was the paradigmatic experience of the "migrant sovereign" humanitarian (Pandolfi 2003). I enjoyed sitting with Imogen for many reasons, not least because I found myself in the equally paradigmatic experience of the "participant observer" anthropologist. Among our many topics of conversation, two of Imogen's comments bear repeating because they have a direct relevance to my research in Aceh. Imogen explained how she increasingly found herself the go-to person for newcomers who needed to learn the context

and history of the relief effort since the tsunami: “There are very few of us left in Aceh who were here during the Emergency period... burnout!” Her comment reflects the transitory qualities and also the frustrations of working as a humanitarian. One important response to Pandolfi’s work is to ask about the everyday experience of the mobile elites who, as noted above, supposedly work in a realm divorced from local context. In their review of the literature and critiques about humanitarianism in West Africa, Sharon Abramowitz and Adia Benton address this question head on:

In spite of riding about town in white Land Rovers and earning radically disproportionate pay, most humanitarians are in contracts which are “unaccompanied,” which is to say that insofar as they have families and close intimate relationships, it is often from a long distance for long periods of time. The majority of their relationships happen in an intensely stressful and utterly fluid context of continual transition. In the breach between what they aspire to do, and what they are capable of doing under the contextual, political, institutional, and social constraints of their careers, exists a wide swath of humanitarians who have been traumatized, suffer emotional burnout, an incredibly high turnover rate, and enduring questions from humanitarians themselves about the efficacy of their goals and actions... humanitarians live a kind of elite “life without a life” in spaces of suffering and death, a life which is consumed by work, distant from close relationships, and... transitory. Their lives are the alter of the lives of the beneficiaries they are trying to assist. The recipients of aid are constantly in the process of trying to build a secure life in which family, work, house, and relationships *stop* being transitory, and all of their efforts are oriented towards persistently trying to create the very kind of ontological security, stability, safety, and predictability that war persistently deprives them of (Abramowitz and Benton 2005).

Abramowitz and Benton argue for an ethnography of humanitarian praxis, which on a personal and phenomenological level means examining the outstanding discomforts people like Imogen and myself have felt while working on humanitarian programs in Aceh. When I first arrived to work for IOM in Meulaboh, West Aceh in July 2005, I lost twenty pounds in a few months without trying or even realizing it. When I moved to Banda Aceh at the end of the year, I quickly gained it all back, plus a whole lot more! How quickly I grew accustomed to having my own car and driver paid for by IOM and enough disposable income to insist on air conditioning in every apartment and hotel room I rented when fans used to suffice! Despite these creature comforts, I at first despised but eventually adapted to IOM’s administrative

bureaucracy, the discomforts of managing a staff of Indonesian researchers who were also my ethnographic subjects, the self-segregating expatriate humanitarian community in Banda Aceh, and above all the constant sense of feeling unsettled. I did many of the things that the anthropological literature on humanitarianism critiques. But I was also sure that paying attention to all the things that made me so uncomfortable about working in the humanitarian industry would produce terrific ethnography about international humanitarianism, “supracolonialism,” its local engagements, its arrogant successes, and its unacknowledged failures.

Humanitarian praxis demands an examination not just of expatriates in action, but also their moral engagement with local staffs, government officials, and the beneficiaries of their programs (ibid.; Kleinman 1999). I was constantly reminded that these actors frequently misunderstood one another not just because of linguistic barriers, but because of fundamentally different understandings of what is at stake in the undertaking of “rehabilitation and reconstruction,” or “reintegration and peace building.” As an information officer at UNDP, Imogen spoke with exasperation about the failures of humanitarian organizations to successfully communicate realistic goals of their programming to beneficiaries: “How did we create such high expectations? Why is there inevitable disappointment despite all our best efforts?” Imogen’s questions are indicative of the different local moral worlds that the actors in the humanitarian encounter inhabit, which is altogether different from saying that humanitarians are global elites detached from local ground.

### **Indonesian Humanitarians**

My flight with Imogen and the issues it illustrates begins a discussion about how to theorize an ethnography of the humanitarian encounter that focuses on the people that we, the

expatriate crowd, relied upon the most to help us answer these vexing questions, our local Indonesian staffs. Caught in the rush of job opportunity and social idealism, the Indonesian staffs employed by the international and local relief organizations working in Aceh offered me their perspectives throughout the duration of tsunami reconstruction and post-MoU reintegration. Typically from more metropolitan centers of higher education such as Medan and Jakarta, many of the Indonesians who provided technical, logistical, and administrative support for international humanitarian organizations felt just as far from home and out of place working in tsunami and conflict-affected regions of Aceh as their foreign employers did. Aceh had no shopping malls, movie theaters, prestigious universities or elite cafés. Nevertheless these temporary residents played crucial mediating roles in this new and entirely unexpected “zone of awkward engagement” between foreigners, tsunami and conflict survivors, government officials, Indonesian security forces, and former GAM leaders and field commanders, whose “words mean something different across a divide even as [they] agree to speak” with one another (Tsing 2005:xi). In most cases, local staff were the only actors in this setting who speak both Indonesian and English, and many spoke Acehnese too thanks to hiring practices within some of these organizations that prioritized Acehnese staff.

These young Indonesians are often described as the face of the “New Indonesia,” the generation of students who so optimistically ushered in the *reformasi* (reform) era after the fall of President Suharto’s dictatorship in 1998, and who helped set the terms and agenda for the nation’s re-emerging civil society. These young activists were happy to work for tsunami and post-conflict relief organizations not just because humanitarianism fulfills many of their aspirations for social justice, but also because they earned decent paychecks and gained valuable skills working with international staffs in a setting of crisis. Their contributions to the region are

more than just humanitarian assistance; my research investigates how these NGO workers access and translate the “planetary logics” of humanitarianism into local terms, which in turn has broad implications for the course of social, political, and economic change in both Acehnese and Indonesian society.

Most of the NGO employees I worked with are Acehnese and belong to a generation that came of age during and feel personally invested in the democratization and resurgence of Acehnese and Indonesian civil society. As I wrote above under the “Aceh, Indonesia” header, after Suharto’s resignation university students in Aceh were leaders not just for a reform movement, but for a referendum on Acehnese independence that provoked a series of military crackdowns and ultimately martial law in 2003. In a 1999 addendum included in the republication of *The Rope of God*, Siegel writes about Acehnese college students and their newly confident but curiously attenuated claims for Aceh’s independence during these turbulent years. Drawing upon interviews with students in Banda Aceh and rebel guerrillas hiding in Aceh’s mountainous interior; Hasan di Tiro’s autobiographical writings and political manifestos; and themes found in pre-colonial Acehnese historical epics, Siegel argues that the Acehnese people require an external source of recognition to authorize a social identity that meaningfully resists Indonesian authority (Siegel 2000[1999]). Prior to colonial intervention, the authority of the Acehnese sultanate consolidated “Aceh” as a concept that gave an identity to the Acehnese people even though the sultan’s authority depended on his control of overseas trade more than any relationship he shared with the people he called his subjects. After the Dutch removed the sultan, Aceh’s *ulama* mobilized “Islam” as a spiritual authority to unify the Acehnese in their collective resistance against colonialism. Post-colonial Indonesia effectively neutralized Islam as an authority to recognize the Acehnese by co-opting the *ulama* into the state apparatus. In

more recent decades, the consolidation of power in Jakarta during Suharto's New Order government ensured that "Indonesia" was the only external agent available to affirm Acehnese identity.

Students in Aceh are part of an Indonesian educational system that in the absence of conflict recognizes them as both Indonesian and Acehnese. This is the legacy of Hurgronje's *adat* legal framework; every Indonesian citizen assumes a customary ethnicity. Siegel argues that the Indonesian educational system carries students through a progressive trajectory out from their traditional villages toward national citizenship, arriving as middle class Indonesians when they graduate. From the late 1990s until the tsunami, students in Aceh could no longer reconcile a simultaneous Acehnese and Indonesian identity because the external source of recognition, Indonesia, lost its legitimacy in the wake of so many brutal atrocities committed by the Indonesian military against ordinary Acehnese people. In fact, Indonesia's terrifying martial stranglehold over Aceh invited opportunities for the *misrecognition* of ordinary Acehnese, students included, as rebel insurgents.<sup>15</sup> Siegel concludes that, up through 1999 at least, there has been no other external authority to affirm the identity of Acehnese people as such, and thus no recourse to a legitimate and independent alternative. Students in turn found their aspirations to join the ranks of an Indonesian middle class citizenry blocked by the authority that once invited them. I argue that some of these young Acehnese Indonesians have regained a coherent sense of Acehnese identity and resumed their journey into middle class life facilitated by the arrival of the humanitarian industry in post-MoU Aceh. I explore whether the "mobile

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<sup>15</sup> This fact was made clear to me during an interview with one of the nurses who works at the psychiatric hospital in Banda Aceh. Before he became a civil servant, he had to work as a volunteer without salary at the local clinic near his home village in Bireuen. To earn money, he took part time jobs in construction. Working in the sun, carrying wood and other construction supplies all day, his skin darkened and his muscles became more defined. He eventually fled to Bogor in West Java to finish his volunteer work because he said that the TNI and police would misrecognize his body for a GAM combatant's.

sovereign” humanitarian might now be the new external force that Siegel claims would be necessary to recognize and reassert Acehnese identity. This recognition does not authorize more rebellion against Indonesia, but perhaps it relegitimizes Acehnese identity within the framework of Indonesia’s arduous transition to democracy.

The “NGO worker” is a recognizable type on the Indonesian political and professional landscape, most often seen championing the cause of civil society revival in the wake of Suharto’s military dictatorship (Danusiri 2009). Sometimes equated with “activist” or “idealist,” there are plenty of other Indonesians who do not understand this profession or just find their activities a nuisance because their protests hold up traffic and they are said to incite naïve villagers to riot. As such, Indonesian NGO workers sometimes find more in common with each other than they do with their own neighbors even if they come from different parts of the archipelago. And yet, as the reaction to Irwandi’s victory demonstrated, the subject of “Aceh” continues to capture the imagination of many of the local NGO staff I have met there. The culture effect wrought by a history of war and antagonistic scholarship ensures that Aceh is very much a subject without scare quotes worth fighting for (or against), but I argue that NGO workers, with their university diplomas in hand, Acehnese or not, are staking these claims with a new sense of purpose from a distinctly Indonesian middle-class subject position.

### **Encounters in Non-Places**

I have struggled with the strange kind of fieldwork I did in Aceh from 2005 until 2010, embedded as I was within the humanitarian apparatus, and how to both acknowledge and write about that strangeness. Chapter Two, titled “Remote Fieldwork,” presents the preliminary results of that struggle, but for the purpose of introducing the idea of “encounter,” I found that



Rudolf Mrázek's 2010 book, *A Certain Age: Colonial Jakarta Through the Memories of Its Intellectuals*, offers a toolkit of methodological and theoretical possibilities for the task.<sup>16</sup> "Speed and lightness over the mud and dust define the city and this observer of the city as well," Mrázek writes in the book's preface, and in the figure of the observer he conjures up Walter Benjamin's flaneur, but with a rushing twist. Mrázek is not just an idle passerby, doing a series of household interviews in Jakarta, sampling his informants like one might browse paintings in a gallery before moving on to the next. There is also an element of compulsive flight, as if Mrázek was never too comfortable getting into the lives of his informants ("keeping my distance from my subjects, my passing by, the burden of my method"); in fact one might find comfort in the moving on, and Mrázek quotes Sartre: "he knew that it was possible for him to make his escape at any moment with the flap of the wings" (Mrázek 2010:xi). The mild discomfort with informants, the impulse toward flight, and the ease ("speed and lightness") with which it is possible to escape from it all (the "mud and dust"), resonates deeply with my sense of what characterized the humanitarian encounters in Aceh that I write about in this dissertation.

In spite of, or rather because of his methodological burdens, Mrázek's data still "generates cognitive sparks" all through his book, when his informants reproduce historical landscapes located in the noisy present of the interview (Buck-Morss 1991:17). Fragments of memory are recomposed in a vivid collage, a method of writing that I have tried to use in this dissertation. The fragments I work with are drawn from a series of unlikely ethnographic encounters such as my flight with Imogen. The challenge has been to find the unexpected tangential points where my fragments of experience in Aceh serendipitously meet those of my

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<sup>16</sup> I first started working with the ideas I draw from Mrázek's book to think about an ethnography of the humanitarian encounter in Aceh in a review of *A Certain Age* that I posted on my blog in October 2010 (Grayman 2010).

informants. Toward that end, Mrázek's book also introduced me to the French anthropologist Marc Augé who writes about overlapping fields of experience in his book *In the Metro*:

If it is true that everyone has a past of his or her own, it nonetheless happens that some, those who remember having lived fragments of their past with others, can sense they have shared at least this memory with them. ... The complicity that emerges from this parallelism—no matter how capricious and subjective memory may be—sometimes materializes unexpectedly, in a serendipitous meeting or along a detour in conversation (Augé 2002:8-9).

During my work in Aceh, I had several moments like these that resulted in productive and complicit engagements. Marc Augé writes about “non-places” and the anthropology of “supermodernity” (1995). A non-place lends itself to generic memories at best; they are typically spaces of motion and travel, such as airports, stations, vehicles, hotels, mobile offices, and refugee camps. These are precisely the kinds of spaces in which humanitarians find themselves most of the time. Like the flaneur, humanitarians are always passing through, checking in and then out of non-places. What would it be like if we thought of humanitarianism not as an abstract “supracolonial” force, as Pandolfi has written of it, but as “supramodern” or maybe just “supermodern?” That brings the industry down to earth without losing the awesome sense of mobility that so strongly characterizes humanitarians and their work. We can set aside the abstracted debates on “mobile sovereignty” and focus instead on just the “mobile,” the blasé sense of just “passing through” humanitarianism's supermodern corridors that lead us, with urgency, to and from its temporary destinations, one crisis after another. “The essence of the blasé attitude,” Georg Simmel writes,

consists in the blunting of discrimination... not that objects are not perceived... but rather that the meaning and differing values of things, and thereby the things themselves, are experienced as insubstantial... to the blasé person all things float with equal specific gravity in the constantly moving stream of money (Simmel 1997:178).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> It was Mrázek's book again that led me to Georg Simmel's meditation on the blasé but here I quote Simmel directly from the source (Mrázek 2010:122).

When the “meaning and differing values of things” become harder to perceive in the field, it makes serendipitous and tangential encounters with the Other much more difficult, but so much more memorable when it happens. Let me illustrate with another fragment.

### **July 2006: A Humanitarian Encounter in South Aceh**

In July 2006, I was traveling across Aceh managing the second phase of HMS-IOM’s PNA research. I had five teams of researchers conducting village-based surveys in five distinct geographic regions of Aceh, each with their own unique history of conflict dynamics. In ten days, I tried to visit and observe all five teams, but only managed to reach four. From East Aceh, to Central Aceh, to West Aceh, I moved from GAM’s ideological heartland along the east coast, up into the mountain highlands where pro-Indonesia militia groups still held sway, then down to the west coast where tsunami recovery efforts seemed to displace past conflict concerns... or so I thought. I joined my West Aceh team to an inland village that in truth was not affected by the tsunami at all. This community had the misfortune of living in the shadow of an old *pesantren* Islamic boarding school that sat atop a big hill overlooking the village. During the conflict, inorganic Indonesian troops took over the school buildings, an ideal vantage to set up their post, and this village bore the brunt of their surveillance activities during the martial law period before the tsunami.

Having already conducted the first phase of research in February 2006, and having just visited the teams working in East and Central Aceh during this second phase, I at first dismissed the findings that my team reported back to me from our visit to the village with the now abandoned and haunted *pesantren* buildings up on the hill. Stories of public humiliation, forced labor, and torture washed over me and I actually caught myself thinking that “I’ve heard this all

before,” and feeling that this village was “nothing special.” Blasé. One of the researchers on the West Aceh team found herself so overwhelmed by what they learned in the villages there that she ended up at the hospital in Meulaboh for an afternoon with an asthma attack. I made sure that IOM’s local doctor in Meulaboh took care of her, and the next morning I raced further down Aceh’s southwest coast to the fourth destination on this crazy itinerary, to South Aceh.

I actually had a special interest in South Aceh because it was known during the martial law period for its explosive and spectacular acts of horrific violence, and yet there was very little documentation to verify it. In 2006 conflict recovery efforts were still focused mostly in GAM’s heartland along the northeast coast, but IOM had recently opened an office in South Aceh’s district capital, Tapaktuan, and my research team would investigate the local histories. We were also able to send another anthropologist who specializes on security issues in Indonesia, John MacDougall, specifically to South Aceh to conduct a supplemental round of sustained ethnographic research there, but “sustained” in this context meant only a week or two.

West Aceh may not have received my due diligence because of a blasé sensation of passing through yet another conflict-affected community, but it was the encounter with my team in South Aceh that jolted me out of the gauzy haze clouding over this exhausting fieldwork. Shortly after arriving in Tapaktuan, I met with the South Aceh team in the dilapidated lobby of their hotel after dinner. I hired the South Aceh team leader, Pak Farhan, based on the recommendation of my trusted research assistant Bachtiar, who told me that Pak Farhan was an excellent but easygoing instructor in the public health program who loved research methods at Muhammadiyah University in Banda Aceh. With his team of six researchers standing around him, Pak Farhan greeted me warmly in the lobby and I could instantly detect a compelling combination of winsome camaraderie, infectious enthusiasm, and panicked shock that had forged

a close team unity during their fieldwork. They had seen and learned terrifying things about the conflict in South Aceh, especially in the Kluet River Valley, and they had been waiting to share it all with me.<sup>18</sup> One of my top researchers, Sami Akmal, who I hired specifically to work on the South Aceh team because he comes from the ethnic Kluet minority group that live in the river valley and speaks the Kluet language, immediately came up to show me his newly shaved head. “I did this for stress relief,” he laughed while one of the psychiatric nurses on the team teased him by telling me that Sami had “secondary trauma,” a term that I taught them during the three day training we conducted before our fieldwork began.

It had occurred to me in West Aceh that perhaps I had acquired a touch of secondary trauma if I was losing my empathy, but sitting in the lobby with Pak Farhan and his team proved a partial tonic. They told me their stories with an appropriate mix of humor and gravity. Despite the teasing jokes, this team had quickly developed an intuitive sense of how conflict victims of traumatic stress share their burdens with others, which I have written about elsewhere with Mary-Jo and Byron Good.<sup>19</sup> Pak Farhan took this work seriously enough to make sure his researchers had free time every afternoon to relax by the seaside, or near a waterfall, where they could put the finishing touches on the questionnaires they had conducted in the morning, and talk to each other about what they had learned during their interviews.

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<sup>18</sup> For specific background and data on the Kluet Valley in South Aceh, see (Good, Good, Grayman and Lakoma 2007:26-29)

<sup>19</sup> “They described the process of listening to respondents tell their stories. They used the term *melampiaskan penderitaan*, which I might best translate as “to expunge one’s suffering out of oneself,” and it has a very physical, almost sexual connotation, because the verb *melampiaskan* is also used with respect to getting one’s “lust” (*nafsu*) out of one’s system and projecting it out, physically, onto something else (usually another person while having sex). But my research teams found this process of expunging one’s suffering very difficult because they found themselves to be the receptacles of the suffering that respondents were at last throwing out of their bodies and onto them, the interviewers. One of our team leaders always complained of headaches at the end of our days conducting interviews in the field or after a day of reading interview transcripts during the analysis phase. Here we have an Indonesian way of talking about intersubjectivity, where suffering is something to be thrown out of someone and into someone else, who then must carry the burden... it is the physicality of suffering, or its objectification, that gets highlighted when an act of witnessing is described” (Good, Good and Grayman 2010:253).

I credit our meeting in that ugly Tapaktuan hotel lobby, such an unlikely and unexpected “non-place” of shared experience, with setting in motion a new group of productive working relationships and lasting friendships. Pak Farhan and I worked together on several more research projects in Aceh, and we co-taught a week-long social science research methods class at Syiah Kuala University. Today he is the head of the Indonesian Department of Health’s Research Unit in Aceh. Sami not only joined me on additional research projects, he also took a full time job with IOM’s post-conflict program in Tapaktuan that lasted nearly three years. I continued close working relationships with two more members of Pak Farhan’s team as well. I think of these collegial friendships that were forged in South Aceh between myself, Pak Farhan, and his research team as a productive and memorable humanitarian encounter. A focus on encounters tells us more about what happens on the ground, again evoking Anna Tsing’s friction metaphor, a meeting point where the rushing, flight-prone, mobile humanitarian makes at least a fleeting contact with the local. The encounter is a two-way, if unequal, interaction with potentially long term effects that outlast the crisis events that brought humanitarians to Aceh in the first place.

But the outcomes of the humanitarian encounter are hardly predictable, and so the idea of encounter requires some qualification. It took not just Pak Farhan and his team’s friendly disposition and research talent to make a memorable encounter, but also their collective capacity to broadcast a loud enough signal, “to exaggerate their personal element [enough] to remain audible,” in order to pierce through an accumulation of blasé noise (Simmel 1997:184). My job in this dissertation is to make sense of an overwhelming pile of data from Aceh, to figure out who and what remains audible through all that noise, to identify the tangential meeting points of productive engagements and misunderstandings, and to acknowledge the mediating distortions (exaggerations or otherwise) that filter my data and make retrieval and recall possible. To bring

these encounters to life and render them sensible, I have to ethnographically describe the “non-places” in Aceh where I spent the majority of my time that prevented me in specific ways from ever really getting to know Aceh as a deeply memorable place. We may be touched by our informants in unexpected ways, but the filters that mediate those encounters inevitably leave us “touched away” from them as well, and quite possibly leave them misunderstood.

### **Narrative Strategy: From Montage to Mosaic**

Earlier in this Introduction I used the phrase “by way of mosaic example” to suggest that a composite of selectively filtered stories might suggest answers to larger questions about the logic of intervention. The term “mosaic” describes how I assemble ethnographic details to address the anthropology of humanitarianism and Aceh’s recovery from crisis. Chapters One through Five tack back and forth between these two topics using a montage approach that draws inspiration from Walter Benjamin’s Arcades Project, via Susan Buck-Morss: “The principle [mode of narrative] construction is that of montage, whereby the... ideational elements [in an accumulation of ethnographic moments] remain unreconciled instead of fusing into one ‘harmonizing perspective.’ For Benjamin, the technique of montage [has] ‘special, perhaps even total rights’ as a progressive form because it ‘interrupts the context into which it is inserted’ and thus ‘counteracts illusion’” (Buck-Morss 1991:67).<sup>20</sup> As a narrative device, montage textually approximates the humanitarian sense of “passing through” that I described above: an itinerary of site visits, a camera full of digital photographs, a collection of email attachments, data points to include in a donor report. These are the ethnographic fragments that reach through the filter of a

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<sup>20</sup> Benjamin’s use of montage in his Arcades Project refers to images not texts. I have revised Buck-Morss’ definition of Benjamin’s “dialectical image” with a generous use of brackets within the quotation in order to apply the same “principle of construction” to the accumulation and juxtaposition of ethnographic moments, or fragments, within the text of my dissertation.

highly mobile humanitarian encounter, which I have collected, bracketed, and curated for the reader. In my writing I embed these fragments within, and juxtapose them against, conversations about *something else* in a way that hopefully “generates cognitive sparks” and sheds critical light upon Aceh’s humanitarian encounter while also sidestepping conventional modes of argument that typically seek reductive answers to complex questions (ibid.17).

## **Chapter Summaries**

While I expect that readers will draw their own conclusions from the substantive chapters about humanitarianism and post-MoU Aceh, in the Introduction and Conclusion I provide the signposts that facilitate a *montage* of ethnographic fragments to assume the status of a more coherent *mosaic*. In this Introduction I have laid out definitions of terms, explicit theoretical orientations, and a historical background that contextualizes the substantive chapters. The Conclusion gestures toward the elusive “harmonizing perspectives” that Benjamin preferred to avoid, and offers a set of contingent lessons, if not teleological prescriptions, drawn from this collection of humanitarian encounters in post-conflict Aceh, Indonesia.

My dissertation reaches back into Aceh’s long history of conflict and a more recent history of natural disaster and humanitarian intervention, but I use two historic elections—the governor and district head elections of December 2006 (the *pemilihan kepala daerah*, or *pilkada*) and the general legislative elections of April 2009 (the *pemilihan umum*, or *pemilu*)—as a framing device that introduces and concludes the dissertation respectively. There are at least four reasons for this. First, these elections mark important benchmarks in Aceh’s ongoing and relatively successful peace process that convinced the vast majority of GAM separatist rebels to relinquish their demands for independence in exchange for allowing them to contest local



elections. Second, as I mentioned under the Post-Conflict header above, the two and a half years between these two elections were among the most turbulent after the peace agreement was originally signed in August 2005 (see Figure 2 above). Third, with some exceptions most of the ethnographic moments that I describe in the substantive chapters take place during this critical period in between these two elections. Fourth, a focus on Aceh's history after December 2006 emphasizes humanitarian involvement in conflict recovery over tsunami recovery, which was a more preoccupying concern throughout 2005 and 2006.

As noted above, the substantive chapters attempt an illustration of Aceh's humanitarian encounter through the use of montage, while talking about *something else*. Chapters One through Five each have their own "something else," exploring different methods, or possibilities, by which humanitarian intervention becomes a productive site for critical ethnography. Chapter One, for example, examines the structure and practices of an international humanitarian organization's email network, relying on the analytical tools of discourse analysis and actor-network theory to learn something about how this organization operates at international, national, and local levels. Embedded within the analysis, illustrative emails from the archive tell us stories, in fragments, about Aceh, and about the humanitarian actors—expatriate and local—involved in Aceh's recovery.

Chapter Two explores the productive constraints imposed upon a consortium of humanitarian organizations conducting assessment research in post-conflict Aceh, resorting to a strategic use of "remote fieldwork" methods that, on the surface at least, look nothing like the traditional toolkit of anthropological research methods once used in long-term village studies. My research team's stories from the field filter through the discussion, and that is how the reader learns—more or less in the same manner that I did—something about both the members of my

team and post-conflict recovery dynamics in Aceh. In Chapter Three, I use the substantive findings from the research project described in Chapter Two and take them a step beyond the descriptive case studies for which they were originally used. I survey the ways in which informants from rural areas throughout Aceh describe their experience with post-MoU recovery assistance from government and humanitarian organizations. Just as Drexler critiqued the bipolar narrative that has dominated academic and policy discussions of Aceh's conflict, I use Mary Steedly's definitions of official and unofficial narratives to argue that we can discern a consolidation of competing narratives about recovery as well (Steedly 1993:133-5). Some respondents, however, share stories that do not fit neatly into a consolidated narrative of Aceh's recovery; whether caught in an undertow or making tactical use of epistemic murk, some conflict survivors blur distinctions between perpetrator and victim, and have trouble leveraging their conflict experience toward reparations or even acknowledgement.

Chapters Four and Five recount the memories of Acehnese friends and colleagues that I interviewed during my "reunion tour" to Aceh in January 2012 as a private citizen and researcher, without the auspices of a humanitarian organization. I conducted roughly twenty interviews with people who have worked on either post-tsunami or post-MoU recovery efforts with NGOs, and I examine the long term effects and implications of their work on the reconstitution of civil society in Aceh after nearly all international humanitarian organizations have left. They describe their current situation and reflect back on the extraordinary times during the *jaman NGO* (NGO era). Chapter Four focuses on a group of close friends and family who all worked for IOM's Post-Conflict Reintegration Program, and have since returned to their hometown of Blang Pidie in the remote district of Southwest Aceh. I look closely at their memories of working for IOM and use Siegel's concept of recognition to make sense of the

recurring figure of the expatriate in their stories. Chapter Five builds upon the argument I started in Chapter Four and expands it based on a set of interviews with a diverse set of friends who live in Banda Aceh. Some civil society leaders play the role of local “champions” who move easily among international donors, high government officials, their peers in civil society, and the beneficiaries of humanitarian aid in ways that have reintegrative effects, reintroducing Acehnese back to a once brutal but now benevolent Indonesia. Other civil society leaders maintain a stance of critical resistance and remain suspicious of efforts to reintroduce a hierarchical system of governance that brings little benefit to Acehnese communities. Framing these stories is the current political context of Aceh in January 2012. As former GAM leaders have assumed control of both the legislative and executive branches of the provincial government, their impulse toward authoritarian rule, with a return to political violence and intimidation, now calls the status and fate of civil society, so greatly enhanced during Aceh’s “NGO era,” into uncertain question. At the conclusion of this dissertation, I ask whether the optimistic era of Aceh’s experimentation in new forms of governance that Mary-Jo and Byron Good have written about has come to an end.

# Chapter 1: Inbox

“As an alternative to fax and telephone, E-Mail has proved to be the most cost-effective and efficient means of electronic communication and should continue to be used whenever possible.”  
— International Organization for Migration General Bulletin No. 1157, Internal Communications Guidelines, 26 March 1998

“Electronic mail today, even more than the fax, is on the way to transforming the entire public and private space of humanity.” — Jacques Derrida (1996:17)

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## **! This Message is High Priority**

### **Email Thread #1: “Opportunity — Case Study on ICRS with Oxfam”**

On a late Thursday morning in early March 2007, an email from my boss arrived in my inbox. As the Program Manager of the International Organization for Migration’s (IOM) Post-Conflict Reintegration Program (PCRCP) in Aceh, Mark routinely sent program updates to a small group of IOM directors and senior managers based in Banda Aceh and Jakarta, and he would typically include his core managerial staff in Banda Aceh on the “carbon copy” (Cc:) line of his program updates. Depending on the latest issues facing the program he would occasionally include senior policy officials at IOM’s headquarters in Geneva and/or his field staff based in ten different Information, Counseling, and Referral Service (ICRS) offices around Aceh delivering the program to its beneficiaries: individual assistance for 3,000 GAM ex-combatants and 2,000 amnestied prisoners along with village-level peace dividends for dozens of civilian communities throughout Aceh that suffered the worst conflict violence.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Total beneficiaries in IOM’s Post-Conflict Reintegration Program match the number of ex-combatants and amnestied prisoners agreed to in the MoU between GAM and GoI signed on 15 August 2005.

The email header, which contains the message's meta-data, is an important component of email composition. On the "Subject:" line for Mark's email dated 8 March 2007 he wrote "Opportunity — Case Study on ICRS with Oxfam" and he assigned urgency to his message by using the "high priority" label, signified with an exclamation point ("!"). Mark further signaled his email's importance by sending it to nearly two dozen IOM colleagues both above and below his own position within the organization. The primary recipients listed on the "To:" line included IOM Indonesia's Chief of Mission, Deputy Chief of Mission, and Senior Project Development Officer all based in Jakarta, as well as the Head of the Aceh/Nias Recovery and Rehabilitation Program in Banda Aceh. On the "Cc:" line Mark included all of his PCRCP program managers, the Reintegration Unit staff in Banda Aceh, the Emergency and Post-Crisis Unit in Geneva, and the entire Project Development Management Team for IOM Indonesia. All recipients on the "Cc:" line were defined with group distribution aliases; my own IOM email address, for example, was included within the "All PCRCP Program Managers" alias together with the seven other managers that reported to Mark.

Having listed so many recipients for this high priority message, the text of Mark's email begins incongruously with an address to only one person among them: Steve Cook, IOM's Chief of Mission for Indonesia. The following excerpts from Mark's email lay out the opportunity mentioned in the subject line, with some editing in brackets for clarity:

Steve,

An interesting opportunity has arisen for the programme, and for the whole IOM individual reintegration model through the ICRS. Jesse, Miriam, and I had a meeting with Oxfam yesterday at their request... A number of their projects throughout Aceh [are] experiencing increased levels of extortion from KPA elements... We had a general discussion of the problem, outlining how BRA assistance had possibly exacerbated the problem, how the KPA grassroots viewed contractors and INGOs as legitimate extortion targets, and how following the [2006] elections there were few options for exerting pressure through the GAM/KPA leadership...

Oxfam zeroed in on a particular problem that they were experiencing on a small island just off Banda Aceh. They have a project to deliver clean water to a number of communities; they describe the island as isolated and having a number of other agencies and contractors working

there. A short while ago the project ran into problems with returned KPA... demanding a 10% cut of all activities. Other organizations working on the island had all experienced similar requests, and they had all acquiesced... [But] Oxfam are unable to agree to these demands and described their fruitless two week process of seeking a solution that involved the KPA, BRR and local leaders... Oxfam has [since] suspended its operations on the island, and is considering pulling out if the problem cannot be resolved. Oxfam [estimates] there are around 24 returned KPA; [our] programme has the capacity to absorb [them].

This is my thinking, and the opportunity: Due to a lack of specific assistance to returning combatants... the environment for delivering aid has deteriorated to the point that an INGO of good standing is about to withdraw due to threats and increasing instability. If IOM accepts these returned KPA into the programme and delivers the individual assistance, we believe that the immediate threats will stop and [Oxfam] will be able to [resume their aid]. Accepting and delivering to these individuals [does] not present the programme with any insurmountable operational problems. The additional activity is to capture data on the context prior to our delivery, expand the data capture on the individuals during registration, and capture data on the context following delivery. Such an undertaking would provide IOM with an irrefutable case-study example of the effect of delivering to an individual case load upon post-conflict stability. The advantage of the island location is that it is 'sealed' from wider factors that could interfere with the context, [thus] easier... to argue that the additional individual assistance affected the context, and hence the stability.

What I would require, assuming we have buy-in, is a short-term consultant to design and capture the data then write-up the case study... This person could work closely with the Project Development Management Team and [our] Research Coordinator to undertake the study... Oxfam would participate in the study and have their name associated with the resulting publication, lending the findings additional credibility... [The results] could potentially prove our thesis that delivering to individuals through the ICRS [improves stability]. One final consideration, the programme will deliver to these 24 individuals with or without the study; the effect on the context of delivering to these 24 would be greater on the island than delivering to 24 individuals in any other part of Aceh.<sup>22</sup> With this in mind, some extra assets and coordination could result in a very publishable case study that can be used to report to the programme's present donors, feed into IOM Indonesia's efforts to get additional funding for an expanded case load and be utilized by IOM globally to define/prove the effects of our ICRS model.

With your permission I will begin planning.

Mark.

Mark sent this email before lunch so that he might quickly secure enough internal “buy-in” within IOM to give a final decision to Oxfam before the weekend and then discuss it in more detail during a PCRCP strategic planning retreat the following week. The program updates that Mark regularly sent to this same group of people typically summarized the current macro-level political context in Aceh and how it affected the state of the program. By contrast, the email above summarizes a singular and unexpected “opportunity” to conduct a micro-level case study

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<sup>22</sup> Mark is making a dosage concentration argument, also a local participation rate argument, which would be 100% on the island, something the program could never realistically achieve in any other defined locality in Aceh. But this in itself introduces unrealistic bias.

evaluation of the program in a seductively ideal social science research setting: an “isolated” island, “sealed from wider factors,” offering greater control of “captured” data.

Within two hours Mark received the rapid responses he was hoping for from four people (with more to follow) who chose to “reply to all.”<sup>23</sup> Two were from project managers of an equal or subordinate position to Mark who both offered helpful suggestions to improve the research proposal. The Head of IOM’s Community Liaison Unit in Aceh, for example, supported Mark’s “outstanding idea,” and offered to share:

a matrix of intimidation, extortion, and related incidents that have led to suspension, postponement, and cessation of construction in a wide range of [IOM’s] construction projects along [Aceh’s] east coast. This also includes the mechanisms deployed and outcomes achieved (rarely satisfactory) to address the problems as they arose. We would be happy to provide you with all the KPA-related ones if this would contribute to the contextualization of the case study.

More important to Mark’s immediate purpose—securing IOM’s assumed “buy-in”—were the two other rapid replies from senior colleagues in a position to approve or deny his proposal. The Head of the Aceh/Nias Recovery and Rehabilitation Program in Banda Aceh, Bruno Oudmayer, wrote that he liked “the idea of a case study, which would lend tangible credibility to our approach,” but then added a paragraph full of his characteristic skepticism:

I am not sure whether this is necessary to generate more [funding]. I believe everybody is already aware that 3000 ex-combatants is far too little; everybody would like to do more with or without the case study... Furthermore I would be concerned that such intervention sets a precedent that we are seen by INGOs... as well by elements in KPA and government as yielding to pressure (even if it is not us who are suffering the current KPA extortion), possibly resulting in further requests [from our] program and even further extortion attempts, thus having an overall negative effect... On balance, I think that the potential benefits do not outweigh the potential risks.

Less than an hour after Bruno’s reply the Chief of Mission in Jakarta, Steve Cook, sent his comments that were remarkably more supportive than Bruno’s but with several caveats as well:

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<sup>23</sup> I emphasize that Mark received four “reply to all” responses because he may have received more if some of the original recipients chose to “reply to sender” only. In those cases, Mark would sometimes forward “reply to sender” emails to relevant project managers, but I would require access to Mark’s email archive in order to know how often he did that. This distinction has relevance for developing the idea of email user networks later in this chapter.



This sounds like an excellent opportunity to concretely demonstrate the effectiveness of our reintegration approach and the impact it has on the broader Aceh recovery dynamic which as you say could be a powerful tool for further program development... A couple questions occur: how do we know they are KPA rather than a bunch of thugs and how will we verify? If we're not careful with this we would run the risk of the impression spreading that if you engage in extortion and claim KPA affiliation as the basis for it you will be lavished with assistance... If Oxfam is willing to participate in the study and associate themselves with it would they also be willing to fund all or part of it? In any event this should be thoroughly thought through during the PCRCP strategic planning retreat.

For each reply-to-all in this rapidly expanding thread of emails arriving in our inboxes, Mark sent replies-to-all with point-for-point rejoinders to every suggestion and critique. Addressing Bruno's concerns, Mark argued that the very isolation of the island would minimize the risk of a perception that IOM yields to pressure, not least because IOM is responding to Oxfam's problem, not IOM's. "The real risk," Mark countered, "is that the assistance does not stop the extortion," in which case IOM "would learn many useful lessons." Mark also reminded Bruno that the argument for "an expanded caseload is far from won, even if our data and perceptions in Aceh lead us to that," noting that "the donors in Jakarta are less than convinced, possibly because they only see the data, millions disbursed through BRA, and are not living with the effects." He closed by arguing that the island's isolation offers IOM a chance to achieve the "biggest bang for our buck" in an ideal, controlled research setting to test IOM's approach to reintegration. In place of a formal valediction, Mark ended his message with emphatic parting words: "I hope to convince you on this."

In his reply to Steve Cook—a closer ally to Mark than Bruno—Mark could not afford to directly critique Steve's distance from the everyday effects of living with KPA's increasingly belligerent behavior in post-conflict Aceh. Instead he explained that Oxfam had already established the credibility of the KPA extortionists on the island. Mark subtly inverted his critique against Jakarta and instead urged Steve to "look at this from an Aceh perspective." Then he reminded Steve that any DDR program must first try to prevent emerging threats, and failing

that must react to them in order to maintain stability. An Aceh perspective supports “delivering to ex-combatants” in order to “avoid consequences.”<sup>24</sup>

By mid-morning the next day, Mark had composed four detailed reply-to-all emails in response to comments and critiques from senior colleagues, including a DDR specialist based at IOM headquarters in Geneva. In a more private email to his eight PCRCP project managers, Mark forwarded his original email without the accumulated replies from the original thread and offered his evaluation of the response: “I can summarize the feedback we had on this as misguided, weak, wet and pointless. So we are going to crack-on and get it done.” As the Research Coordinator on the PCRCP staff, I had the most at stake in the outcome of this proposal, so I took an opportunity to reply-to-all PCRCP staff and suggested that we take each of the senior IOM director responses with us to the retreat so that we will all be prepared to fend off their “weak, wet, and pointless critiques in a way that makes the critics think we’re taking them seriously.”

Nested further within this thread of emails we can find private emails between two individuals, and about these I can only speak for the messages in my own archive. Two small examples include an informal email containing just a three-letter abbreviation that I sent to Mark to convey my astonishment after we all received Bruno’s dismissive reply: “WTF.” For this email I used the forward function and typed in Mark’s email address to ensure direct delivery to him only. In another private email to Mark, I addressed Steve’s primary concern by reminding Mark that it is “easy to verify KPA members via the *panglima* [the local GAM commander whose territory includes the island], which I think Oxfam has already done.” As noted above, Mark incorporated this point in his formally composed reply to Steve.

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<sup>24</sup> Mark’s “Aceh Perspective” (more on this below) helps explain why all other organizations on the island have taken the short cut and acquiesced to KPA demands, with the formal recommendation of BRR to do so.

## **Oxfam’s Attachments: “FW: Info on Oxfam work in Pulo Nasi”**

One week later, two days after we had returned from our staff retreat, Mark forwarded an email to me and three other PCRP staff from Lilianne Fan, the Senior Policy Coordinator for Oxfam’s Aceh and Nias Tsunami Response Program. The five of us were scheduled to attend our second planning meeting with Oxfam in the afternoon, and Lilianne’s email to Mark provided exhaustive background information about the island and Oxfam’s activities there since the tsunami. The subject line, “FW: Info on Oxfam work in Pulo Nasi,” provides a name for the island that had remained unspecified throughout the entirety of Mark’s internal IOM thread the previous week. The main text of Lilianne’s email includes basic demographic data about Pulo Nasi—1895 residents from 547 households living in a federation (*mukim*) of five villages—and its historical significance during the conflict:

KPA’s local *panglima* [commander] for Pulo Aceh<sup>25</sup> says there are 24 active KPA members on Pulo Aceh (including Pulo Nasi), including 6 *inong balee* [female ex-combatants]. Pulo Aceh was apparently peaceful during the DOM era, and started to be affected by TNI counter-insurgency operations in 2000 with the launch of *Operasi Cinta Meunasah I* and *II*.<sup>26</sup> The island evolved into a GAM stronghold, and under Martial Law became the target of a massive joint attack by the Air Force, Navy, and Army (the *panglima* and other KPA members claim that air raids were conducted during this period). There were plans in mid-2003 to build a detention facility for processing GAM prisoners on Pulo Nasi (see attached media reports), but this was eventually withdrawn in favour of renovating an existing prison on the mainland.

Lilianne attached six documents to her email, including the media reports from June 2003 about TNI plans to build a prison camp on Pulo Nasi (the “TNI’s Guantanamo”) one month after the declaration of Martial Law (Jakarta Post 2003; Koran Tempo 2003). The other attachments describe Oxfam’s tsunami recovery and development programs on Pulo Nasi since 2005, mostly in the “log-frame” (logistical framework) spreadsheet format that international humanitarian and development organizations typically use, such as IDP camp management for tsunami survivors;

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<sup>25</sup> Pulo Aceh is the name of the sub-district (*kecamatan*) of Aceh Besar district (*kabupaten*) that includes Pulo Nasi and several other small islands off the coast of Banda Aceh.

<sup>26</sup> *Operasi Cinta Meunasah I & II* were the names of TNI’s counter-insurgency missions in Aceh in between the DOM period of the 1990s and the martial law period from May 2003 until after the tsunami.

relocation programs back from IDP camps on mainland Aceh to Pulo Nasi; livelihood support programs ranging from simple cash-for-work activities to skills trainings to micro-credit savings groups; and finally an intensive public health promotion program with an emphasis on clean water. Log-frame documents also lay out a timeline of activities for each program, starting with assessment work, community-based program planning and monitoring, coordination meetings, materials procurement, program implementation, and evaluation.

In her conclusion, Lillianne suggests terms for developing Oxfam's partnership with IOM, one practical and field-based, the other at the level of advocacy and policy development:

1. to support the implementation of IOM's programme of assistance in Pulo Aceh, Stuart mentioned that we have 2 offices on the island, one which IOM might make use of if you were to commit to extending your programme there. We are also still looking at ways that we can involve KPA members in some of our activities, including through on the job training, etc.
2. to develop strategies to advocate donors and the wider recovery community about the critical need for a coherent recovery framework for Aceh that prioritises policies and programmes which directly support peace-building and address the root causes of the conflict as a basis for sustainable long-term growth and development. This currently does not exist... My sense from conversations with senior individuals in BRR and local government is that there is indeed a growing awareness that the various stakeholders in Aceh cannot afford to take 'peace' for granted and that a failure to address the specific post-conflict challenges will have dire consequences not only for the reconstruction process but also for sustainable peace and development in the province.

On a Saturday morning after our second meeting with Oxfam, Mark forwarded a second email to me that he received only moments earlier from Ian Small, Oxfam's Senior Program Manager for Aceh and Nias. The fact that Ian wrote to Mark on a weekend less than a day after our meeting suggests the enthusiasm with which Oxfam was approaching a potential collaboration with IOM. The subject line in my inbox: "FW: good to meet yesterday." Ian's message requests feedback from Mark on a draft Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Pulo Nasi case study, which he attached, stressing that he "wrote [the ToR] very quickly as an internal document to cement some action within our own organization." The ToR Introduction lays out the problem:

We are currently dealing with a sensitive issue on Pulo Nasi, whereby young men have threatened our staff and unless we can resolve the issues in a way that upholds our principles, we stand the risk of being thrown off the island. At this point we are unable to separate out how much of the issue is about young thugs throwing their weight around trying to extort money from us (illegal actions) or how much of it is a case of legitimate ex-combatants who are at the margins of society and their expressed need of support has been ignored by us because we treat such issues as [Human Resource] issues rather than programmatic—conflict sensitivity—issues... The Oxfam Aceh/Nias programme remains frustrated with our inability thus far to show leadership on post-conflict issues given our donor finance restrictions.

The ToR then states the objective of the case study: “The goal is to capture data” to “produce a policy paper” that will “advocate for a more coherent recovery process in Aceh with a substantial investment in post-conflict issues,” with an explicit reference in bold-face print to an emerging “**equity divide**”<sup>27</sup> in Aceh’s recovery programs.<sup>28</sup> The proposed methods for the case study acknowledge the crucial contributions that IOM would make by providing individual assistance to ex-combatants and collecting data about these clients before, during, and after their acceptance into the ICRS program, but also suggest a variety of qualitative methods to supplement the IOM data such as compiling meeting minutes, conducting key informant interviews, writing human interest case studies, drafting a bibliography on post-conflict issues in Aceh, and asking a few Oxfam staff and community members to “keep a simple diary.” The ToR concludes with an ambitious pre-implementation timeline that includes a visit to Pulo Nasi within four days “to discuss and present our plan to the various stakeholders,” and a finalized, signed MoU with IOM within ten days so that the case study research could begin in April.

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<sup>27</sup> A footnote next to the bold-faced “**equity divide**” in the TOR reads: “We are intentionally keeping a broad focus on the issue, not calling or limiting it to such concepts as ex-combatants, reintegration, corruption, coercion, extortion etc. as we see these as symptoms of a wider problem—that of ensuring peace in Aceh. In that sense our analysis is that equity—or rather a lack there-of fuels conflict.”

<sup>28</sup> Oxfam was at the forefront of identifying and addressing the equity divide between tsunami and conflict recovery programs in Aceh. Subsequent research by academics that have worked in Aceh’s humanitarian community has verified this issue as a barrier to peace (Noble and Thorburn 2009; Waizenegger and Hyndman 2010; Zeccola 2011).

## Email Thread #2: “The Island — The Problem — The Solution”

Late on Monday afternoon, Mark sent his follow-up email—high priority again—to Ian, Lilianne, and three other Oxfam project managers, and on the “Cc:” line he included me, the PCRP Deputy Program Manager, and the PCRP Reintegration Unit. None of the senior IOM persons that had collectively debated the merits of the case study a week and a half prior were included. The confident subject line: “The Island — The Problem — The Solution.” The message summarizes everything Mark was able to find out about ICRS involvement with KPA from Pulo Nasi so far, and outlines the next steps IOM will take:

Ian, et al.

Following our meeting on Friday, we have taken things forward. Let me share the data we have, and suggest how we proceed. One of my Reintegration Unit staff has met with Raja Hitam (Black King), who I believe is the KPA *panglima* for Pulo Nasi (The Island) that you guys have already spoken with. The meeting was not arranged but we ran into him at the Aceh Besar ICRS office, as we had registration of ex-combatants this morning. Raja explained his angst at Oxfam and reiterated his wish to 'be involved' in order that he could 'share' with the people/communities. Let us not waste time on analyzing his angst, this is more about influence and political power, but he does believe their own arguments. We have not mentioned to Raja our conversations with Oxfam. The additional data is that there are a total of 16 KPA on The Island, 7 of which are [already] registered clients of ours, with a remaining 9 unregistered. The fact that 7 are registered does not mean that they have been delivered to as yet. Our next move, this afternoon, is to contact Muharam the Head of KPA for Aceh Besar. Our intent is to inform him that we will be taking additional clients on The Island, to ascertain his reaction. If he objects, then I shall make a deal with him for extra clients in Aceh Besar and remove his objection. I shall let you know how that goes later today, assuming that there is a no objection.

Objection or not, here are my suggestions on how we proceed. I believe that we will have to have a meeting with KPA here in Banda Aceh, by which I mean us, you and them. Our thesis at present is that the KPA are 'kicking-off' due to high expectations and no specific assistance for their members. Our solution was to provide the assistance and that would meet some of their economic expectations, and Oxfam would continue a dialogue with the communities in order to create the space required for the delivery of assistance. The two additional pieces of data lead me to believe that we should add one element to this approach. The fact that 7 of 16 KPA on The Island are registered removes half of the expectations argument, but not the economic argument as they have not been delivered to as yet. The fact that Raja, our Black King, believes his own arguments means that we should engage him directly. Our 'expectations' and 'economic' solutions do not meet the political aspect, and I believe that we should address this. Do not balk at me bringing in politics, it is generic, I believe that we should meet with Raja (possibly with Muharam if he objects) and simply cut a deal. Let us make clear the connection between additional clients, and a rapid delivery, with their present activities and their cessation.

In terms of the study and your present plans, I do not think they are affected. Remembering that our intention is to help create the space for Oxfam to continue operations, this is my best advice on how to achieve that. If we take this additional 'political' aspect forward then it is already a lesson learned. In terms of your plans for meeting on The Island on Monday 26th, I would suggest to meet that deadline, that we arrange the tri-partite meeting in BA for that date. This

would not preclude the meetings on The Island with communities on the same day. The outcome of the IOM-KPA-Oxfam meeting would be an agreement on what IOM will deliver, and how KPA's actions towards Oxfam will change.

Any thoughts, additions, objections or suggestions?

Mark.

Within an hour, Ian sent a brief reply-to-all to simply say that Mark's plan "sounds reasonable," and referred the details of meeting planning down to his "Aceh Besar team." The next morning, the Oxfam project manager more directly involved with the ongoing problems in Pulo Nasi sent his reply-to-all as well. He thanked Mark for all the work he had done so far, and agreed with Ian that the idea to hold a tri-partite IOM-KPA-Oxfam meeting "sounds very reasonable." He confirmed that a community stakeholders meeting would take place within a few days, and only added that he hoped "someone from the Oxfam main office," preferably Lilianne or Ian, would be able to attend the tri-partite meeting in Banda Aceh. Mark had the last word on this final email thread about the Pulo Nasi case study, with a reply-to-all, declaring "No problems," and "good to know that we are still all on the same song sheet." He concluded his email with a promise to try and "confirm the meeting by the end of today," but the email archive has no further communications about a collaborative case study with Oxfam in Pulo Nasi.

## **Inbox as Both a Source of Data and a Method of Inquiry**

In this chapter I argue that we might creatively examine the work and logic of large humanitarian agencies such as IOM and its partner organizations through the administration and everyday practices of their email systems. By the late 1990s, IOM determined that email had become their most cost-effective and efficient means of communication, "and should continue to be used whenever possible." At around the same time, Jacques Derrida privileged email above all other recent communication technology innovations, calling its arrival an "archival

earthquake,” noting that its “technical structure... also determines the structure of the archivable content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future. The archivization produces as much as it records the event” (Derrida 1996:16-17). And yet my review of the anthropological literature has not yielded a sustained ethnographic account of the structure, practice, and genre of email as a dominant communication technology.

The Pulo Nasi example shows how the email archive captures with remarkable fidelity the timeline of IOM’s activities and negotiations, successes and failures. The email archive also bears witness in a mosaic fashion to the wider context of post-tsunami and post-conflict developments in Aceh. News articles and digests, press releases, research findings, and security incidents all found their way into the inbox as IOM was deeply involved in recovery efforts all across the province. From the Pulo Nasi example, Lilianne’s informational email and Ian’s ToR document provide a comprehensive historic and programmatic background from Oxfam’s perspective about a tiny island that rarely figures in larger narratives of conflict and recovery in Aceh, and yet Oxfam’s experience there speaks to all of the challenges that every humanitarian organization in Aceh has faced. In short, the IOM email archive has been just as valuable as any of my own private fieldnotes for reconstructing both the timeline of my fieldwork in Aceh and the historical unfolding of the peace process from 2005 through 2007. As for the unexpected absences in the archive such as the abrupt end of IOM’s Pulo Nasi plans with Oxfam, these shortcomings may turn out to reveal more about humanitarian organizations in Aceh than they conceal with the help of a few reliable analytical instruments from the anthropological toolkit.

As a powerful and preferred communications medium, IOM’s email network structures the work environment for nearly all of its employees, including the IOM staff who do not have an email address such as the drivers. The first thing IOM office staff do when they enter the



office in the morning is turn on their computer and open up the email client to check for new messages, and the last thing they do in the late afternoon or evening is check it one last time before they leave. Senior level managers must carry an IOM-issued Blackberry smartphone encrypted with a secure connection to the IOM email network so that they will be able to respond to crisis situations at a moment's notice when they are outside the office. As the email documentation of the Pulo Nasi case study shows, a steady stream of email enters the Inbox all throughout the day. Although most email messages are "low priority" and frequently irrelevant to recipients, the email network still demands frequent interruptions from other tasks if only to check new messages then click the "delete" button. These are just some of the ways that IOM's email network both facilitates and hinders IOM's work.

The Pulo Nasi example also suggests how IOM's email network reproduces institutional organization and hierarchy. Mark sent his first email to senior figures on the "To:" line with subordinates on the "Cc:" line. Lilianne wrote to Mark, her peer in the corresponding organizational structures between IOM and Oxfam, who then forwarded the message to subordinates on his team. Further discussion about meetings, assessments, and selection of PCRPs beneficiaries occurs at the field level of both organizations, IOM's ICRS office in Aceh Besar and Oxfam's "Aceh Besar team" mentioned in Ian's email. Although some national staff were included in these emails, particularly from the PCRPs reintegration unit, the conversations were held exclusively among expatriates, suggesting differential levels of authorization among IOM staff to add one's voice to an emerging email thread with a diverse group of participants.

Anticipating the usefulness of a precise and chronological documentation of my work in Aceh, I saved every email in my IOM inbox, including the spam. Recognizing that all email users at IOM ultimately have different content in their archives because of their inclusion on or

exclusion from various distribution lists, I specifically asked that my email address be included on national staff distribution lists in addition to international staff distribution lists in order to increase the diversity of emails in my archive. My IOM email archive offers a rare opportunity to compare the conversations that take place on either side of this prominent organizational divide within IOM's Indonesia country mission.

In this opening chapter of my dissertation, the Inbox serves as both a point of entry into the humanitarian encounter in post-conflict Aceh and a novel method for its analysis. Following Bruno Latour's deceptively simple method of "sticking to the framework and the limits indicated by the interviewees themselves," I exclusively use my IOM Inbox and its rich archival content—with its local emphasis on our conflict recovery work in Aceh—as a starting point to trace out some of the logics and limits of IOM's global humanitarian network (Latour 1996:18). But before I discuss user networks on IOM's email system, my analysis begins at an elemental level with Mikhail Bakhtin's definition of the speech utterance. Taken in aggregate, an IOM staff person's email archive captures nearly every instance of his or her text-based communication as both an addressor (in the sent mail folder) and addressee (in the inbox). This "addressivity, the quality of turning to someone," Bakhtin writes, is "the first constitutive feature of the utterance." Following Bakhtin's definition, every email in the archive counts as a discrete "utterance," a "unit of speech communication" (as opposed to "units of language" such as words or sentences), characterized firstly by addressivity and secondly by "finalization," when the speaker or writer "has said everything he wishes to say at a particular moment or under particular circumstances." Even though a single email has clearly defined boundaries, with an absolute beginning and an absolute end, the writer and readers of that utterance can only make full sense of it in the context of several registers. First, each utterance is a "link in the chain of speech communication," the

boundaries of each utterance “determined by a change of speech subjects” (Bakhtin 1986:76-77). Email users call a linked chain of emails a thread or conversation. Every email must be read as a dialogue with the thread in which it is embedded, “both those [emails] to which it responds and those that respond to it” (ibid.76-77). Second, the emails in a thread lead us in a Latourian fashion from one email to the next toward an accumulation of communication threads that in aggregate trace the contours of and define the email user’s network. Third, the extent to which a single email utterance conforms with or strays from the speech conventions (or genre) that characterize the entire constellation of IOM emails in the archive accentuates that email’s sensibility in specific ways. And finally, we have to take an account of the media effects that the email client and network server bring to bear on every message that travels through IOM’s communication system.

### **The Email Client and its Functions**

IOM uses Microsoft Outlook as its email client for every email user on its staff, and Microsoft Exchange Server as the link that connects all Outlook users via a central server on a shared network within the organization.<sup>29</sup> By itself, Outlook integrates a single user’s email with contact lists, calendars, and task management features into a deluxe communications platform with secretarial support functions. Combined with Exchange Server, IOM synchronizes these features across all Outlook users within the organization, which then allows for a shared directory of users and distribution lists, calendar management for scheduling meetings with discrete participants, and secure access to email away from one’s computer using either an internet web browser or a handheld smartphone device. When an IOM staff person opens the

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<sup>29</sup> IOM used Microsoft Outlook as its email client, but there are many other email software and exchange server systems that other organizations may use instead, with media effects that certainly vary from what I describe in this chapter.

Outlook client while connected to the IOM network, Exchange Server automatically synchronizes the user's online inbox with IOM's central server, and reproduces any new messages from the central server in the user's Outlook inbox. Each user has a limited quota of storage space on the central server, so IOM staff must routinely delete or remove older emails from their online inbox. Email removed from the server may be stored in an offline archive on the user's own computer and remain accessible with the user's Outlook client.

On a computer screen, the Outlook display features several panels framed within a single window. The first panel, typically a vertical column on the far left of the Outlook display, is the file directory displayed as nested folders with the online inbox at the top. The directory automatically includes additional folders for unsent drafts, sent email, deleted email, and spam messages. The user may create additional folders to categorize and store emails either on the online server or in an offline archive. Selecting one of these directories activates a second display panel that shows the list of all the emails in the directory, and these may be sorted chronologically, by sender, priority status, presence and size of attachments, and so on. When the user clicks on one of the email messages in the list, the message appears in a third panel either within the main Outlook display or as a separate window on the computer screen. A single message has header information at the top (sender, date sent, recipients, priority status, subject), and the email's content beneath it, frequently with a thread of prior messages reproduced beneath the primary content. If a single message is part of a larger discussion thread, there is a button at the top of the header that will reveal all of the related emails that the user has received both before and after the email currently in view. At the top of the Outlook display, a fourth panel appears as a toolbar across the entire Outlook display with a row of "buttons" that may be clicked to activate a variety of email functions such as compose a new email, reply, reply all,

forward, and delete. When a user composes a new email, a separate window opens that includes spaces and settings for filling in the header information at the top of the window with a large blank space beneath the header data for writing the message. When composing a reply or forwarding someone else's email to new recipients, the body will automatically include all prior communications in the ongoing discussion. An email "signature" designed by the user that typically includes the user's full name, position at IOM, and contact information usually appears as an automatic insert at the bottom of the message.

## **Discourse in the Email Archive**

Emile Benveniste broadly defines discourse as every utterance assuming an addressor and an addressee, and in the addressor, the intention of influencing the other in some way (Benveniste 1973). He argues that language in its discursive form is responsible for the production of subjectivity because the dialectic switching between "I" and "you" in discourse produces a contrast that enables recognition of self. Viewed through the Outlook client, a user's IOM email archive might be seen as a precise, detailed representation of the user's subject position within IOM's entire discursive field. According to Benveniste, discourse relies exclusively upon the back and forth switching of first and second person; the third person is the domain of history, where objective narratives unfold outside of discourse. For the general purpose of defining the discursive practices of email, I think of the names appearing on the "sender" and "To:" lines in an email as participants in discourse. For passive email recipients on the "Cc:" line, however, the same email functions as a historical document because they are not the formal addressee but instead are included as a witness for their reference only. Attached documents, such as the helpful background documents about Pulo Nasi that Lilianne sent to

Mark, in as much as they are points of reference for all participants in an email discussion, also reside outside of discourse.<sup>30</sup> In practice, of course, objective historical narratives and discourse are in constant interaction. Lilianne's attachments, for example, provide additional leverage to her speech because her words are backed up with an accumulation of objective facts. We also see this interaction when Ian Small actively solicits Mark's comment on his attached ToR, or when PCRCP project managers originally included on the Cc: line of Mark's first email replied-to-all with their suggestions to supply contextual data.

If in discourse the addressor intends to influence the addressee in some way, then each email utterance in the user's archive should also be read as discrete performative speech acts in an unfolding, dynamic exercise of power and persuasion within IOM's discursive field. Framing this discourse, the Outlook client's toolbar across the top of the email display along with each individual email's header and signature make explicit the dialogical function of language in the content of each email. Bakhtin's term "dialogicality" suggests that the back-and-forth spoken discourse between two or more people is already embedded and anticipated in the individual speech acts of each participant (Bakhtin 1981). In dialogue, all email utterances "are aware of and mutually reflect one another" (1986:91). The Outlook client facilitates the user's participation in the dialogue, providing metalingual reminders in the form of buttons and blank fields to reply, reply-to-all, forward, file away, or delete the messages that accumulate in the inbox. Every reply, reply-to-all, or forward helpfully quotes the previous email(s), generating the discussion thread, so that the sender can tailor a specific response and the recipient

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<sup>30</sup> Use of the word "reference" in this sentence and the previous one is deliberate, in that Benveniste's definition of the third person corresponds to the referential function of language that de Saussure focuses on (*langue*) in his *Course on General Linguistics* to the exclusion of language in context (i.e. the pragmatic functions of language) (de Saussure 1964).

understands the context within which the sender's message was written. Some examples from the Pulo Nasi case study negotiations illustrate the process:

Mark's original email anticipates and tries to foreclose resistance by writing almost as if to inform rather than request permission from his superiors about the opportunity with Oxfam. He starts by addressing Steve only, an implicit challenge to formal reporting lines by not addressing the three other superior IOM staff that Mark specifically listed in the "To:" line. Mark reminds his readers of his detailed knowledge about reintegration issues in Aceh and shows not just how IOM's post-conflict program has an ideal model to address Oxfam's problems but also that the Oxfam case presents a rare opportunity for testing the model itself. In short, Mark asserts his authority and knowledge in a well-crafted argument, while also using phrases like "assuming that we have buy-in" and "with your permission I will begin planning" as if his email is a mere formality and "permission" is a foregone conclusion.

The rapid and contrasting responses from IOM's Head of the Aceh/Nias Program in Banda Aceh and then, less than an hour later, from IOM's Chief of Mission in Jakarta suggest an internal conflict. Bruno's dissent speaks for himself using the "I" pronoun almost exclusively, while Steve's cautious enthusiasm for Mark's plan uses the inclusive "we," leveraging his leadership to speak for everyone in the mission. Bruno reframes Oxfam's problem on Pulo Nasi, turning what Mark originally described as an opportunity into a risk in order to argue against Mark's plan. Steve repeats and shares Bruno's concern that KPA will make fools of IOM and other organizations that cater to extortion, but reframes the issue once again as a thoughtful question for PCRPP to consider on its upcoming retreat. Steve does this only after positively acknowledging and recognizing Mark's idea to test IOM's reintegration model and leverage the results to raise additional funds, the abiding concern for any Chief of Mission.

After Mark shared his frustrations with the PCRP team, my reply unwittingly demonstrated and acknowledged the dialogic process. In my suggestion to the PCRP team that we strengthen our argument for the case study during the upcoming retreat, I first refer back to the responses Mark (and the rest of us) received by directly quoting his description: “weak, wet, and pointless critiques.” Second, even though I establish agreement with Mark’s assessment by using his own words, in order to secure that elusive “buy-in” I suggested that we respond to “weak, wet, and pointless critiques *in a way that makes the critics think* we’re taking them seriously” (emphasis added). My words preemptively anticipate the critics and suggest that our team must craft our response accordingly. From a subordinate subject position, my words leverage Mark’s in our mutual effort to secure a desired outcome in which I had much at stake. Through a dynamic process of quotation, citation, and preemptive anticipation, every utterance in the email archive both demonstrates and negotiates power relations within IOM.

## **The IOM Email Directory and User Networks**

Using the Outlook client, with background Internet facilitation by Exchange Server, all users on the IOM network can access a universal directory that lists every IOM staff person around the world. All email distribution lists, such as the aliases Mark used to fill in the “Cc:” line in the opening example (e.g. “All PCRP Program Managers”), are also available in the directory. These distribution aliases group IOM staff together and nest them hierarchically in different ways. For example, all IOM staff have a duty station specified in their contracts; the duty station determines the nest of geographically defined distribution lists in which each IOM email address appears. Any email sent to the aliases “All Users in Banda Aceh,” “All Users in Aceh,” or “All Users in Indonesia” would arrive in my inbox. Distribution lists also categorize



IOM staff by thematic working areas such as “All Migration Health Staff in Indonesia,” or by job titles such as “All Migration Health Nurses” or “All ICRS District Coordinators,” plus any useful permutations of categories such as “All Migration Health Nurses in Aceh.” The distribution lists do much of the work of reproducing IOM’s organizational structure and hierarchy on its email network. Some of the most frequently deployed email distribution aliases in my archive are those that distinguish between IOM’s national and international staff such as “All National Staff in Indonesia” or “All International Staff in Aceh” (more on this distinction below). The distribution aliases are defined and listed in the directory by local IOM information technology (IT) personnel in coordination with project managers and other senior staff.

The online IOM directory in Outlook defines the architectural and theoretical limits for defining a single user’s email network within the organization. I use the term “network” in the sense defined by Bruno Latour, whose actor-network theory partially informs the methodology for this chapter. Latour starts the investigation of a network from within and allows the actors to define their own network parameters by tracing connections from one point to the next. The only context required comes specifically from the information provided by actors (both humans and objects) at each point within the network. Actor-network theory offers anthropologists the idea that we can follow one local point to the next, examine the mediations at each point, and trace out the proliferating but tenuous webs of an interconnected network at the same time (Latour 2005; 1996). Depending on the starting point the network takes shape differently, which is why no two users’ networks at IOM—as traced through their email archives—will be the same. Even within a single email thread that includes a number of IOM staff such as the Pulo Nasi case study, the presentation of the thread as it unfolds in each user’s inbox varies beyond just the subjective distinctions between addressor, addressees, and third person observers. Under

the banner of Mark's first email titled "Opportunity — Case Study on ICRS with Oxfam," none of the senior managers included on the original message were privy to Mark's assessment of their "weak, wet, and pointless critiques" as the conversation continued among a smaller subgroup, and only Mark ever received my sarcastic abbreviated comment ("WTF.") after Bruno's critique. Likewise I must assume that other messages were exchanged under the original banner of Mark's email that did not include my email address, and in turn were not captured in my archive. So while we can learn about the humanitarian endeavor in Aceh through an exploration of the email archive, the data in this chapter are drawn from a specific network—my own—defined as an accumulation of email utterances sent and received throughout the duration of my employment at IOM, framed by the Outlook client on my computer, and mediated by IOM's Exchange Server.

### **Email User Networks Generate Organizational Identity**

Apart from some conversations with Oxfam, so far the discussion focuses almost exclusively on the internal form and function of email at IOM. One reason for this is because the vast majority of emails sent and received are internal communications. Many of these messages are forwarded messages moving up and down IOM's chain of command featuring attachments for our information. Each day the human resources unit forwards to "All Users in Indonesia" several IOM job vacancies within Indonesia and abroad; office administrators in Banda Aceh send several emails each day to "All Users in Banda Aceh" summarizing staff expense settlements, travel authorizations, salary payments, and so on; every afternoon the transportation department in Banda Aceh sends out a list of drivers working on call throughout the evening to "All International Staff in Banda Aceh" to serve our transportation needs after office hours; and

IOM headquarters in Geneva routinely sends internal newsletters and press releases to the global “All Users” distribution list highlighting IOM achievements around the world. Within a particular working group, staff send weekly and monthly progress reports, expense reports, meeting minutes, and other documents.

The accumulation and preservation of documents, of course, are one of the hallmark instruments of Max Weber’s bureaucracy: “The management of the modern office is based upon written documents (‘the files’), which are preserved in their original or draught form. There is, therefore, a staff of subaltern officials and scribes of sorts. The body of officials actively engaged in a ‘public’ office, along with the respective apparatus of material implements and the files, make up a ‘bureau’” (Weber 1991:197). For a transnational inter-governmental organization always on the move in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, digital copies are typically broadcast by email, ensuring document reproduction and storage in every relevant stakeholder’s inbox. Nearly all documents have a pre-formatted digital template, from high level inter-agency legal contracts and project proposals down to field level travel and procurement authorizations. Filling in digital templates and circulating them by email are one of the core tasks of IOM’s “subaltern officials and scribes,” who are today called administrative support staff. Some IOM staff who divided their time between office management in Banda Aceh and program implementation in the field jokingly referred to some of the senior administrative staff in Jakarta as “Forwarding Officers” because it appeared that their sole task was to forward emails throughout the day from Geneva and other country missions to “All Users in Indonesia.”

The sheer volume of email and attached documentation overwhelms most IOM staff, especially middle and senior management, who routinely complain that they receive “Cc:” emails on every conceivable office and project concern, too often only remotely related to their

job description. Most of these messages remain unread, but each one incrementally does the work of delineating and extending a user's connections within the organization while also reinforcing his or her position within this web of connections. The contours of one's network at IOM take shape through the proliferation of connections over time in the inbox. And even though no two users' email networks will look exactly the same, the shared level of internal document circulation and accumulation—this massive noise-to-signal ratio in the email archive—ensures the emergence of a familiar organizational identity for every IOM email user.

In her ethnography *The Network Inside Out* about international women's NGO networks in Fiji, Annelise Riles also highlights the circulation of documents in a way that emphasizes the inward focus and closed aspect of the "network." While Riles' informants celebrated and deployed the term "network" as both a noun and verb, emphasizing the popular or modernist definitions of the term that suggest possibilities for infinite expansion and inclusion, her analysis sees the network as self-referential and therefore concerned with the aesthetics and self-perpetuation of form. The network closes in on itself rather than expands despite its stated purpose to disseminate information. She defines a network as the "set of institutions, knowledge practices, and artifacts thereof that internally generate the effects of their own reality by reflecting on themselves," presenting a bleak image of the closed network as endlessly reproductive of itself and productive of nothing outside of it, a structure that is all form without meaningful content (Riles 2000:3). Although I disagree with Riles' hermetic definition, I find a similar dynamic at work in the IOM email archive wherein the constant internal circulation of template-ready documents—dutifully typed, formatted, and sent on time by email with a carbon copy inclusion for everyone—appears to reflexively assert and affirm IOM to itself.

Outside IOM's internal directory, all emails sent by IOM staff, such as Mark's communications with Oxfam cited above, automatically assert their organizational identity to external recipients in at least three different ways. The first is the domain name that appears on all IOM email addresses; `username@iom.int` always identifies the organizational affiliation of the sender, whereas the domain name is optional for emails sent among IOM staff. Second, when an IOM email user sends a message to another domain, the IOM email servers automatically attach a legal disclaimer at the bottom of the message:

The information contained in this electronic message and any attachments are intended for specific individuals or entities, and may be confidential, proprietary or privileged. If you are not the intended recipient, please notify the sender immediately, delete this message and do not disclose, distribute or copy it to any third party or otherwise use this message. The content of this message does not necessarily reflect the official position of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) unless specifically stated. Electronic messages are not secure or error free and may contain viruses or may be delayed, and the sender is not liable for any of these occurrences.<sup>31</sup>

The third sign that asserts IOM's identity to external email recipients is the aforementioned inclusion of an email signature at the bottom of the message that typically includes the user's name, staff position at IOM, and the user's contact information. All staff must include an automatic signature at the bottom their sent email, but every user has the flexibility to create their own, and many staff take this opportunity to individually express their organizational identity in a variety of colorful fonts and background designs.

### **Email Network Maintenance and Surveillance at All Points**

Having established the shape, identity, and borders of an IOM email user's network, I turn briefly to a special type of administrative staff in IOM's bureaucracy, the IT specialists who ensure that email services to all IOM staff remain available and stable. In every field office

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<sup>31</sup> Oxfam's email server also automatically attaches a message at the bottom of messages leaving the `oxfam.org.uk` domain. Instead of inserting a legalistic disclaimer, however, Oxfam's message is shorter and friendlier: "Oxfam works with others to overcome poverty and suffering. Oxfam GB is a member of Oxfam International, a company limited by guarantee and registered in England."

where IOM expects its staff to maintain regular communication by email, IOM must invest in, then install and maintain a telecommunications infrastructure that connects at least one computer securely to IOM's Exchange Server. In Aceh IOM had to invest in satellite ground station communication technology to extend and secure its email network into disaster settings all across Aceh, at first along the coast following the tsunami and then again when the additional ICRS field offices were opened in former conflict areas after the peace agreement. Latour's actor-network theory draws attention to the mediation effects at every point in a network, and that includes the cost of extending the reach of IOM's network capacity. IOM's IT budget comes from a percentage of every project budget, part of IOM's overhead charge that it reports to donors. The budget supports not just hardware procurement but also the IT staff who assign equipment and email addresses to IOM staff and monitor the network. Because IOM specializes in emergency response, the borders, or reach, of IOM's network capacity are constantly under construction or contraction and therefore require constant surveillance, underscoring the locality and fragility of IOM's network at all points.

Throughout 2006 and 2007, the IOM IT staff in Indonesia routinely sent a few emails each month to keep "All Users in Aceh" abreast of problems or changes in the network, or to remind users about the rules that govern use of IOM email and related online services such as Internet browsing and data storage on IOM's servers. The most common issues that come up in these messages cover three general domains that reflect the cost of maintaining email access for IOM staff in Aceh: interruptions of service due to maintenance of servers or satellite equipment; heavy or inappropriate use of email bandwidth that exceeds the network's transmission capacity, including the enduring and vexing challenge of spam surveillance; and maintenance of each user's online quota for email storage. IT staff must also communicate with individual IOM staff

to resolve user problems on a case by case basis, such as configuring personal laptop computers to access their IOM email using the wireless network. This was a particular frustration for temporary IOM consultants without an IOM email address but required access to IOM network resources in order to perform their tasks.

## **IOM Email as Practice and Genre**

The third and most important constitutive feature of the speech utterance according to Bakhtin is its “stable generic form,” or “speech genre” (Bakhtin 1986:78). A genre corresponds to a specific “sphere of speech communication” characterized by typical situations and themes. Individual utterances within a speech genre feature the patterned repetition of words applied under particular circumstances that invest the otherwise neutral “dictionary meanings” of words with shades of value and expression. The use of email at IOM—as a routine and generic form of speech communication—may be defined as a genre. All genres allow for individual creative expression—though some such as literary artistic genres are more conducive to creativity than others such as the military command or legal contract—but every unique speech utterance necessarily develops in interaction with every other utterance in the chain of communication. Furthermore, every genre has its authoritative voices: “In each social circle, in each small world of family, friends, acquaintances, and comrades in which a human being grows and lives, there are always authoritative utterances that set the tone... on which one relies, to which one refers, which are cited, imitated, and followed” (ibid.88-89). IOM headquarters in Geneva plays this role.

## **Making Good Email Users: Text Regulators from Geneva**

The Director General's Office (DGO) and the IT administrators at IOM headquarters in Geneva issue bulletins and guidelines that explain the rules of communication by email. In mid-February 2006, the head of IT services for IOM Indonesia forwarded to "All Users in Indonesia" an email he had received just two minutes earlier from the senior IT administrator in Geneva that had one of these bulletins attached titled "IOM General Bulletin No. 1157" on the subject of "Internal Communications Guidelines." "Effective immediately," Bulletin No. 1157 begins, "all IOM staff should adhere to the following guidelines in the interest of making our internal electronic communication more efficient." The bulletin illustrates efficiency by using a numeric outline format to organize succinct boldfaced topics with decimal-pointed supporting explanations, easily reproduced here in the form of a table:



Table 1: Summary of IOM “General Bulletin No. 1157” [ellipses denote excisions from the text]

<b><u>INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION</u></b>	
<b><u>GENERAL BULLETIN NO. 1157</u></b>	
<hr/>	
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS GUIDELINES</b> <span style="float: right;"><b>26 March 1998</b></span>
<hr/>	
<b>1. Use of E-Mail</b>	1.1 As an alternative to fax and telephone, E-Mail has proved to be the most cost-effective and efficient means of electronic communication and should continue to be used whenever possible.
<b>2. Message Marking and Summaries</b>	2.1 All messages which request an action or a decision should be labelled ACTION on the first line of the text. All others should be marked INFO... 2.2 The originator's name and office should appear at the end of the message. 2.3 Letterhead should not be used on internal communications.
<b>3. Action Assignment</b>	3.1 Messages - whether E-mail or fax, 'action' or 'info' - should be addressed to the one office or individual, which the message originator believes is responsible for taking action, or for benefiting from the information. When the originator does not know the name of an appropriate individual, please use an office designation... No more than one individual or office should appear on the “addressee” line (the “To:” line on E-mails) with the single exception that multiple addressees are permitted when the text of the message makes it clear what action is being asked of each addressee. (There is no similar restriction on the circulation of copies – see “Information Copies” below.) 3.2 If the addressee feels that it is not the appropriate office to take action, it will nevertheless be responsible for determining who should and for transferring action in written form, with a copy to the originator of the message. (Senior secretaries in each office should be responsible for ensuring that messages addressed to the office are referred to the proper individual for action).
<b>4. Response Time</b>	4.1 All action addressees (in Headquarters and in field missions), are responsible for responding to an action message WITHIN THREE WORKING DAYS, even if this response is only an interim acknowledgement that definitive action will take longer...
<b>5. Information Copies</b>	5.1 All E-mails and faxes should indicate the sender's desired distribution of copies (the “Cc:” line in E-mails) in addition to the single addressee office. There is no formal restriction on the number of entities which can be included in copy: individual names, office designations, and collective “mailbox” designations may all be used. However, every effort should be made to limit copies to those who need to know the information contained... 5.2 The action addressee (on the “To:” line) should review those offices addressed in copy, and forward a copy to any relevant offices and/or individuals which may have been omitted by the sender.
<b>6. Coordination</b>	6.1 The message originator, whether at Headquarters or in the field, is responsible for obtaining and keeping a record of necessary coordinations on key messages...
<b>7. Superfluous Messages</b>	7.1 Please limit distribution of messages to the minimum required. Notification of holidays, and other administrative items should be sent only to offices with a need to know, avoiding 'All users', 'All Missions' and other collective distribution lists unless these are truly necessary.
<b>8. Questions</b>	8.1 Questions on these guidelines and their application should be sent to DGO [Director General’s Office] at Headquarters.

These rules define how IOM staff should engage in discourse with one another by email, providing instructions on how to use the metalingual functions of Outlook such as the “To:,” “Cc:,” and “Subject:” headers and the automated email signature. The bulletin also instructs IOM email users to sustain the chain of communication by assigning time limits for response, designating responsible parties for follow-up, coordinating key messages along the way, and even requiring “the action addressee” on the “To:” line to review all parties addressed in copy in case “relevant offices and/or individuals... may have been omitted by the sender.” Although the guidelines for designating a primary addressee on the “To:” line are strict, there are “no similar restrictions on the circulation of copies” on the “Cc:” line (3.1 and 5.1 in Table 1). In short, the guidelines ensure that the “links” in a chain of email utterances do not break, communication is sustained until all messages reach their intended destinations, all action items are achieved, and all information circulates maximally among relevant stakeholders.

By the time it arrived in my inbox, Bulletin No. 1157 had been circulating within IOM, always “effective immediately,” for eight years, having first been issued in March 1998. Bulletin No. 1157 lays out the rules of engagement for discourse by email within IOM, but says nothing about email content. The IT administrator in Geneva sent the bulletin *as an attachment* to his IOM country mission counterparts worldwide as a routine reminder. *The content* of his email describes the “basic principles” of how IOM staff should compose and manage their emails. His main concerns, consistent with his role as an IT administrator, are email security and efficiency. While emails sent within the iom.int domain are relatively secure, he emphasizes that “emails sent to people outside IOM are vulnerable to unauthorized access or modification.” This necessitates the following five negative, inhibiting regulations:

1. Do not create and send emails that in any way compromise IOM, this includes sending defamatory notes, harassment and unauthorized purchasing.
2. It is IOM policy that all email coming and going out of IOM will be scanned for viruses and spam. Emails containing any form of malicious software will be automatically deleted from the system. [The IT team] does not monitor for spam/viruses by reading the content of emails.
3. Email users must be alert to suspicious mail and refrain from opening mail that they are not sure about.
4. It is prohibited to send chain letters via the IOM email system.
5. Do not advertise items to buy and sell via email.

He then reminds everyone to read the attached bulletin, and concludes with a lengthy list of stylistic and personal suggestions in a section of his email titled “Makings of a Good Email User.” Some of the tips include rhetorical questions that encourage email users to reflect critically on their use of the medium: “Is an email necessary when you can walk down the hall to see the person?” and “Do you really need to ‘Cc:’ the whole world?” Other tips emphasize brevity in content (“Four bullet points are better than four paragraphs”) and overall size (“Keep attachments to a minimum and compress them when possible. Will people read the attachment anyway?”). Stylistic clarity contributes to email brevity as well (“Use the subject line to clearly describe the message,” “Start your message with its purpose,” and “Use the first lines of the message body to summarize the content of your message”). Reflecting the superiority of the email medium as stated in item 1.1 of Bulletin No. 1157—IOM’s “most cost-effective and efficient means of electronic communication”—one of his tips even proclaims that email has displaced an older genre of bureaucratic writing: “Do not write a memorandum and then attach it to the email. Just use the email. Memos are out of date.”

A final subset of the senior IT administrator’s “Makings of a Good Email User” emphasizes exemplary behaviors. In the following list, I have sorted the remainder of his tips comparing behaviors to cultivate against behaviors to avoid.

**Table 2: “Makings of a Good Email User”: Behaviors to Cultivate and Avoid**

Behaviors to Cultivate	Behaviors to Avoid
“Check email regularly” “Reply immediately. Be considerate of the sender’s urgency.” “Use email to thank a person or give them a compliment and copy others if necessary.” “Watch your language—be polite—people can see your moods in emails” “Be aware that once you have committed something to email, it can be distributed anywhere. Think about what you are sending out.” “If a message generates emotions, read it again. Give the writer the benefit of the doubt.”	“Avoid Blind Copy (‘Bcc:’) as that indicates you are hiding something.” “Avoid using email for reprimanding a person—talk to the person directly.” “Avoid responding while emotional. Occasionally it is prudent to save the reply message without sending it, wait a few hours, and read it again.”

If IOM documents such as “Bulletin No. 1157” and “Makings of a Good Email User” outline the ideal forms and ground rules of speech communication by email, a third document also worth mentioning defines and outlines IOM’s never ending efforts against the absolute worst form of speech by email, worthy of huge investments in censorship: spam. In November 2006, a massive increase in spam emails managed to pass through IOM’s “anti-spam system” into all user inboxes, prompting a security upgrade and a series of helpful emails from IT officers explaining the problem, the steps they have taken to address it, and routine surveillance that every email user should undertake as well. Again from Geneva to Jakarta, and then onward to “All Users in Indonesia,” IOM’s IT team sent out a document titled “ANTI SPAM Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ).” The FAQ begins with a definition of the problem:

Due to the nature of Internet email technology, each email message, whether it is bulk or not, whether it is solicited or not, whether it is commercial or not, costs the recipient more than it costs the sender in terms of both money and resources. Fighting spam is about saving IT resources like storage, internet line bandwidth as well as time to sort-out the good from the bad email messages.

Next, a definition of the term: “What is SPAM”

Spam is unsolicited e-mail pushing a point. Be it an ad for car sale, or an urge to vote on a proposition; if you didn’t ask for it, didn’t sign up on a mailing list related to it, and didn’t leave your e-mail address on a web form asking for more information on it, and the sender’s address is spoofed, it’s spam.

The FAQ cites an astonishing figure: “80% of the total number of messages reaching the IOM.INT domain” are spam, which amounts to roughly “100,000 spam messages per day” that are successfully blocked by IOM’s anti-spam system. While the IT team successfully prevents a deluge of emails arriving in IOM inboxes every day, the FAQ reminds users to always be aware of two persistent problems that accompany spam surveillance. First, it is impossible to prevent 100% of all spam sent to the iom.int domain from reaching user inboxes, so all users need to exercise caution when opening emails from unknown senders, especially attachments that almost always have malicious viruses that can damage not only the user’s computer but also the network administration across IOM. Second, the anti-spam system—which relies on a screening mechanism that checks for viruses, valid sender domains, and suspicious vocabulary—will inevitably misrecognize legitimate email as spam, especially when security measures are tightened. To ensure that good emails are not lost each user receives a daily report listing all emails sent to the user’s address that have been temporarily quarantined as spam. Users must inspect the quarantine list each day for potentially misrecognized legitimate messages, which can be released from quarantine and delivered. Every released email automatically updates the anti-spam system; it “learns” that those senders should not be marked as spam anymore. “Therefore,” the FAQ warns, “exercise caution when releasing and whitelisting email messages.”

Through the routine dissemination of bulletins, guidelines, and warnings across IOM missions worldwide, IOM’s senior DGO and IT officers in Geneva take on the role of “text regulators.” Niloofar Haeri introduces the concept of text regulators in her ethnography *Sacred Language, Ordinary People* about the use of Classical Arabic in contemporary Egypt. With considerable support from the Egyptian government, a heterogeneous group of language scholars

in academia, government, religion, and journalism, often with competing or contradictory agendas, protect the sacred and secular legacies of Classical Arabic through the surveillance and regulation of publishing houses (Haeri 2003). Likewise IOM's instructional documents issued by IOM's authoritative voices in Geneva define the acceptable limits of speech communication by email. IOM has invested significant organizational resources toward regulating all speech acts that pass through the network into user inboxes, preventing the ongoing flow of communication from descending into a spam-fueled cacophony. On the front lines of email text regulation, IOM's IT staff from Geneva headquarters down to their field offices throughout the world administer the surveillance filters that screen out 80% of incoming email and enforce the guidelines whenever users violate them (more on this below). While Haeri's text regulators in Egypt are language experts who concern themselves with maintaining the purity of Classical Arabic as it is used in sacred Islamic texts and in modern print media, the three regulatory documents cited above suggest that IOM's text regulators, who are administrators, care more about ensuring a continuous and efficient flow of communication. But like the Egyptian text regulators, IOM's text regulators have competing agendas between the DGO that would like to ensure maximal circulation of information through the liberal use of the "Cc:" line and the IT administrators who ask users "Do you really need to 'Cc:' the whole world?" in order to conserve bandwidth resources.

### **Public and Private Reflexivity**

Both the Outlook client and IOM's text regulators encourage email users to develop a reflexive approach to email as a medium of communication and genre of speech. As described above, the Outlook display frames every email with visual cues and metalingual functions

(compose, reply, reply all, forward, archive, or delete) that are designed to guide the user toward the composition and management of messages in context while also retaining the metaphor of individual letters sent and received in private mailboxes. The archive and every thread of replies and forwarded messages helpfully reproduce the user's communication network within the organization and enable the user to compose messages that respond to and anticipate the discourse. The stream of system-wide emails sent to "All Users" along with the more interactive communications within a working group that flood every user's inbox provide plenty of examples that help new users, such as the Indonesian staff and American anthropologists working with an international humanitarian organization for the first time, to acquire the facility to cite, revise, and rewrite within the acceptable limits of the IOM email genre. As the prevalent mode of communication at IOM, the email client and its archival content make "All Users" explicitly aware of Bakhtin's dialogical function of speech in discrete detail, generating a shared or public reflexivity deeply rooted in this genre of speech.

The guidelines reinforce this self awareness. The DGO bulletin reminds email recipients to check that the sender included all relevant personnel on the "Cc:" line (see 5.2 in Table 1). "The Makings of a Good Email User" document contains repeated appeals for critical self-reflection in the use of email at IOM, starting with the rhetorical questions that all users should ask oneself before sending a message and ending with the list of recommended behaviors that use phrases such as "watch your language," "be aware" and "read it again." The SPAM FAQ document asks users to join in the surveillance for spam by reminding them to "exercise caution" when opening email from unfamiliar senders and releasing misrecognized emails from quarantine. These routine reminders encourage the development of a "private reflexivity" in which email users at IOM learn to recognize in their own archive conflicting or overlapping staff

networks, powerful actors and their writing style, and the tell-tale signs of a spam email that slipped through the surveillance filter. In turn the user's private reflexivity discerns when and how he or she is authorized to speak, or to self-censor instead.<sup>32</sup>

### **Ideological Communication**

This begins a discussion about linguistic ideology, broadly defined in Kathryn Woolard's review of the subject as "a particular organization of signifying practices that constitute social subjects" (Woolard 1998:11). "The point of the comparative study of language ideology," Woolard writes, "is to examine the cultural and historical specificity of construals of language" (ibid.4). I appreciate Woolard's use of the word "construal" because "to construe" means both to analyze the grammatical combination of words in sentences and to expound, interpret, and construct meaning, often allowing for various complements and extensions beyond the apparent meaning (OED Online 2011).<sup>33</sup> Examining construals of language suits ethnographic inquiry, employing a Geertzian interpretive analysis concerned with both the syntax of language and its use and meaning in specific historical and cultural settings, such as international humanitarian organizations using email as a communications medium in settings of crisis and recovery.

So far my description of an IOM email genre remains at the macro-level with broadly defined guidelines routinely issued from Geneva and the automated bulk regulation of speech with system-wide spam filters. As "authoritative utterances," the guidelines described above to

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<sup>32</sup> I borrow the term "private reflexivity" as it is used by Scott Lash and Brian Wynne in their Introduction to the 1992 edition of Ulrich Beck's *Risk Society*. Beck's risk society discerns a new condition of modernity that is politically reflexive, responding to and managing risks of society's own industrial creation. These risks are qualitatively different from the risks of prior eras; the new global reach of risks and their imperceptibility to the five senses (e.g. radioactivity, mad cow disease, acid rain) necessitates a growing dependence on technocrats who describe risk to an increasingly mistrustful lay public. Lash and Wynne zero in on the ethnographic possibilities offered in an analysis of reflexive modernity. Before the debates on risk become public, what kinds of "private reflexivity" inform the stakeholder's decision or refusal to speak out? (Lash and Wynne 1992:6-7)

<sup>33</sup> "construe, v.". OED Online. December 2011. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/39912> (accessed February 18, 2012).



some extent “set the tone,” as Bakhtin wrote, for a recognizable speech genre with disciplining effects that ensures the use of email at IOM proceeds in a continuous and efficient manner. These documents set the tone through explicit metalinguistic discourse—speech acts that reflect upon the use of language—in an effort to rationalize the use of email at IOM. To the extent that these regulations assert “power or have political effects on subordinates, they may be said to constitute a ‘linguistic ideology’” ( cited in Caton 2006:226; Schieffelin, Woolard and Kroskrity 1998).

In his review of *Sacred Language, Ordinary People*, Steven Caton praises Haeri’s formulation of the text regulator concept and suggests that an analysis in light of Foucaultian governmentality could show how text regulators engage in “micro-processes of linguistic disciplining, normalizing and regulating texts,” such that readers become subjects of the regulators’ ideological signs (ibid.232). If in Egypt text regulators bring readers “under the sign of religion and state” (ibid.), in this chapter I explore the extent to which email at IOM, with “its own repertoire of speech forms for ideological communication,” brings users under the sign of a humanitarian governmentality, or expresses a kind of humanitarian subjectivity (Voloshinov 1978:20). But as the differing priorities between the senior DGO and IT officers in Geneva already begin to attest, I want to emphasize that the “repertoire of speech forms” in the email archive hardly speak in concert in the service of a singular and authoritative (what Bakhtin would call “monologic”) discourse. As Woolard notes:

Ideology can be viewed as piecemeal and internally contradictory... [Valentin Nikolaevich] Voloshinov, for example, does not reserve the term ‘ideology’ for organized systems of signification but writes of the ‘lowest stratum of behavioral ideology’ as one that lacks logic or unity (1973). Characterizing ideology as a social process, not a possession, [Goran] Therborn finds it more like ‘the cacophony of sounds and signs of a big city street than... the text serenely communicating with the solitary reader or the teacher... addressing a quiet, domesticated audience (Woolard 1998:6).

Ideology as piecemeal and contradictory, as social process, as a cacophony of sounds, suggests the possibility for struggle. Every linguistic sign covers a field of contested meaning, and every speaker accentuates their words in specific ways that suits his or her agenda.<sup>34</sup> Bakhtin and Voloshinov therefore argue that ideology is an inherent part of every speech act, specific to the time, place, and subject position of the speaker. Relations of power assert some ideologically dominant forms of speech over others, but my reading of the email archive suggests that users are never completely “boxed in” by their inboxes because all users reflexively re-accentuate the dominant conventions of email in their own fashion, or employ conventions of their own, sometimes in surprising and unexpected ways. The email archive presents us with an enormous collection of performative utterances, “idioms of engagement and encounter expressed in particular genres and precise ideologies.” (Stewart 1996:78). With the remainder of this chapter, I look at some additional examples from the archive that illustrate how email users at IOM make use of email speech conventions, perform hierarchy, and contest their ideas through this preferred and prevailing communications medium in the humanitarian industry.

### **Reading Conflict in the Email Archive**

The failure of IOM and Oxfam to conduct a collaborative case study on Pulo Nasi is just one of many examples in the email archive of project proposals that did not succeed during my time at IOM. The archive provides a useful corrective against the donor reports and glossy publicity documents that advertise IOM’s programmatic achievements and, in the case of anything less than success, useful “lessons learned.” The point here is not to reveal damning information about what goes on behind the scenes, because even in the case of IOM’s most

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<sup>34</sup> “Speech genres in general submit fairly easy to re-accentuation, the sad can be made jocular and gay, but as a result something new is achieved (for example, the genre of comical epitaphs)” (Bakhtin 1986:87).

resounding successes working in post-conflict Aceh—such as IOM’s remarkably efficient handling of the release and reinsertion phases for amnestied prisoners, or IOM’s research collaboration with Harvard Medical School to produce a psychosocial needs assessment (PNA) of conflict-affected civilian communities—the archive reveals untold threads of planning, argument, and negotiation that precede successful outcomes. The lasting achievements of IOM’s post-conflict work in Aceh assume the sociological status of what Latour calls a “black box.” Originally an engineering term for devices into whose workings one does not peer because its usefulness and efficiency are a settled matter, a black box in the sociological sense designates any combination of ideas, objects, and people whose output is assumed to be truth (Latour 1987). The inner workings of the black box become invisible through its own success because “one need only focus on its inputs and outputs and not on its internal complexity” (1999). The post-hoc shorthand references at IOM to the “prisoner release” or the “PNA” signify undisputed achievements in the post-conflict program that have been leveraged to build subsequent projects at IOM—reintegration assistance for amnestied prisoners and mental health care for victims of conflict violence—without the need to revisit the messy details that brought disparate stakeholders together to deliver these successful products. The email archive allows us to not only re-open these black box signifiers and trace out the threaded conversations and negotiations among a network of actors that came together to produce success, but also to revisit and ask how dozens of other proposals such as the IOM-Oxfam collaboration on Pulo Nasi failed to produce black box reference points in the life of the post-conflict program.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> As a counterfactual example, a signed MoU that Ian proposed in his ToR document would have established the basis for collaboration between IOM and Oxfam. An MoU brings contractual certainty and presumes a new black box that contains the results of all the prior, more fluid, discussions documented in the email archive. The MoU triggers a new set of planning and implementation discussion threads that culminate in a joint report—black box of a higher order that contains the MOU as a crucial component—which in turn marks a reference point that IOM and Oxfam may leverage (together or separately) for new discussions about project proposals, donor applications, and

A simple comparison between the emails from Mark at IOM and from Lilianne and Ian at Oxfam suggest divergent priorities that each side fails to acknowledge. Mark proposes to capture data on a remote island whose fate has negligible implications for IOM's overall program but is nevertheless uniquely isolated such that IOM will be able to test the efficacy of its ICRS model for reintegrating ex-combatants all across Aceh. His negotiations within IOM as well as with KPA leaders are all focused on achieving this goal. IOM can use the results to raise money for additional post-conflict projects in Aceh and promote its reintegration methodology in other post-conflict settings around the world. By contrast, Oxfam has invested heavily in Pulo Nasi communities ever since the tsunami. Oxfam wants to leverage their experience there to produce a policy paper, "intentionally keeping a broad focus," that addresses what they see as an emerging humanitarian equity divide between tsunami and conflict affected communities. Oxfam worries that this equity divide has the potential to fuel more conflict in Aceh through acts of extortion, coercion, and corruption, and hopes to "develop strategies to advocate donors... about the critical need for a coherent recovery framework for Aceh that prioritizes policies and programs which directly support peace-building and address the root causes of the conflict as a basis for sustainable long-term growth and development." The fact that IOM and Oxfam describe the same opportunity to conduct a case study on Pulo Nasi with such highly divergent terms and priorities might not be totally irreconcilable, but the fact that neither the IOM nor the Oxfam emails ever acknowledge the other's interests stands out as one piece of evidence that suggests how the stakeholders failed to settle upon a coherent, mutually beneficial agenda.

A close reading of the first email thread at the beginning of this chapter hints at the internal disagreements within IOM that ultimately prevented the elusive organizational "buy-in"

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policy advocacy. Every higher order black box increasingly obscures the network of actors that came together to make possible these achievements, but the email archive enables at least a partial recovery.

Mark tried to secure.<sup>36</sup> In addition to the different opinions expressed and facts reframed, I would also suggest that the different use of pronouns, Mark's exclusive address to Steve, and the rapid contrarian replies among higher officers exemplify Bakhtin and Voloshinov's assertion that every speech utterance contains a microcosm of social conflict. A wider survey of the email archive bears this out. A separate thread of emails about the PCRCP strategic planning retreat that Steve refers to was originally intended—by Steve and Mark, not Bruno—to include IOM's entire Aceh program, not just the post-conflict team, but Bruno and other program managers would not agree to participate. Another pair of emails from Steve to “All Users in Aceh” first announces and then, a few days later, retracts the news that Bruno would be leaving IOM. These emails among others throughout the first half of 2007 slowly revealed to “All Users in Aceh” that the IOM Indonesia country mission was embroiled in a complex management struggle that ultimately invited intervention from Geneva. When I asked Mark by email in 2011 about his recollections of the proposed collaboration with Oxfam, he replied “if it had happened six months before we would have had the energy, time and resources to really undertake the study.” But in March 2007, the demoralizing management review and its attendant turmoil within IOM Indonesia posed too many barriers to embark on collaborative inter-agency research projects.

### **Everyday Email Practices**

To theorize ideology as a social process invites a turn toward email as everyday practice. In his introduction to *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau states his preference for

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<sup>36</sup> Without access to their internal communications, I cannot write about the barriers Oxfam faced in realizing their proposed collaboration with IOM, but when Ian sent the draft ToR to Mark, he explained that the ToR is an “internal document to cement some action within our own organization.” In effect, Ian's ToR for circulation within Oxfam serves the same function as Mark's original “Opportunity” email intended to secure internal “buy-in” at IOM. When communications end shortly after Ian circulates his ToR within Oxfam, we can speculate that perhaps an internal debate of their own transpired that reduced their enthusiasm for collaboration.

the term “users” instead of “consumers” because the latter does not imply that “the dominated element in society” are neither passive nor docile. Users invent their everyday lives by “poaching in countless ways on the property of others” (de Certeau 1984:xii). Later in the text, he writes “users, like renters, acquire the right to operate on and with [the property of others] without owning” (ibid.33). For my purposes, I shall lend de Certeau’s definition to the IOM email system’s deployment of the term “users,” for every IOM staff person borrows the capital provided by their employer—hardware such as computers, laptops, and Blackberry smartphones and software such as the Outlook email client with access to network resources such as Exchange Server—and then operates upon it, uses IOM’s property, filling it with an ensemble of overlapping utterances that disrupt the discrete organizational propriety that IOM projects, even if the disruptions are momentary or only legible among subaltern networks.

### **Distribution Lists: All Users**

The practice of using distribution list aliases to broadcast announcements to particular groups within the organization deserves special attention here because these are the most performative utterances in the archives, messages composed for a large audience. A user’s inclusion or exclusion on these alias addresses profoundly determines the composition of his or her user network. The largest program that IOM implemented in Aceh was its Shelter Program, reconstructing houses all across Aceh for families that lost their homes in the tsunami. At the program’s peak throughout 2005 and 2006, the Shelter Program employed dozens of Indonesian engineers and administrative support staff. Since my work at IOM fell within the post-conflict and migration health domains, my email archive shows very little interaction with the Shelter Program; they were outside of my network. But at the end of January 2006, after Steve

announced in a formal message sent to “All Users in Aceh” that the expatriate head of the Shelter Program would be leaving his position, we all became suddenly acquainted with dozens of Indonesians working with the Shelter Program who were shocked and unhappy with this turn of events. Rumors of corruption within the Shelter Program had been circulating throughout much of 2005, so those of us outside of the program were not surprised to hear of the leadership change. Over the span of two days, 28 emails—all written in English and variously addressed to either Steve or the departing Program Manager (“G”), but also shared with “All Users in Aceh”—poured into our inboxes. The following excerpts, corrected for grammar and spelling, reproduce the language and tone that characterized all of these messages from a mix of men and women, engineers and administrative support staff:

I was very shocked when I knew you will leave IOM soon. I did not prepare my self to face this immediately. Working with you for the last 10 months has been a wonderful experience, you taught us many things. I don't know why you want to leave us, we still need you here. Under your leadership IOM Shelter Project has received a lot of awards and thanks from the people. In the name of the Acehnese people, I would like to say thank you very much for all you have done in Aceh. I am very proud [to have been on] your staff.

I was really shocked when I read this email. I felt really lost. He is my teacher. I can't believe this. I do not understand [what] actually happened. Why, when our [program is] increasingly improving, has our Project Manager been suddenly replaced?

For me G was not only the best Project Manager that I ever had but he was also like a father who always supports me. Working with G makes everything easier and G always makes his staff comfortable. YOU ARE THE BEST G; YOU ARE A VERY GOOD FATHER FOR US. FOR ME THERE IS NO “GOODBYE ” BUT ONLY UNTIL WE MEET AGAIN.

I cannot say anything, just quiet shock when I hear that you will finish your service with IOM. We cannot imagine that you will leave us [so soon]...it is like we will never see you again, like we cannot see your smile any more, your lovely smile that you give to everybody at IOM and to IDPs when you stay and talk with them. You always gave us more spirit and always believed in your staff, [which] made us confident and optimistic that we can make all IOM shelter projects a success.

Thank you...thank you...and thank you very much G... You are the great... You are the best boss that I ever had... We always love you....G...we will not forget you, sir... We will continue your dream...to make IOM shelter always number one in Aceh reconstruction... For all IOM shelter staff, dry our eyes, save all the tears you cried...let's make Mr. G's dreams always be true... Always remember us, G...

We all know G..... We all are wondering..... Thanks is not enough for your leadership in shelter dept. Mr. G..... Your body is leaving, [but] your success and everything is staying in our land..... (thanks [from the] people of Aceh)<sup>37</sup>

National staff typically used the All User distribution lists to broadcast repetitive messages only for holiday greetings, condolences when a staff person's family member passed away, and for weddings and birth announcements. Collective farewell messages from both national and international staff broadcast to All Users were also common but not with as much intensity of emotion and astonishment as these messages responding to the news of G's departure from IOM. Neither Steve nor G offered any reply to All Users about this collective outcry from the shelter team. Given the common themes about G's service, achievement, leadership, and fatherhood alongside staff expressions of astonishment, gratitude, and love, I read this thread of emails as a rare instance of coordinated public protest coming from national staff but in an idiom that IOM's formal email communication guidelines do not recognize.

### **Distribution Lists: All National Staff**

While the protest over G's departure from IOM exemplifies a rare instance of national staff collectively making use of All User distribution lists, the lively exchange of news, jokes, photos, and debate on distribution lists restricted to national staff (e.g. "All National Staff in Aceh") offers what must have been an entertaining way to socialize and exchange ideas across offices and programs. When Playboy Indonesia magazine launched its inaugural edition in January 2006, one IOM staff took the initiative to forward a petition to "All National Staff in Indonesia" writing in Indonesian "Those who disagree with and feel irritated by the publication

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<sup>37</sup> ellipses here and in the prior excerpt do not indicate excision from the text. These ellipses were included by the individual writers.



of Playboy magazine in Indonesia can sign this online petition,” followed by a link to a petition website, and sparking two days of spirited debate with a wide range of opinions:

Wow I'm sorry but I totally agree... it's time our country stopped the hypocrisy...

I don't care if there is a Playboy magazine in Indonesia or not... the fact is there are national tabloids that aren't so different from Playboy with publishing licenses that are available from any seller on the streets...

I would agree if there was a competing magazine. So there should be pictures of “naked” men too!

Why must we make an issue out of the publication of Playboy in Indonesia. Even without it Indonesians still look for [porn] in various places and other media that serve arousing pictures. My point is that we should look at this with an adult and mature perspective.

Actually what makes us worry are our own thoughts, if we regard something as beautiful, then there is beauty, but if we think something is dirty, then its filth that will appear before us. Whether or not its pornography depends on our own thoughts.

If you want to read and support that magazine, go ahead... (but take responsibility for your sins). If you want to reject it, you can go ahead too... (fill out the petition). As for me, clearly I reject it, but... if I'm tempted by demons, then well... I'll read it too! ;)

Yes. I TOTALLY DISAGREE. This is the work of savages that want to return us to age of ignorance... REJECT all forms of immorality in the MASS MEDIA... if the publisher still has a license then truly our government is foolish... it refuses to learn from history. Thanks for the info.

For adults maybe there is no impact, but for teenagers it could be really damaging. I suggest conducting research on the relationship between teen sexual behavior and the sensual information they receive.

This thread came to an end as many do when considered off-topic from the defining characteristics of the group, with a level-headed reminder from one of the members: “May I suggest that for topics such as these, if you really need to distribute them, please use *your personal email*, so that iom.int [email] will be more focused on business, our work at IOM.”<sup>38</sup>

The original sender apologized, somewhat defensively: “I JUST WANTED TO SHARE THE INFO... jeez, no need to reply!!! And I also never asked for your comments did I??? How did this get so involved...??? And if there really are some who don't like it, THEN I APOLOGIZE FOR DISTRIBUTING THIS EMAIL. THANKS FOR YOUR ADVICE AND ATTENTION.”

A mischievous staff member had the last word with a teasing three-word reply to the apology that translates roughly as “Feeling guilty are we?” Conversation threads like this among national

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<sup>38</sup> *your personal email* was written in English, not Indonesian.

staff appear frequently in the archive, and typically follow the same pattern; someone shares a headline, a funny picture, a joke, or an appeal with one of the national staff distribution lists, and if it sparks conversation it will continue for an average of two days, ending on its own or with polite requests to finish it up from other members of the group, all unbeknownst to their international supervisors.

The only instance of an IT staff person (also national) stepping in to shut down a thread of emails among national staff occurred at the end of February 2006 after Aceh's largest newspaper *Serambi* published a story about rumors circulating from mosque to mosque across the province about a naughty daughter who turned into a fish after she kicked her mother while she was in the middle of her prayers (Serambi Indonesia 2006). The article mentions a video recording that supposedly documents proof of the rumor, so one of the database assistants for the post-conflict program at IOM sent the video file as an email attachment to "All Users in Aceh." The "Subject:" header of his email reads "Video of the *Anak Durhaka* (Godless Child) Rumor Reported in Today's *Serambi*" but the body of his email only instructs readers to use the QuickTime application to open the attachment, without any description of the article. The minute-long video clip, also titled *Anak Durhaka*, with the look and feel of a home video made with a cellular phone, pans from head to tail and back again across a flat fish-like object, obviously a fake, in the shape of a stingray. The audio accompaniment prominently features the wailing megaphone-distortion sounds of a koranic recitation. The semantic field covered by the word *durhaka* includes "rebellious" or "insubordinate" alongside "godless" or "faithless," and is most commonly used to describe children who do not show appropriate respect to their parents and will eventually suffer for this fundamental sin. After sending this email, five more people jumped in over the course of six hours, sending their own attachments of *durhaka* images to "All

National Staff in Aceh,” summarized in the following table beginning with the original *Anak Durhaka* video:

**Table 3: List of *Durhaka* Images Sent to “All National Staff in Aceh” on 28 February 2006**

Title of Image	Description
1. <i>Anak Durhaka</i> (godless child) (video)	Cellphone video camera shows a flat fish-like object, accompanied with the amplified megaphone sound of koranic recitation
2. <i>Anak Durhaka</i> (godless child) (photo)	A baby orangutan pinches its mother’s breast
3. <i>Monyet Durhaka</i> (insubordinate monkey) (photo)	A monkey urinates into the mouth of the willing human that holds it and drinks.
4. <i>Orang-orang Durhaka</i> (ungodly folk) (photos)	A collection of tiny human figurine toys posed as laborers on top of various kinds of food, such as miners digging watermelon seeds from the fruit, and a lawnmower clipping the furry skin of a kiwi fruit.
5. <i>Tukang Parkir Durhaka</i> (insubordinate parking attendant) (video)	Video clip of a US Air Force soldier directing a plane onto the runway using sexually suggestive strip-tease gestures with his hands, arms, and hips.
6. <i>Umat Durhaka</i> (ungodly people) (photo)	A pregnant woman reveals her large belly standing next to a Chinese style laughing Buddha statue with a similar body shape.

Less than an hour after the final *durhaka* image was sent, one of the IT administrators based in Banda Aceh effectively shut down the conversation by replying to “All National Staff in Aceh” not with any admonishing words of his own, but rather with the “email basic principles” document summarized earlier in this chapter pasted into the message, with all other IT staff (including one expatriate) in Banda Aceh included on the “Cc:” line. These strange, out of context, unrelated (but for the word *durhaka* linking them) image attachments feature no text from the senders apart from the image titles typed into the “Subject:” header, leaving “All National Staff in Aceh” without any interpretive signposts apart from a reference (without a link) to the original *Serambi* story in the first message. A sense of propriety has been breached with a bewildering excess of meaning in the word *durhaka* littering national staff inboxes all across Aceh. “All National Staff in Aceh” are served a momentary glimpse of the abject.

### **Distribution Lists: All International Staff**

Email sent to “All International Staff” distribution lists follow a more restrained set of implicit ground rules. A simple comparison between emails sent to “All National” and “All International” lists reveals nearly the same number of messages in the archive, but the content for each set varies widely. The vast majority of messages sent to international staff are one-time announcements, many sent routinely by Indonesian administrative support staff. The most prevalent example comes from the Transportation Unit in Banda Aceh who sent a list to “All International Staff in Banda Aceh” every afternoon of drivers who are available on standby until midnight. The “Vehicle Standby” messages account for nearly two-thirds of all email sent to “All International” staff in the archive.

Another large set of messages sent exclusively to international staff come from the IOM Security Unit with a range of security concerns. The Security Unit at IOM liaises with UNDSS, which in turn coordinates its guidelines and messages with local military and police. UNDSS maintains a radio communications network and passes along routine reminders by email to all UN and partner agencies to participate in the daily radio check at sundown, when all international staff must turn on their IOM-issued walkie talkies and announce their presence one after another. When there are election campaign rallies or protests against BRR or BRA from aggrieved tsunami and conflict victims, the Security Unit sends an email advising international staff to avoid travel in certain parts of Banda Aceh. Criminal or violent events are also shared by email, typically with advice on preventive behaviors to adopt. Before the peace agreement in August 2005, security emails reminded international staff about the nightly curfew in effect and reported violent incidents outside of the cities. On two occasions in July 2005, international humanitarians traveling outside of city limits after curfew were injured by sniper gunshots on the

highway. Even after the peace agreement, international staff received tips by email on how to behave in the event of a kidnapping or unexpected interrogation from plain-clothes intelligence officers from the Indonesian police or military.

A persistent and recurring security issue shared by email with international staff concerns the inappropriate mingling between expatriates and local Acehnese of the opposite sex, a problem that has resulted in the immediate deportation of several foreigners during Aceh's humanitarian encounter since the tsunami. The very first security-related email I ever received at my iom.int account in June 2005 featured the subject heading "Security and Local Culture":

Recently a large NGO in Banda Aceh received a faxed warning from a group called Group of Community Moral Value and Syariah Islam Watch. This group complained about the behavior of one of this NGO's international staff, requested that the staff member be removed from Aceh, and stated that "something bad could happen" if the NGO did not take appropriate action. I want you all to be appraised of this. We are guests here and must be sensitive and aware of local sentiments. Acehnese society is very conservative. Please dress and behave appropriately.

Nine months later, Steve Cook weighed in from Jakarta with one of his rare emails sent exclusively to "All International Staff in Aceh," using the strongest language in any of his emails in my inbox:

In recent weeks there have been a number of recent cases of international staff who have been detained or arrested for being found in inappropriate circumstances with nationals of the opposite gender. These incidents have been highlighted in local and international media, and have been the subject of a UNDSS advisory. We have also experienced an internal situation which fortunately did not reach public attention. In light of these events, I wish to forcefully remind everyone of the necessity for all IOM staff to respect local customs, religious rules and national laws. This is a reminder that it is incumbent on IOM staff to maintain both cultural awareness and sensitivity during your posting with IOM in Indonesia. Please note that in all situations you remain an official representative of the IOM and you will be considered as such by our national counterparts and local communities, whether you are on or off duty. Unacceptable behavior will therefore harm not only your own reputation, but that of the whole Organization.

**In light of the above, please be reminded that any abuse in relation to national staff and population of the host country, disrespect of their culture and ways of living will not be tolerated by the Organization and prompt and appropriate sanctions will be applied, especially in cases of harassment and/or exploitation of locals of the opposite sex which in the case of Aceh is very broadly defined.** (boldface text in original)

International staff parties on the weekend also posed a frequent security concern, described with vivid detail in the email archive. At the end of every work week, “All International Staff in Banda Aceh” would inevitably receive at least one invitation to parties held at expatriate homes. Early the following week, IOM’s Security Unit would send reports from UNDSS, the press, and the government about local community disapproval of hedonistic expatriate parties. Problems included neighbor complaints, formal orders from local authorities to shut down, and vigilante raids on expatriate homes. Less than two months after Steve sent the email quoted above, he wrote again after an especially raucous IOM party:

I am not inclined to impose restrictions on parties or social gatherings as has been suggested to me from certain quarters. To the contrary, given the hardship nature of Aceh, socializing with colleagues is healthy and encouraged as it is a way to relieve stress and tedium and build relationships that result in a more positive and constructive team atmosphere. However, I must reiterate in the strongest terms that international staff in particular must be cognizant of the sensitivities of the Sharia environment in which we operate in Aceh. All international staff must ensure that individual and/or group activities do not transgress these sensitivities as it appears this particular party did. This has the very real potential of threatening the Organization’s presence in Aceh. Further, IOM would be powerless to protect individual staff who put themselves at risk of arrest, deportation, or other punitive actions.

Security and cultural sensitivity emails rarely generate discussion, but they appear repeatedly from IOM senior officials, security officers, and public relations staff, addressing the issue in detail from a variety of perspectives. One exception occurs when Aceh’s security officer sent a warning to “All International Staff in Indonesia” in early February 2006 when the Islamic world rose up in protest after a small Danish newspaper published comics depicting the prophet Muhammed. Advising international IOM staff of planned protests in Jakarta and Aceh, his email included a digital reproduction of the contested comic for reference as an attachment. Within an hour, two email responses questioned his judgment, the first from a Muslim expatriate of Balkan descent: “Why do you so brainlessly have to attach that unspeakable act to the e-mail?!!” The second came moments later from an expatriate New Zealander who spent most of his adult life in Indonesia: “Are you not aware that a number of our international staff are also Muslims?” But

even this divisive, potentially volatile thread did not extend beyond three emails because the IT manager in Jakarta was able to remotely delete the attachment from every international staff inbox throughout Indonesia.

### **Distribution Lists: Transgressing the Inter/National Staff Divide**

International staff at IOM appear to adhere more closely to the email ground rules established by Geneva, perhaps due to more awareness of themselves as “official representatives” of IOM in host countries, or perhaps due to more penetrating surveillance of international staff communications that are more easily accessed by senior officials who also receive emails sent to “All International” distribution aliases. The disproportionate emphasis on security—including the transformation of local morality concerns into security risks—addressed exclusively toward international staff also suggests the application of a more restrictive disciplinary standard that may have an overall dampening effect on discourse among expatriates working at IOM in Indonesia. National staff, by comparison, who typically remain silent on “All User” communications, take advantage of their relative freedom from supervision on “All National” aliases to engage in all kinds of off-topic social communication amongst themselves.

The archive maintains a radical separation between international and national staff communications, and bears a striking resemblance to Saya Shiraishi’s nuanced description of the disciplinary use of language in New Order era Indonesia to produce national subjects. Shiraishi identifies a remarkable level of tolerance afforded to so-called “noise” from the underclass (or from children, students, civil servants, etc.) during an era of extremely codified hierarchy and autocracy. “Order is maintained not by suppressing all the voices, which would require enormous energy and high efficiency... but by guarding the border that separates the two

spheres” of proper state-sanctioned speech on the one hand and noise on the other, likened to quacking ducks, tolerated but ignored as long as the content of the cacophonous chatter remains unintelligible in formal speech” (Shiraishi 1997:164). The following example shows what happened when a lively discussion-turned-argument among national staff got cross-posted into the international staff domain:

After an exciting IOM men’s soccer match in Banda Aceh on a Saturday afternoon in late May 2006 between the shelter staff versus the transportation and logistics staff, a representative from the winning shelter team claimed their bragging rights with an email sent to “All National Staff in Aceh” the following Monday morning. With good cheer, his email recounts a glorious play-by-play victory embellished with amusing hyperbole, congratulates members of his team for their skillful contributions, and concludes with advice for the losing team: “Keep practicing and never give up!” This triggered a cascade of nine playful replies, with rejoinders from the losing team and teasing comments from the women. By late afternoon, Aji Munir, the District Coordinator for IOM’s ICRS office in Bireuen—more than 200km away from Banda Aceh on the east coast highway—sent an unexpected rebuke:

Sorry, but I don’t appreciate it when our email service out here is disrupted just because all of you immediately reply all. I am a new staff person at IOM, but I feel very annoyed by these emails irrelevant to my work. Not to patronize and not to brown-nose... I just hope our friends in BANDA ACEH show some understanding and stop sending emails like these to me. Again, my apologies...

The next morning, the shelter staff person who started the conversation of humorous boasts and insults replied to Aji but without an apology: “Good morning dear Mr. Munir, I have worked at IOM for awhile and so far no one has ever complained about our email usage. If you sir feel annoyed, all you have to do is delete the emails from your inbox. Simple, right?” Sensing tension, the local IT administrator sent a version of the email guidelines translated into Indonesian to “All National Staff in Aceh,” and suggested continuing the discussion over private



email, but without effect. Another member of the shelter team also responded to Aji, this time more rudely: “Mr. Munir, if you sir feel annoyed with these emails, please just delete them... This email address has been used for sports and other headline news... so why don’t you sir just read women’s magazines instead? Thanks.”

A woman from the post-conflict program working in Banda Aceh responded next, writing that it was fine to have this debate about the appropriate use of email but no one should ever resort to sexism. Next, one of Aji’s fellow District Coordinators based at another ICRS office wrote: “Actually I am also a soccer fan and play often. But information like this that goes on and on has no connection to us, so why do you have to ‘Cc:’ everyone? I think the IT administrator’s message about this was clear enough...”

Up until this point, the entire conversation had been conducted in the Indonesian language and among national staff only. The discussion might have ended there, but on Wednesday morning, Aji decided to take his grievance into the international staff domain. He first sent an email to “All International Staff in Jakarta” with a “Cc:” to “All IT Staff in Indonesia” *and* “All Users in Indonesia,” writing in imperfect English: “Dear All, I’m sorry to take a moment of your time, but are we working for tsunami recovery or just kidding with each other every day? Please see the following emails.” Beneath his message Aji included the thread which ended with “simple, right?” A half hour later, he wrote again, this time directly to Steve Cook with a “Cc:” to “All Users in Aceh”: “Dear Sir, Excuse me Sir. Are your shelter staff in Aceh working for tsunami recovery or just kidding around every day waiting for their salary?” Beneath his second message Aji included the thread that ended with the sexist insult. After he sent these two messages, he wrote a final message, this time in Indonesian and only to “All National Staff in Aceh,” in ALL-CAPS: “MAY YOU ALWAYS BE UNDER THE

PROTECTION OF THE ALMIGHTY LORD...AMEN.” Nine hours later, an email sent internally among all IOM PCRP staff (national and international) in Aceh announced that Aji was leaving his position as ICRS District Coordinator and leaving IOM altogether.

### **Generic Civility**

Before working with IOM, Aji was a well-known local journalist based in Bireuen district who covered conflict issues for a provincial tabloid magazine called *Aceh Kita*. His deep knowledge of conflict dynamics and actors in Bireuen earned him a job as the coordinator of IOM’s newly established ICRS office in Bireuen after he was involved in the successful prison release program. But the email archive shows that he had trouble both as a manager of his staff at the ICRS office in Bireuen and as a subordinate to the PCRP management team in Banda Aceh. I suspect Aji may have shared his grievances in the manner that he did with “All Users in Indonesia” and with Steve Cook in particular because he already knew that he was leaving IOM, and could afford to leave the organization using a scorched earth approach, maybe hoping to take other national staff down with him or at least to expose his critique to the entire mission. I do not know if Aji quit on his own or if IOM decided to terminate his contract, but the email archive clearly shows that he did not follow the “makings of a good email user” where the principle of civility is concerned. Leading up to his final and dramatic set of emails sent to “All Users,” Aji already had a history of writing emails using increasingly audacious language while including international staff on the “Cc:” line. Just one week before he left IOM, Aji posed questions about unexpected ICRS activities that he suggested were not covered by his job description, resorting to ALL CAPS again to angrily emphasize his point: “Out here in the districts it’s as if we are just workers who must be ready to do what we’re told at a moment’s notice and need not

ask ‘is this really our job?’ ... OR PERHAPS WE AREN’T ALLOWED TO ASK ANYTHING AT ALL, INCLUDING WHY ARE WE USING A MOTORBIKE THAT UP UNTIL NOW STILL DOESN’T HAVE A POLICE REGISTRATION?” I think Aji lost his job partly because he never articulated grievances within the implicit limits of the IOM email genre. His emphatic critiques transgress the inter/national staff divide and violate the generic civility that prevails throughout the archive. Like the protests over G’s departure from his Indonesian staff, Aji wrote his emails in an idiom that stands outside the recognizable communication tropes that characterize the IOM email archive.

Most national staff, however, learned how to emulate IOM’s generic civility, carefully quoting the correct formulaic English phrases that bridge the treacherous divide between national and international staff. As noted earlier in the chapter, the vast majority of emails at IOM make use of document templates that circulate repetitively within the organization. This effectively domesticates communication between national and international staff, administrators at the mission office and program implementers in the field, IOM headquarters in Geneva and its country missions around the world, ensuring legibility and courtesy in service of efficient and continuous communication. The most emblematic word in the archive that characterizes the generic civility of IOM email is “kindly.” The word kindly appears in 11.5% of emails in the archive, preceding nearly all imperative verbs, turning every command into polite requests. The following list gives a sense of the consistency with which the word kindly is deployed in IOM emails for a wide range of instructive orders:

**Table 4: Selected Examples of “Kindly” Commands in the Email Archive**

“kindly call me on my cell phone”  
“kindly send the UN ID Cards to me through someone who will return to Jakarta”  
“kindly approach the medical administrative staff for the forms and instructions”  
“kindly find the blank attendance record, so you can use it”  
“kindly attend my wedding party”  
“kindly could you tell us the reason why?”  
“kindly give the card to me so I can extend it”  
“kindly return the cellphones with charger and SIM card to the Procurement & Logistics Department”  
“kindly double-check your ‘reply all’ addressees before hitting the ‘send’ button”  
“kindly prepare a vehicle to pick him up at Polonia Airport”  
“kindly check this shipment and make the necessary arrangements to deliver it to Nagan Raya”  
“kindly assist Paula with her data collection”  
“kindly forward this message to other staff without email addresses”  
“kindly find the attachment for vehicles on standby this evening”  
“kindly assign one person to report activities for each area of work”  
“kindly furnish me a copy of the total number of accrued annual leave until the end of my contract”  
“kindly find my answer directly below your message”  
“kindly comply with the requirements below”

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the adverb kindly has both a colloquial and an obsolete definition. In spoken English, kindly means “an easy, natural way; congenially; spontaneously” while its rare or obsolete form means “by natural disposition; characteristically,” and describes “processes which successfully follow their natural course” (OED Online 2011).<sup>39</sup> The patterned repetition of the word kindly in the IOM email archive invests the neutral OED definition of kindly with particular shades of value and expression that only apply to the IOM email speech genre. A kindly instruction softens the imperative verb, lubricates civility among IOM colleagues, and suggests that to carry out the command easily—or even spontaneously—follows the natural administrative order of operations within the organization. The user who

<sup>39</sup> "kindly, adv.". OED Online. December 2011. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/Entry/103469?rskey=QLpnq8&result=2> (accessed February 28, 2012)

receives a kindly instruction by email understands that a task has been assigned. Some users even kindly instruct themselves, once again internalizing the reflexivity of the genre: “may I kindly remind you that all colleagues with outstanding operational cash advances should have this settled before the end of the month?” In this context of generic civility, it seems that Aji forgot to kindly “watch [his] language” and to kindly “avoid responding while emotional.”

### **Temporality of Email: Politics in Punctuated Action**

Throughout this chapter I have emphasized the *temporality* of email communications in the archive. Every email utterance in a thread has a time stamp and we can trace with precision the punctuality of a conversation as it unfolds, as I have shown in many of the previous examples. The temporality of multiple ongoing email conversations organizes the office workday with persistent interruptions. In the interest of efficiency and smooth communications, all staff are encouraged to pay attention to their inbox in order that they may kindly address time sensitive action items. Project managers and senior officers in particular are expected to be on call outside of office hours to account for the time difference between Geneva and Indonesia and also to anticipate unexpected crises in the field that may occur at any hour. The urgency of the humanitarian imperative justifies this always-on-call ethos at IOM.

In his essay “Publics and Counter-Publics,” Michael Warner describes how the punctual rhythms of discourse, the rate at which an exchange of utterances circulate and accumulate, “accounts for the dramatic differences among publics in their relation to possible scenes of activity.”

The more punctual and abbreviated the circulation, and the more discourse indexes the punctuality of its own circulation, the closer a public stands to politics. At longer rhythms... action becomes harder to imagine. This is the fate of academic publics... In modernity, politics takes much of its character from the temporality of the headline, not the archive (Warner 2002:68).

The email archive preserves these dialogues, IOM politics in action, as they once unfolded throughout the day(s) in real time. For example in Email Thread #1 it was not a coincidence when Steve Cook replied to Bruno's skeptical response to Mark in less than an hour. Like the tribal Yemeni poets who challenge and retort with one another, exchanging *balah* verses in public performance in an effort to win over an audience with their rhetorical talent, IOM staff engage in political acts of power and persuasion, staking out their ideological claims, with every email they send (Caton 1990). As academics more accustomed to discourse through the comparatively *longue durée* of peer reviewed publication cycles, the Harvard University researchers (including myself) who collaborated with IOM from 2005 until 2009 came to lament the "irrationalities of 'donor time.'" Apart from the urgency of the humanitarian imperative, IOM must play by "donor time" in order to secure funding for its programs, and this necessarily involves "maintaining relationships with donors, writing proposals, negotiating budgets and contracts, evaluating work, and providing reports on outcomes," or in other words engaging in politics, all on the donor's schedule (Good, Good and Grayman 2010:256). The email archive records these politics as they unfold, before they either cohere into timeless black box benchmarks or disperse as punctuated traces of failure in the archive.

### **Geography of Emails: The Aceh Perspective**

Email communications produce a sense of false proximity to the field because the capacity to converse back and forth throughout the day leaves an impression that all addressors from around the world are as intimately involved in the daily politics of program implementation as Mark and his PCRP staff were in Aceh. The archive posits an imagined community of humanitarians conversing in the same virtual room with one another. The emails from Geneva in

Email Thread #1 (which I do not even bother to quote here) weigh in with expert knowledge and jump too easily into comparative case studies without an understanding of Aceh's context. Mark makes a subtle critique of his distant colleagues when he promotes the "Aceh Perspective." Donors in Jakarta and abroad rarely see the daily realities that dozens of NGOs and their local partners face when trying to implement the programs they fund. Bruno assumes that donors in Jakarta understand the need for an expanded caseload, but Mark reminds him that they only see facts and figures on paper and have never "lived with the effects." When Mark says that an Aceh Perspective entails "delivering to ex-combatants" in order to "avoid consequences," he speaks of the daily push and pull of politics in the field, the messy negotiations required to achieve desired outcomes. ICRS staff in the field would certainly agree; in turn they criticized PCRIP managers in Banda Aceh for a similar lack of perspective on the daily frictions of working with conflict victims, ex-combatants, amnestied prisoners, and local officials in remote districts. Aji's emails just before he left IOM hint at Banda Aceh management's disconnect from their field staff.

Mark handily demonstrates what the Aceh Perspective entails in Email Thread #2 when he describes his negotiations with the local KPA *panglima* for Pulo Nasi named Raja Hitam. First, he was able to sit and talk with Raja Hitam because "we ran into him at the Aceh Besar ICRS office." Next, Mark let Raja Hitam air his grievances. Mark says: "let us not waste time analyzing his angst, this is more about influence and political power, but he does believe their own arguments." Only by running into him was Mark able to hold an unplanned discussion, taking advantage of this unexpected face time to understand Raja Hitam's motivations for letting his men on Pulo Nasi extort money from NGOs trying to assist with tsunami recovery.

I have argued that the email archive reproduces the user's humanitarian network and documents the history of the user's activities with precise fidelity, but the medium reaches its limits when it comes to the push and pull of cutting a deal on the ground. Mark explains how it works: "The fact that Raja, our Black King, believes his own arguments means that we should engage him directly. Our 'expectations' and 'economic' solutions do not meet the political aspect, and I believe that we should address this. Do not balk at me bringing in politics, it is generic, I believe that we should meet with Raja and simply cut a deal."

I highlight Mark as a kind of anti-hero in the Pulo Nasi story, because despite IOM's failure to secure an MoU with Oxfam to do the case study, what he calls an Aceh Perspective sounds to me a lot like a practitioner using applied ethnography to achieve program goals.<sup>40</sup> He took some time to see Raja Hitam's perspective, and although Mark disagreed with him, he took Raja Hitam's concerns seriously enough to figure out how to cut a deal that works for everyone. For Oxfam's part, both Ian and his field manager's responses gloss over Mark's detailed and messy politics with the phrase "sounds reasonable," which I read as a subtle recoil back to the generic civility of email correspondence and away from the dirty politics of post-conflict reintegration. Internally at IOM, Mark lamented his colleagues' "misguided, weak, wet, and pointless" feedback because they did not share his Aceh Perspective. This may be due in large part to the fact that they were not based in Aceh with Mark and his staff, but the internal politics conducted by email lends an *as if* quality of having been there with us.

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<sup>40</sup> On the anti-heroic mode, I borrow from Arthur Kleinman's book *What Really Matters*. In one passage, Kleinman approaches a definition: "The lesson is not one of standard heroism— there is no victory—but a kind of negative heroism or anti-heroism that may not change the world but helps make clear to others what needs to change if the world is to be a less unjust and desperate place... Heroic acts that change society are rare and more often than not meretricious fictions, whereas protest and resistance as well as perturbing and disturbing the status quo are, at best, the most ordinary people like us can achieve" (Kleinman 2006:25).



## Outside the Inbox

My examination of the email archive demonstrates some of the centripetal forces that tether many IOM staff to their inboxes, keeping users tied within the networks that the inbox generates. The archive suggests to me that for some IOM staff, in particular the administrators and subaltern bureaucrats who issue and endlessly circulate guidelines and template documents among All Users, the kind of network that Riles describes in her ethnography—enclosed, inward focused, endlessly reflexive—approaches the experience of what one informant described to me as the “internal” side of IOM (see “Intan on the Inside” in Chapter Five). One manager who spent most of his time in the field once told me that the biggest barrier to implementation was not the extortion threats from ex-combatants or corruption in local government, but rather IOM itself which he likened to an energy-absorbing black hole. Clearly this tendency also partly prevented IOM from collaborating with Oxfam on Pulo Nasi. The “Inbox” offers a metaphor that reflects this centripetal tendency to keep the discourse at IOM boxed in.

But Mark’s description of his run-in with Raja Hitam and subsequent discussion to cut a deal with him—Mark’s Aceh Perspective—pulls us out of the inbox and reminds us that not all humanitarian politics in post-conflict Aceh are conducted by email. Indeed, chance encounters in the field figure heavily in the remaining chapters of this dissertation. A notable critique of *The Network Inside Out* questions Riles’ choice to conduct her fieldwork at the headquarters of an NGO based in Suva, the capital of Fiji, which acts as an administrative hub of operations for NGO activities all over the South Pacific. But if the analysis stops there, then we lose data from the front lines of program implementation, where ICRS district coordinators must manage the expectations of demanding ex-combatants and their local commanders, but find it difficult to engage with their project managers in Banda Aceh in an appropriate speech genre. Likewise, if

we restrict our representation of humanitarian encounters in Aceh exclusively to the inbox, then we also lose data from the dozens of IOM staff who do not use IOM email such as the drivers, security guards, data entry clerks, part-time consultants and temporary fieldworkers.

For all the effort and expense that goes into policing the boundaries of IOM's email network, including many of its internal boundaries set up with the distribution lists, discourse in the archive can never be fully contained. Internally, for example, a friendly request to the local IT administrator ensured my inclusion on the "All National" distribution lists, opening up a huge network of communications on the IOM email system the extent of which perhaps none of the other international staff at IOM Indonesia knew. Furthermore, many IOM staff did choose to take their conversations off network by using their private email accounts. During my years working at IOM, I actively communicated with IOM staff with my personal gmail account, especially if I was traveling, in addition to my IOM account. So too did national staff make use of their private email to share private work-related concerns with me, and presumably with one another. Finally, it turns out that a proliferation of communication technologies beyond email has greatly expanded the reach of user networks engaged in humanitarian work in post-conflict Aceh, projecting the promise and misfires that characterize all ethnographic research in new and unexpected ways. This is the subject of the next chapter.

### **Coda: Why We Fight**

One of the questions guiding my research in Aceh asks about the moral and ideological commitments of the international staff working in Aceh—their commitments to Aceh, their staff, their organization, and themselves—and whether and how international staff communicate those commitments to their local staff counterparts. One way to answer this question is to look at how

international staff communicate with local staff by email. Through use of the distribution lists, IOM staff have an opportunity to compose their thoughts in a performative mode and broadcast them to dozens, if not hundreds or thousands, of people.

Luc Chounet-Cambas was Mark's Deputy Program Manager on PCRP. A Frenchman with several years of experience working with international organizations in conflict settings, Luc was Mark's closest friend in Aceh, sharing both their office space and a house in Banda Aceh. Their nicknames at IOM were Mick and Mack because Mark handled the external or Mack/macro issues related to PCRP management and Luc handled the internal or Mick/micro issues. After Luc conducted a week-long PCRP site visit along the west coast of Aceh in early March 2007, he composed a rousing email (with an Indonesian translation) to report on his results and sent it to "All PCRP Staff in Aceh" with a "Cc:" to "All National Staff in Aceh" and "All International Staff in Aceh." The subject header on Luc's email reads "Why We Fight."

Here is the message in full:

Dear all,

I've just returned from 8 days with our ICRS in Calang and Meulaboh, where I went to assess randomly selected individual reintegration projects. Together with Tya [the Reintegration Unit Program Assistant] and respective ICRS staff, we visited 38 project sites.

The results are stunning and could not be so without each and every staff who's made these projects happen. In four locations, we could not meet with the client nor anyone involved in the business, hence no indication of success. In 2 locations, projects had not started yet (in spite of delivery being a month old), and 2 projects have failed. In all other 30 sites, success is blatant.

The first client we met with is a female ex-combatant who's set up a grocery shop nearby a KPA office. With IOM's assistance, she has expanded into a coffee shop and has already generated profit and reinvested it into her business, to give herself the ability to serve food to ten regular customers 3 times a day, plus others. With IOM's assistance, her daily income has increased 5 fold. When asked what she'll be doing with the additional savings, she showed us the photo of her 10 year old child with serious cerebral damage and his brains literally leaking through his nose. That's where the money goes so the child, for the time he's got to live, feels happy.

Another client we went to visit was not there. He set up a fuel business on the side of the road, by the grocery & coffee shop that belong to his brother. The client is the quintessence of what our clients are like. He spends the day on illegal logging. His brother explained that he never recovered from the torture he went through, worsened by the loss of his entire family (wife and kids) with the tsunami, and his brother needs a physically demanding activity that "keeps him from thinking." His business, operated by the brother, generates 3 million IDR income a month, twice as much as his illegal logging activity (1.5 million IDR).

Another client used his IOM assistance to purchase 4.5 tons of coconuts to initiate a copra oil business. Less than 6 months later, he has saved enough to build a storage facility, part of which will be used to expand into a grocery shop to be held by a wife he married after he received his assistance, and who's expecting a child. He is traumatized, never smiles, caught typhoid fever a week before we met, but he's already back to work.

We have a collection of people who had between nothing to very little, grown-ups who were living with their mother and, 3 months after their IOM assistance, have built their own house and doubled the size of their business. We have at least one client who's income is higher than an IOM budgeted G-6 position, and another one who is so successful that he would not even disclose the amount of cash he generates each month.

Out of 38 projects, 14 were owned by clients who heard we were in town, literally chased us and were so painfully enthusiastic and eager that we had no choice but to follow them so that they could show us how well they did. They're all doing extremely well, they're proud and already planning their next business expansion.

All the clients we met have undergone torture while in jail.

A good number of them shows signs of, to say the least, mental disorder.

Nonetheless, the majority of them, they're proud, they're grateful, they're successful.

They've lived in dark places, they now trust us.

And they made me feel humble.

Should you ever ask an ex-combatant "why did you fight," you'll hear how the greatest ideals turn into the most petty power struggles, but you will also hear how, even in the darkest moments, there can be light at the end of the tunnel.

Heads up people, it's working, you've proven it.

I now expect nothing short of success.

Luc Chounet-Cambas, Deputy Program Manager

Post-Conflict & Reintegration Program, IOM Aceh-Indonesia

When I re-read "Why We Fight" in late 2011, for a few moments I felt the same way I did when I read it the first time in 2007. Luc's email was a terrific morale booster, and when he first sent "Why We Fight" I shared it with two of my advisors at Harvard, Byron J. Good and Mary-Jo D. Good, who at the time were growing increasingly frustrated with their ongoing IOM collaborations due to the "irrationalities of 'donor time.'" Byron replied, summarizing what I felt too: "There is so much to criticize, and rightly, that we all wonder what the hell we are doing working in these organizations. It really is good to feel that it isn't all bureaucracy and bad programs... and even to feel a part of something that is doing good for people."

That was private correspondence between Byron, Mary-Jo, and me. What fascinates me most of all is that *nobody* replied in a public manner to one of the distribution lists. I double-checked with some national staff colleagues and they confirmed what my inbox shows... no reply, not even among national staff distribution lists, not even with the Indonesian translation. When I reconnected with Luc to ask his recollections, he wrote: "I feel slightly embarrassed when remembering this email actually. I've always wondered how it read to staff members and assumed they thought I was drunk or feeling like some mad white man in a Kipling novel!" The biting self-critique reminds me of the heightened reflexivity that email generates, but Luc poses a question that lingers. He imagines what went through the minds of his former staff and conjures up a caricature of colonial conceit so absurd that it forecloses further dialogue; the inverse, perhaps, of the public silence that greets the national staff who on rare occasions project their own heartfelt words across the treacherous divide that separates international from national staff in the archive.

## Chapter 2: Remote Fieldwork

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### Introduction and Background

In early summer of 2008 I was hired for the third time in as many years to coordinate another field-based research project on post-conflict recovery issues in Aceh. The fieldwork that I describe in this chapter is just one small component of a much larger project called the “Multi-Stakeholder Review (MSR) of Post-Conflict Programming in Aceh.” The MSR was an enormous undertaking whose stakeholders included several international donors and embassies,

national and provincial government agencies, and a few civil society groups.<sup>41</sup> Their goals were to summarize and evaluate the past three years of conflict recovery programs in Aceh and to identify barriers and opportunities for consolidating peaceful development in the future. To do this the MSR team relied upon a variety of methods such as quantitative surveys of both conflict-affected civilian communities and GAM ex-combatants, a desk review of all humanitarian programs and expenditures for conflict recovery in Aceh, a qualitative review of the elite level stakeholders in the peace process, a broad historical review of Aceh's cyclical histories of conflict, and others. The logo in Image 2.1 with the ring of linked little circles surrounding the larger blue circle represents the contributions of these different methodological components to the MSR team's overall analysis, and one of those little circles is mine. My job in the summer of 2008, with support from the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) and the World Bank, was to produce a dozen case studies that fall within the broad rubric of "Community Perceptions of the Peace Process."

**Image 2.1: MSR Logo**



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<sup>41</sup> The MSR benefitted from the financial support of United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the World Bank, the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), the United States Agency for International Development SERASI Program, the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID), and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Support for the MSR's community-based qualitative research component described in this chapter and the next came from AusAID and the World Bank. The findings and opinions described in the MSR case study reports and in this dissertation are those of the author and should not be attributed to any of the bodies who have supported the MSR, nor the authors of the main MSR report.

I hired and trained a team of nine Acehnese field researchers. They conducted two week-long rounds of fieldwork under my supervision, and with their field reports I compiled their findings into what turned out to be eleven case studies on different issues that were relevant to the peace process in Aceh at the time. These eleven case studies were compiled into a single document and included as a digital annex on a CD-ROM included with the published MSR report (Noble and Thorburn 2009). The table of contents show the topics that I addressed in each case study, and the page count gives a sense of the book-length results (Grayman 2009).

**Image 2.2: Table of Contents for the MSR Case Studies<sup>42</sup>**

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I reserve a partial analysis of the findings from these case studies for Chapter Three in which I approach the data in a different manner than the eleven topics shown above, but in this chapter I write instead about what it was like to conduct the kind of fieldwork that resulted in these reports. When Byron Good delivered the Marett Memorial Lecture titled “Theorizing the ‘Subject’ of Medical and Psychiatric Anthropology” in 2010, he emphasized that anthropological

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<sup>42</sup> The document titled “Annex 5: Community Perceptions of the Peace Process: Eleven Case Studies for the Multi-Stakeholder Review of Post-Conflict Programming in Aceh (MSR)” is available for download here: [http://jgrayman.wordpress.com/?attachment\\_id=370](http://jgrayman.wordpress.com/?attachment_id=370)



investigations of conflict, violence, suffering, resilience, and recovery require inquiry and analysis from multiple vantage points. When he described our research in Aceh, he argued that our positions working with humanitarian organizations and evaluating their interventions constitutes at least one critical site for anthropological inquiry (Good 2010). One of the goals for this dissertation is to further develop the logic of “intervention as a mode of inquiry” and so using my fieldwork experience on the MSR project, I will describe some of the limits and possibilities of doing an ethnography of humanitarian encounters in post-MoU Aceh from the subject position of someone actually wearing a humanitarian’s hat.

At first glance, the fieldwork stories that follow do not feel authentically anthropological in that my role as lead researcher on this project kept me in a supervisory role, at a deliberate distance from the objects of our research, and reliant upon my nine researchers for data. This is not a long term village study in the canonical and individualist participant-observer traditions established by Bronislaw Malinowski and Franz Boas. But a more critical examination reveals a striking lineage with the foundational practices and texts of the discipline, for just as my research was embedded within the humanitarian apparatus that made my dissertation research possible in the first place, so too were the founders of modern fieldwork-based anthropology as we know it embedded and enabled by the colonial governments that sent their ethnologists to research native subjects. I discuss this hidden and heterodox lineage later in the chapter, but first I begin with the description of a day’s fieldwork in the Central Highlands of Aceh; it is a classic ethnographic stage-setting scene featuring travel, landscapes, and arrivals.

## **A Day's Fieldwork in the Central Highlands**

On an early July morning in 2008 I took the provincial highway southbound from the town of Bireuen on the northeast coast of Aceh up into the mountains. I had scheduled a morning meeting with a team of three field researchers that were nearing the end of their first week in the central highlands collecting data on community perceptions of the peace process three years after the peace agreement. There were two other teams, one on the northeast coast and the other on the southwest coast. Distributing the teams in this way would arguably yield representative data from across the province, or at least among the three major geographic theaters of the Aceh conflict, each with their distinct local dynamics. My job “in the field,” as on prior projects I managed, was to shuttle amongst the teams, ensure that each team was on schedule, advise on their fieldwork strategies, and troubleshoot problems.

I discovered in my years of coordinating these projects across the province that the geography separating coastal lowland and mountain highland communities can be vast and unruly. Along Aceh's northeast coast, for example, ethnic Acehnese live in a dense patchwork of fishing and farming villages extending several kilometers inland. Shrimp and fish farms give way to rice fields and then to forest gardens in the foothills. But when the road begins its ascent in earnest up into the mountains, the settled Acehnese communities end and the landscape alternates between industrial palm oil plantations, abandoned farms with barbed wire fences, and impenetrably overgrown secondary growth forests. In 2008, there were few places to stop in these inter-zones, even along the provincial roads that traverse the mountains. For me the emptiness was striking as I had become accustomed to Indonesia's more densely populated rural areas such as Java or Bali; the landscape was unsettling too because more than a few of the abandoned farms bore the tell-tale scars of conflict: burned out houses, many with war graffiti.

Settlements reappear upon arrival in the cool highland plateaus. Spread out widely, here live indigenous Gayo and other highland minorities, more Acehnese, and a large transmigrant population from Java. Highland communities work on small farms, coffee plantations, and in logging or other extractive industries.

For our morning meeting, we agreed to meet at a *warung* (small cafe) in *Simpang Tiga* (Three-way Intersection), Bener Meriah district. Simpang Tiga is not even a town, but it passes for the seat of Bener Meriah's district government with a few scattered buildings within a few kilometers of the intersection, all recently built and many still empty. Bener Meriah separated from its bordering parent district of Central Aceh during the conflict and was the site of the worst violence in Aceh's highland districts. My team of field researchers had to stay up in Takengon, the district capital of Central Aceh, because Bener Meriah still does not have any hotels. Simpang Tiga is roughly mid-way between Bireuen and Takengon, about two hours from each direction. They only had to look for my car parked at the side of the road to find me.

Highland *warung* serve only *indomie* (Indonesian style ramen noodles) in the morning, but the mountain fresh scallions, cabbage, greens, and an egg thrown into the wok made the noodles mixed with an MSG packet of "spices" surprisingly palatable. Along with a hot coffee, this breakfast put me in a jocular mood, ready to talk shop with my staff. Rina was the team leader; she comes from a Gayo family in Bener Meriah, and speaks the local Gayo language. She had years of research and advocacy experience on gender and conflict issues in Aceh. Her Acehnese husband was a well-known human rights activist, one of the leaders of Aceh's civil society movement to hold a peaceful referendum for independence instead of a violent insurgency, and a co-founder of one of Aceh's new local political parties but at that time he was dying of cancer at their home in Banda Aceh, so Rina was understandably anxious to return

home. The two men on her team were both Acehnese; Farid was a lecturer from the State Islamic University in Banda Aceh, and Imron was a journalist. Over breakfast, they started in with their field report, using a large digital camera to scroll through the images that validated their stories.

**Images 2.3 & 2.4: Posters on a Cafe Wall in Bener Meriah**



**Caption: Two posters in a *warung* (small cafe) in Bener Meriah district. On the left, the poster promotes peace with religious iconography. On the right, the poster shows a calendar from the year 2006, produced by a local TNI infantry brigade, also promoting peace for Gayo Land (*Tanah Gayo*)**

“There is so much going on up here,” Farid began, “but the people are reluctant to speak with us. In one village the community leaders wouldn’t let us talk with the residents. The leaders themselves aren’t very forthcoming. We could really use someone who already knows the community to facilitate our entrance.” I looked to Rina. This was precisely why I asked her to be the team leader, so that she could use her family network and Gayo language to help establish trust and access. “It takes time to build trust,” Rina said confidently, anticipating my question. “My sister works for an NGO in Takengon, and I have a friend that can accompany us

around the villages. Between them, we will be able to meet a lot of different people. We've already attended several community planning meetings.”

Imron turned on the camera to show me pictures of the meetings they had attended along with some other photo documentation. A human rights training at a village mosque. A participant from the training showing his torture wounds for the camera. A surreptitious photo from the hip showing a discussion with one of those impenetrable village heads Farid described. An empty children's activity center, built by IOM in a village as a so-called “peace dividend.” Vanity pictures of Rina, Farid, and Imron posing in a gorgeous field of flowers—a welcome moment of levity. House foundations, remains from an arson attack during the conflict. Notes from a village consultation meeting in which residents determine how they would like to use a small development grant, their peace dividend. The photo shows a useful community facilitator's trick to demonstrate the importance of gender sensitivity; in one group, composed entirely of women, the discussion of development priorities for their village yielded a completely different set of results than from the other group with a mix of men and women.

The digital camera told one story after another, each photograph another data point, dozens of them, and we scrolled through them like a slide show. The camera functions as both a source of distancing—a fast-forward scroll through the field—and as proof of interaction with and a legitimate representation of the objects of our research. Imron then paused and smiled at the next set of pictures on the camera. “Look at this. We went to a volleyball game for peace!” “It's true,” Rina chimed in, looking up from her phone as she was sending text messages to check on her husband's condition. “They had GAM ex-combatants, [anti-separatist] militia members, local police, village youth, and some local leaders all playing together on the court. Everyone came to watch! The community used their peace dividend to renovate the volleyball

court and build a tall net around it so that stray balls wouldn't roll down the hill." Their pictures showed crowds of men and women watching the game from behind the net. There were vendors selling snacks. The players wore sharp colorful athletic uniforms. Everyone was having fun.

We spent the rest of the meeting strategizing ways they might arrange to have more honest and meaningful interviews with ordinary villagers from conflict-affected communities while also planning to cut this first week of fieldwork short so that Rina could return home to her ailing husband. Her friends in Takengon would do some advance planning to arrange private interviews on their next trip. Within days of our return to Banda Aceh, Rina's husband died. While Aceh's loose federation of human rights activists and NGOs mourned the loss of one of their heroes from the referendum era, Rina took a leave of absence to grieve with them, leaving Farid and Imron to do their second week of fieldwork up in the highlands alone.

## **Remote Fieldwork 1**

What I want to emphasize from this account of a day's travel and meeting with my staff up in Bener Meriah are the formal barriers built in between the lead researcher on this project and the subject of our fieldwork. My job as research coordinator was to hire and train my staff, provide them with a field manual with clear instructions and defined targets, then supervise and touch base with them while they were in the field, in the manner I just described. When the MSR team leaders hired me they told me up front that I should not join the research staff during their key informant interviews and focus group discussions. Rina and some of the other researchers who had prior experience working for the same donor also knew that the expatriate coordinator was not supposed to get directly involved. They understood that expatriate involvement in the villages introduces a bias, and at that particular moment during Aceh's

encounter with massive humanitarian intervention, I had to agree with them. The figure of the foreign humanitarian in Aceh had come to signify big donors with money to spend, whose arrival in a village would raise big expectations, inevitably leading to big stories of big suffering and big need. During my work on the MSR project, I never experienced the discomfort of interviewing a wary and protective village head, nor did I attend any development planning meetings or volleyball games for peace.<sup>43</sup> My encounters with communities in Aceh recovering from conflict were always second-hand, mediated through supervision meetings, digital photos, and field reports.

Here I would like to introduce the phrase in the chapter's title. This was "remote fieldwork" not just because Bener Meriah district is far up in the highlands of Aceh without any real towns to call its own. The research coordinator—who also happens to be an anthropologist-in-training—is remote from his subject, and I would argue that this is more of the norm than the exception in most fieldwork settings commissioned by international humanitarian or development agencies. Let me share a few more remote fieldwork encounters to further develop this idea.

### **In a Takengon Hotel Lobby**

Remembering that there were no hotels in Bener Meriah, during the second round of fieldwork a few weeks later, I decided to meet with Farid and Imron in Takengon. This time I drove from the southwest coast on the newly repaved provincial highway, but even under these improved road conditions the ride to Takengon from the nearest town still took twice as long as

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<sup>43</sup> A friend of mine I used to work with at IOM, as a peer reviewer for this chapter, wrote this comment: "and you also didn't get phone calls in the middle of the night from GAM subcommanders asking 'where's the money for my soldiers, bitch?' We repeatedly received these calls, but you were a researcher and not a project officer. Just a point of comparison."

it did from Bireuen on the northeast. The steep road becomes slippery when wet and we had to scale the peaks of Sumatra's Bukit Barisan mountain range before it descends back down the other side into the Gayo plateau. Takengon lies at the western end of a large crater lake, surrounded by the walls of an extinct caldera.

**Image 2.5: Takengon Panorama**



In August 2008 the atmosphere across the central highlands was tense, three years of peace notwithstanding. Just a few months prior, a mob of transmigrant villagers massacred five GAM ex-combatants in Atu Lintang village just outside of Takengon, putting the peace agreement to its most serious test yet. Anti-separatist militia groups were never formally acknowledged in the Helsinki MoU, so their members never had to surrender weapons. In the years since the end of the conflict, militia groups transformed themselves into the foot soldiers for an elite driven movement to partition the highlands away from the rest of Aceh and form a



separate province called Aceh Leuser Antara (ALA).<sup>44</sup> During their fieldwork, Farid and Imron witnessed the shutdown of the Bener Meriah district assembly building. All of Bener Meriah's district legislators and all of the district government agencies scattered around Simpang Tiga had been on strike for weeks, demanding that Jakarta and the provincial government recognize their right to secede from Aceh.

We held our meeting after dinner in the hotel lobby where I was spending the night, covering the latest details of Farid and Imron's fieldwork in hushed tones so as not to draw attention to ourselves. We were warned that intel agents routinely track who checks in and out of Takengon's hotels. After describing the government shut down in Bener Meriah, Farid and Imron told me more about the wall of silence they continued to face in rural communities and described some of the crafty ways they devised to work around it, to remake refusals and denials into a source of data in and of itself. What follows is a retelling of their experience. They wrote it in Bahasa Indonesia and then I translated and edited it for the case study about how local communities perceive the ALA partition movement. This is an example of the self-contained illustrative vignette, the "boxes" one reads in field assessments and donor reports throughout the NGO world and the humanitarian industry:

## **Box 2: ALA in Denial**

On two separate occasions while in the Central Highlands, our researchers had the strange experience of informants telling them they had no information or knowledge about ALA in spite of obvious physical evidence to the contrary. The first occurred in a transmigrant village known for its anti-separatist militia activity

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<sup>44</sup> The southwest coast district elites also had their own provincial partition movement to break away from Aceh called Aceh Barat Selatan (Southwest Aceh, or ABAS). The ALA and ABAS movements, with support from local elites, the military, and some political groups in Jakarta, propose to break up Aceh into three separate provinces, a move that GAM categorically opposes because it would violate the terms of the peace agreement that clearly specify the current borders of Aceh. For more on the ALA and ABAS partition movement, see the first out of the eleven case studies I wrote for the MSR (cited above), and also (Ehrentraut 2010).

during the conflict. Our interviewers asked the village head about the ALA issue but he told them that he did not know anything about it. Just before leaving one of the interviewers stepped to the back of the house to use the bathroom and noticed an ALA calendar on the wall. Returning to the front he asked the village head where he could get an ALA calendar, but the village head told him he has never seen an ALA calendar before, and would not know where to find one. This might be looked over as an anomaly except that it happened a second time in another village during a focus group discussion. Thirty minutes into the lively and friendly discussion about various post-conflict issues in their community, the discussion facilitators unwittingly created an awkward moment when they brought up the subject of ALA. No one would offer their thoughts about the proposed new province, and some even tried to change the subject saying that they did not understand or know anything about ALA. The discussion moved on to keep the atmosphere conducive, and at the moment when the village head's wife wanted to make a list of households that have received post-conflict assistance, she took out a piece of paper which had an ALA logo for the letterhead! The two researchers were staring at the paper with the ALA letterhead, and when the village head's wife realized what they were looking at, she tore off the top section of the paper with the logo on it in an obvious moment of embarrassed discomfort. When the researchers tried to ask her about the letterhead later on, she dismissed it and said she did not know anything about ALA; the previous village head had left that letterhead behind. The research staff asked for another piece of the ALA letterhead as a "souvenir" but she refused, saying that she did not want to start any trouble. Despite being surrounded by so many publicity materials for the movement in the public sphere (roadside banners and billboards) and into private households (ALA calendars and stationery), there is a persistent reluctance to discuss ALA efforts with outsiders, much less with ethnic Acehnese interviewers from Banda Aceh conducting research for a multi-agency review of post-conflict efforts in Aceh. ALA propaganda efforts and the aggressive actions taken by local activists to ensure ALA's realization foster an atmosphere of cautious suspicion and perpetuate lingering conflict-era tensions that have long since begun to wane in many other parts of Aceh.

In the absence of any honest discussion with ordinary people about the movement to break up Aceh into three separate provinces, this was the best that Farid, Imron and I could come up with to convey the sense of caution and fear that still prevails throughout the highlands. But the tradeoff here is that once we put it into the tidy gray box package, the data is literally squared off and set to the side of the page layout in donor reports and policy papers.

### **Fatima's Phone Call**

The next morning we left Takengon and drove down to the northeast coast in a hurry to get back to Banda Aceh because in a few days I was scheduled to fly home to the United States. Despite Aceh's rapidly improving roads since the tsunami, it was a field coordinator's fantasy to imagine that I would be able to visit three different teams spread out across the province within a week's time. As with the first round, I would not be able to visit one of the teams working farther down the northeast coast past Lhokseumawe in the interiors of North and East Aceh. The team leader there was anxious to check in with me, so we spoke by phone while the car was cruising down the mountain. I had given this team the task of investigating the impact of conflict and recent recovery efforts on children. Fatima, the team leader, was a young law student with a precocious and uncanny talent for conducting interviews with elite figures in GAM, government, and Indonesian security forces. When not in school, Fatima worked as a freelance journalist and also as a post-conflict field researcher for a major donor organization working in Aceh, which is how she came to work on my project. The needs of children, and in particular the conflict orphans living in Islamic orphanages where she was doing her fieldwork, came as a rushing revelation to her, and she was determined to share it all with me during our phone call.

She talked about an orphanage they visited in East Aceh where nearly all of the children there had lost one or both of their parents during the conflict. Most had other relatives nearby but their families were unable support them. She spoke with the religious instructor for the girls, and with some of the older kids, and they told her about what happened to them during the conflict, including the kinds of violence they had witnessed or experienced directly. Fatima then recited a long and familiar list of horror and humiliation characteristic of the conflict violence. She had complete stories to accompany every example. Of particular interest to me were the stories Fatima had heard about child soldiers working with GAM because this was an allegation that GAM leadership has vehemently denied for years, not wanting to be caught on the wrong side of human rights doctrine in their appeals to the international community for sympathy toward their struggle. For more than a half hour while our car raced through the ugly wastelands between the highlands and the coast, Fatima's facts, shot through with surprise and shock, poured out during the entire phone conversation. Her reaction reminded me of my own frantic phone calls to IOM after the first time I visited some of the worst conflict-affected areas while working on the PNA project shortly after Indonesian security forces withdrew from the villages in early 2006. I congratulated her on conducting terrific fieldwork, collecting such fascinating data, and encouraged her to write everything down that she had just told me before she forgot. This was an issue that has been largely overlooked by all post-conflict recovery and assistance programs since the peace agreement, and the MSR could use Fatima's data for policy advocacy. Confident in Fatima's eye for detail and newly discovered passion for the welfare of conflict orphans, I was hopeful that her data would yield an exemplary case study for the MSR, replete with several illustrative boxes.

## **Text Messages**

Phone calls like the one I just described can be overwhelming and time consuming. Text messaging by cell phone was actually a preferable mode of communication with my staff in the field. We could focus on the basics of a plan or bypass the small talk and etiquette of a phone call and skip to the heart of the issue that needed to be addressed. Text messages are cheaper too, and more reliable in rural areas with weak phone signals.

### **Utilitarian Text Messages**

Planning: “meet at any *warung* in Simpang Tiga”

News flash: “the pro-ALA legislators and militias have shut down the government in Bener Meriah”

The workaday referential clarity and efficiency of text messages turned out to be just the start of our fascination with this communication technology. Text messages provided a constant source of Geertzian culture-as-actual-text analysis. Instead of having to peer over an informant’s shoulder, the cell phone broadcasts data remotely, bypassing the wasted landscapes altogether, rendering the field coordinator’s site visits nearly obsolete. After all, for all those hours I spent going up and down the mountains, I had just spent less than 24 hours in Takengon with Farid and Imron.

### **TNI Voter Intimidation by Text Message**

During our fieldwork we learned that text messages were an effective election campaign tool because they could penetrate into most rural communities throughout Aceh. The medium also allows for anonymity, and so the messages are routinely used to safely threaten and terrorize individuals and communities from a distance. A military officer from a local base (*Koramil*) in

East Aceh sent this text message to village heads in the neighboring sub-districts. The village head showed the message to his interviewer who then forwarded it to me, but he could not tell if the officer who sent the message composed it himself or if he was simply forwarding it from another source:

“Be careful, GAM has begun listing community members as members of their political party by filling in blank GAM party forms. GAM’s data collection methods are not so different than those used by the PKI [the Indonesian Community Party] in the past. People should not be seduced by GAM’s deception; it could be a trap, but if people want to then feel free to fill in the forms completely. Share this SMS [text message] widely with your family, neighbors, friends, etc., so that people in the community are not deceived, and become victims like those caught up in the PKI’s September 30th Movement rebellion in 1965.”

The message is more than just a warning against unwittingly becoming members of a political party for which they did not knowingly sign up; it is a thinly veiled threat suggesting that the fate of GAM party members may resemble the fate of communists in 1965 who were massacred in the hundreds of thousands across Indonesia, including Aceh.

### **“Anonymous” Intimidates FORKAB Members by Text Message**

Poetic text messages in Acehnese language were sent anonymously to members of an organization called FORKAB, the *Forum Komunikasi Anak Bangsa*, which roughly translates as the Communication Forum for the Sons of the Nation. The members of FORKAB are GAM ex-combatants who surrendered before the peace agreement and GAM considers them traitors. When they surrendered, FORKAB members underwent a formal reeducation program sponsored by the TNI, and then officially “returned to the motherland.” They operate as any other anti-separatist militia with TNI backing in Aceh. This poetic text message urges FORKAB members to vote for GAM’s new political party by using unspeakably rude metaphors in Acehnese (you can see how I translated it) and not-so-veiled threats:

“a young child gathers rattan in the mountains of Meuruedu / find the best to make a basket / now it is almost election season / it is time to choose a throne for the king / head over there to GAM’s party / have no doubts my brother / whoever does not choose the descendents of Acehnese kings / just move to Java / no need to stay anymore in Aceh / just get the fuck out of here”

### **FORKAB Conducts Anti-GAM Election Campaign by Text Message**

Not to be outdone, in response FORKAB registers their disappointment with GAM’s party leaders over the past few years with a text message of their own, also widely distributed. Their message does not use the same poetic form as the anonymous message above, but nonetheless uses evocative poetic language of its own.

“In the year 2000 we ran away, fearful of police and soldier’s weapons. In the year 2004 the tsunami came, Allah’s judgement that brought enormous water. In the year 2006 there was no more fighting. In the year 2007 we inaugurated new kings. In the year 2008 they fought amongst themselves. The leaders of the land forgot to compensate their people’s service. Nobody cares about the victims of shootings, nor does anybody care about the widows. The aristocrats and district leaders are busy with their Kijang Innova luxury vans. In the year 2009 we choose the people’s representatives, and again they bring us promises on a heavenly wind. Those promised a car will get a bicycle. Those promised a coffee will get poisoned. Congratulations to the leaders of this land!”

Messages like these do not typically appear in the mass media or in analyst reports about post-conflict politics in Aceh, and yet we found that this cheap and global technology is being deployed to spread rumors and threats, campaign promises and political slander, poetry and invective, all across the province in rich and distinct Acehnese and Indonesian vernaculars. “The presence of personal electronics,” Mary Steedly writes, “is more a means of vernacularizing the global modern, highlighting what Kajri Jain describes as a specifically postcolonial condition, in which subjects ‘function across epistemically disjunct yet performatively networked worlds’” (Jain 2007:14; Steedly 2013:259). Most of these ephemeral documents transmitted across cell phone networks will easily escape the archives that will someday bear only a partial historic witness to this momentous and occasionally tumultuous chapter in Aceh’s transition to peace.

## Back in the USA: Conducting Remote Fieldwork From Home

At the end of August 2008 I returned to the United States in time to teach a class for the fall semester, but our remote fieldwork continued while I was writing up the case studies. My staff sent me their field reports and interview transcripts by email, and we conducted lively discussions about the data by email and chat which helped me immensely as I composed the eleven thematic case studies. The data posed several challenges and some unexpected surprises. On the subject of conflict orphans and child soldiers, the case study for which I had the highest hopes, Fatima sent me a four page report that had nothing of the extemporaneous flow of detailed stories and genuine outrage that she had shared with me by telephone less than a month ago. Her text was filled with sentimental platitudes and empty prescriptions, reminiscent of fundraiser appeals on cable television. Fatima warns the reader about the consequences of inaction on behalf of conflict orphans, for they might grow up to take revenge for the injustices committed against their parents. She makes an appeal to national sentiment, in effect saying: “No child should be left behind.”<sup>45</sup> Now there are surely some NGO reports that fall back upon this style of advocacy writing, but I could not bring myself to do the same thing. In the end I dropped the case study on child welfare in post-conflict Aceh. Fatima’s deeply moving and revelatory field experience was lost in the translation of her fieldwork into text and there were no remote technologies available to me in Cambridge or to Fatima in Banda Aceh that would help us collect better data on this issue long after our field budgets were exhausted.

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<sup>45</sup> Here is an excerpt of Fatima’s text as she wrote it in Bahasa Indonesia. Speakers of the language will easily identify the empty platitudes and appeal to sentiment without significant content: “...*Bagaimanapun, anak-anak korban konflik baik yang berperilaku “berbeda” maupun yang berperilaku “normal” mereka semua mempunyai alasan yang sangat kuat untuk suatu saat melakukan tindakan balasan atas kekejaman yang menimpa keluarganya. Untuk itu potensi-potensi tersebut harus diredam seminimal mungkin melalui program yang berkelanjutan. Jangan sampai komunikasi terhadap mereka putus. Jangan sampai mereka merasa diabaikan sebagai anak negeri, terlebih mereka banyak tinggal di daerah pedalaman...*”



There are several ways in which we might make sense of Fatima's radically different representations of her fieldwork by telephone and then in writing. First, earlier generations of anthropologists have written about the empty qualities of Indonesian political and bureaucratic speech, as if it were inherent in the national language (Anderson 1990). This applies to educational settings and academic writing as well. I suspect this is a hangover from Suharto's New Order era, when the art of saying as little as possible was perfected, but Bahasa Indonesia as a living vernacular across the archipelago has developed and diversified considerably since the 1970s. Despite Fatima's competent descriptions of her observations in conversation, she may have been writing about her results exactly as she was taught in school. In another register, Fatima may have felt reluctant to formally put into writing what she had breathlessly recounted to me over the phone because attaching her name to a description of GAM's conscription of child soldiers may have been too dangerous for her. Finally, we might also consider that Fatima was simply too busy to give a thorough account of her fieldwork in writing.

Apart from the disappointment over losing such promising data from Fatima's field research about conflict orphans, most of the field reports and interview transcripts yielded productive insights, and some of them were quite astonishing. The last case study I wrote was a kind of "where are they now?" profile of several ex-political prisoners three years after the peace agreement. Perhaps this is typical for an anthropologist, but the ex-political prisoners I found most interesting were the ones who slipped through the cracks and defied some of the easy categories typically assigned to perpetrators and victims of conflict.

I started reading the transcript of an interview with a woman from Pidie Jaya district named Dona. The story of how she decided to join GAM and receive military training recalls the story of many other young recruits who joined GAM to avenge the wrongs committed against

friends and family by Indonesian security forces during the DOM era of the 1990s, but Dona's story is still unique compared with other revenge narratives. Back in 2001 when she was 22 years old, she fell sick with a fever and a terrible pain in her lower abdomen. The village healer told Dona that the spirit of a woman who had been raped by Indonesian soldiers had possessed her. Upon recovery, a sense of moral outrage grew out of her spirit possession experience and she decided to join GAM's troop of women combatants. At least with some military training Dona would have the strength and skill to defend herself if anyone tried to assault her. Her training up in the mountains lasted three months and then when she went home to visit her family, the military found and arrested her. At her trial she was sentenced to three years in prison, but her parents paid off security officials in order to reduce her sentence to eleven months and keep her in a local prison. While she was in prison, Dona composed her own lyrics to popular Acehnese and Indonesian songs, lyrics that reflected her and her friends' experiences during the conflict. She composed 15 sets of melancholy song lyrics and gave them as gifts to her friends in jail. Her favorite was a song titled "Cut Bang," with lyrics that she sang in Acehnese during her interview:

The neck was slit and brought to the beach /  
The blood poured out like a heavy rain /  
Oh Lord the man I loved is no longer here /  
It felt as if the Earth quaked at the moment Cut Bang died /  
My life carries on without direction anymore

Dona was released from jail before the peace agreement, and so was not counted among the amnestied prisoners eligible for reintegration assistance. She works at home helping her parents make Acehnese snacks and she also works for daily wages in the tobacco fields. Dona makes just enough to send her younger siblings to school, two of which were able to pursue higher education in the nearby town of Sigli. As of July 2008, Dona still had not received any

reintegration assistance. After many attempts and faced with layer upon layer of corruption in the handling of reintegration funds, she gave up in frustration and told the person who interviewed her that the peace is only for the former combatants that hold higher office.

Dona's story is the kind that remains unrecognized in Aceh's post-conflict landscape. Her hobby composing plaintive and disturbing song lyrics, or her admirable dedication to supporting her family are not legible contributions to a larger political narrative of recovery. And yet, starting with the apocalyptic and lovelorn lyrics that I am to believe she sang to her interviewer, I have this powerful illusion that Dona herself is reaching out of the flat, black and white transcript on my computer screen and touching me. I wanted to meet and talk with her. So I reached back through the layers and sent an email to the person who interviewed her. I didn't ever get to meet Dona, but her interviewer and I wrote back and forth about six times going over the translations of her lyrics and discussing her life history in some more detail. She even called Dona to do some fact checking and see how she was doing five months after the interview, and we were pleased to discover that she had finally received the first payment of a government reintegration assistance package.

## **Remote Fieldwork 2**

This is what it is like to meet someone on paper, to meet someone remotely. I am touched unexpectedly by Dona's story, but the filters that mediate my encounter with her inevitably leave me "touched away" from her as well. She is both present to the extent that the transcript leaves me gobsmacked and speechless and absent to the extent that our fieldnotes and

case studies will never do justice to her life experience.<sup>46</sup> I offer this example of extremely remote fieldwork to show that even at its outer limits we might still have productive encounters. On our way to these outer limits I have sketched out fieldwork scenes that are increasingly remote from their subject: at a roadside *warung* listening to my staff tell stories, then flipping through their pictures on a digital camera; the tidy packaging of fear and caution into comforting “gray box” rectangles; a breathless telephone call; a series of ephemeral text messages; and finally, a collection of email dispatches between Cambridge and Banda Aceh, translating the most promising fragments of transcript, and making decisions about which ones make the final cut, and which are left behind.

The fieldwork I have described in this chapter is strange for an anthropologist; it does not feel quite right because of the degrees of separation that lie between the ethnographer and his or her informants. Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson have written about the professionalization of “the field” in anthropological research (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). Ethnographic accounts typically present the reader with tropes of “entry” into and “exit” from a constructed site for research conducted “in the field” (ibid.12-13). Where most humanitarians in Aceh lived, Banda Aceh, was never considered “the field,” because “‘the field’ is most appropriately a place that is ‘not home,’” and “some places will necessarily be more ‘not home’ than others, and hence more appropriate, more ‘fieldlike.’ All ethnographic research is thus done ‘in the field,’ but some ‘fields’ are more equal than others—specifically, those that are understood to be distant, exotic, and strange” (ibid.13). In Aceh, humanitarian fieldwork implied the tsunami-destroyed coastal villages and the conflict-ravaged interiors, but not the suburban neighborhoods of Banda Aceh, far from the wrecked coastal parts of the city, where all the NGOs opened up their offices in

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<sup>46</sup> On this feeling of being “touched away,” Rudolf Mrázek describes the wavering power of the listener in technologically mediated encounters with the other (voice recordings, computer screens, etc.). The listener either crumbles before the voice or crumbles the voice when writing it down (Mrázek 2010:244-8).

middle and upper class homes. Entry and exit to Aceh's more 'fieldlike' sites are a formalized part of humanitarian work, always marked with travel authorization forms, security clearances, and the requisition of terrain-appropriate vehicles, sometimes requiring a convoy in high security zones. In this chapter, I overemphasize the entry and exit aspects of humanitarian fieldwork—the road scenes, streetside cafes, and hotel lobbies—because I spent days traveling to and from “the field” without ever actually arriving, and used remote strategies while on the road to maintain fieldwork productivity.

Gupta and Ferguson's genealogy of “the field” also reveals some of the hidden heterodoxies of fieldwork practice in the history of our discipline that veer from the Malinowskian style of individualist fieldwork that has been the classic industry standard for generations. Their archival research into the annals of American anthropological practice reveal examples that look remarkably similar to the donor-driven research projects I have worked on in post-conflict Aceh. What stands out for me is Gupta and Ferguson's appreciation for Paul Radin's *Italians of San Francisco*, a project supported by The New Deal unemployment reduction programs during the Great Depression that Gupta and Ferguson call “a vivid illustration of the road not taken in mainstream American anthropology” (ibid.22; Radin 1975[1935]). Radin, a student of Franz Boas, was expected to hire teams of unemployed workers to conduct his research. Just as Malinowski made the best of his imposed exile in the Trobriand Islands by inventing the individualist model of fieldwork, so too did Radin extoll the virtues of hiring unemployed insurance agents and real estate salesmen, because they were unencumbered with the academic conceits that put trained anthropologists at a distance from their subject, and because they had a closer sociological connection with their informants:

The anthropological heresy is complete: the real secret of ethnographic rapport is to have the fieldwork done by unemployed insurance salesmen and real estate agents! One could hardly ask for a more vivid illustration of the point that conventions of fieldwork are shaped not simply by

intrinsic methodological merits, but by the institutional conditions of intellectual production...Radin's strategy neatly reverses the hard-won Malinowskian/Boasian dogma that only people with university degrees in anthropology can really get the facts right. Radin argues, plausibly enough, that such professionals are socially separated from those they would understand by their very training, and that local intellectuals or specialists may be better positioned, at least for certain sorts of data collection (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:23-24).

The MSR research project also placed a high premium on hiring Acehnese researchers, or subcontracting components of the project to local institutions. Less than one third of my research team were academics, the others were journalists and NGO activists.

In a more detailed consideration of the arc of an anthropological career, we realize that we always deploy a range of remote fieldwork strategies, through the use of field assistants, translators, and peer review (Steedly, in seminar conversation). Our data inevitably includes stories heard second or third hand, and their examples can still retain their immediacy just as often as some of our face-to-face interviews fall flat. If we want to avoid reproducing vignettes, illustrative boxes, and picaresque journeys, a useful corrective to an excess of remote fieldwork is to not lose sight of what remains proximate even as you reckon with data from afar. We are sitting in the roadside *warung* when Rina tells me about events in the next village over. We are holding the camera in our hands as we scroll through their images. I am racing up and down the mountain as I check in with my staff by phone, usually with text messages. My perspective is necessarily at the provincial level because my employers aim to represent the Aceh context, but the tradeoff is that my memories of such a complicated place like Takengon are only as panoramic as the lakeview shown above in Image 2.5, and as paranoid as the meeting I held in a dirty hotel lobby. We debrief in makeshift offices back in Banda Aceh, and when I get home to Cambridge, I rely entirely on my computer screen and the internet to interact with our informants. We are left with the sense of just “passing through.” These are the field conditions

that structure the humanitarian encounter, and we must take account of them as a starting point for using these encounters as a site for anthropological inquiry.

## **Epilogue**

It is not lost upon me that when we flip through the images on a digital camera and call it “fieldwork” that there is a profound thinning in our subsequent accounts of social suffering. I am reminded of Arthur Kleinman’s trenchant critique and dismay over the nonchalant use and exploitation of images of suffering in the mass media (Kleinman and Kleinman 1997). We are touched by what we see and touched away from it simultaneously, and then we look for something else.

One could ask where my commitments lie as an anthropologist working under these conditions during my years in Aceh. I follow post-conflict developments in Aceh with interest, and I have a vivid sense of the stakes involved should things ever fall apart. But my deeper commitments are to the more proximate encounters I have enjoyed there. My two closest colleagues from the MSR team are Rina and Fatima. I have worked with them closely on subsequent projects after the MSR, and we keep in touch routinely, and remotely, by facebook and email. After her first husband died, Rina reconnected with and married an old schoolmate who was finally released from prison, without amnesty, three years after the peace agreement for his involvement in GAM. She still conducts community-based research on post-conflict issues, both at Syiah Kuala University and with a well-known Australian political scientist. In the 2012 executive elections, she took a brave step into politics to run for *bupati* (district head) of Bener Meriah, and lost, but she ran for election simply to remind Bener Meriah constituents that women have been increasingly sidelined from politics since the MoU.

Fatima, within months of completing her work with me on the MSR, received a six month research grant to study more about conflict orphans and child soldiers from the Aceh Research Training Institute, an initiative supported by the Australian government to improve the social science research capacities of young professionals, activists, civil servants, and academics in Aceh. She asked me to be her international academic advisor, and I pushed her to find a writing voice that matches the passionate enthusiasm with which she talks about conflict orphans and child soldiers in Aceh. She has presented her data at several conferences since then, and the first of several planned publications is currently under review for a government journal that focuses on maternal and child welfare issues.

In the next chapter, I take the findings that Rina, Fatima, Imron, Farid, and the five other researchers on the MSR team sent me, and look for clues in the interview transcripts that lend themselves to an analysis that goes beyond simply the descriptive case studies for which the data were originally collected. Since I completed the first draft of this chapter, remote fieldwork has continued, not just for this improving this chapter and the next, but to supplement, update, and cross-check many of the ethnographic fragments and analyses throughout this whole dissertation, up until and including the Conclusion's very last sentence.



## Chapter 3: Recovery Narratives

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### Introduction: A Volleyball Game for Peace

On a cool and sunny day in the central highlands of Aceh, the residents of a small federation of villages (*kemukiman*) in the Permata sub-district of Bener Meriah have come together to enjoy a “volleyball game for peace” on a court that stands at the top of a nearby hill. It is July 2008, nearly three years since the peace agreement (MoU) brought an end to Aceh’s separatist conflict. Before the MoU, the ethnically differentiated villages in this remote community found themselves swept up—as both perpetrators and victims—in spasms of

violence visited upon each other.<sup>47</sup> Mass graves have been uncovered in the nearby valleys. But since the MoU, incremental changes such as a new generation of village leaders and the delivery of small but symbolic peace dividends at the village and *kemukiman* levels are having a revitalizing effect. Indeed the rehabilitation of the volleyball court itself was part of a small development grant from the government for post-conflict reconstruction. The “peace” players on the court include former armed adversaries—some from GAM, others from national security forces and anti-separatist militia groups—as well as local leaders such as village secretaries and youth leaders. A tall net to prevent stray balls from rolling down the hill surrounds the entire court, separating the tournament from the crowds who came to watch.

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<sup>47</sup> Conflict violence did not reach the Central Highlands of Aceh until the late 1990s, when GAM launched a massive recruitment effort after the fall of Suharto. As a counter-insurgency measure, the TNI supported the formation of anti-separatist militia groups, which took strongest root among Javanese transmigrant communities in the Central Highlands. The ethnic mix of Bener Meriah’s wholly rural and underdeveloped population—Javanese transmigrants, local Gayo, and Acehese migrants from the coast—was easily exploited and provoked into heretofore unprecedented levels of communal inter-ethnic violence and displacement throughout the district.

**Image 3.1: A Volleyball Game for Peace in Bener Meriah District**



**Caption: Former armed adversaries engage on the volleyball court to mark a new era of post-conflict friendship in a village in Bener Meriah district. Community members watch along the sidelines from behind a netted fence.**

This image of the volleyball game for peace, as it was recorded during a day's fieldwork in Bener Meriah, strikes me as an apt metaphor for how rural communities observe Aceh's peace process. The court delineates boundaries where two sides compete on equal footing. The players anticipate their opponent's strategic moves with a well-rehearsed defense and counter-offense. The game has rules and a referee. Many studies of Aceh's relatively successful peace process restrict their historical and political analysis to this metaphorical playing court, focusing on the give and take between former adversaries and their mediators to achieve and then sustain a negotiated peace. Still missing and often elusive from these studies are the spectators on the sidelines, behind the tall net, outside the field of play, and far less subject to the rules of the

game, who tell us poignantly and repeatedly, when given the chance, that they were never invited to join in any games for peace.

## **Narratives of Conflict and Recovery**

The volleyball game described above and the stories that follow are based on the MSR fieldwork that I described in the previous chapter. Together with my team of nine field researchers, I designed this research to solicit and explore rural community perceptions through private interviews and focus group discussions about the ongoing peace process in former conflict areas throughout Aceh. The inclusion of these studies within the MSR aims to bring the voices of so-called peace beneficiaries into their analysis, and while we found that the peace process brought many tangible benefits and shortcomings to post-conflict communities, what stands out is the sense that respondents were mere spectators observing someone else's game.

Rather than mine these case studies to somehow definitively summarize how the diverse populations of Aceh understand the successes and failures of the peace process, my goal in this chapter is to describe in broad terms an emergent set of competing post-conflict recovery narratives, and then to hint at some of the less accessible and unrecognized narratives from our fieldwork. I start with the official version of what recovery looks like in Aceh, a story that represents the interests of the ruling institutions that structure society. Following Pierre Bourdieu, Mary Steedly also uses the metaphor of a game when she defines "official discourse."

Official discourse, and especially those concepts and principles within which a social group forms an image of itself, both "sanctions and imposes what it states, tacitly laying down the dividing line between the thinkable and the unthinkable, thus contributing towards the maintenance of the symbolic order from which it draws its authority" (Bourdieu 1977:21). The ability to impose such official definitions upon situations or to eliminate those situations from official consideration is closely linked to political authority; that is, it is associated primarily with those who control or have privileged access to what Marx and Engels (1965:61) labeled the "means of mental production" within a social community. By creating a generic representation of social reality, official language provides, roughly speaking, the rules of the social game, as these are defined by

those group members with sufficient “social capital” to make their own particular version of these rules stick (Steadly 1993:134).

Within official discourse, we can find a reigning official narrative of recovery as well as opposing narratives that present alternative models of recovery that people can access as a means to resist the claims of the official narrative. Both the official and counter-official narratives deploy similar *strategies* to make their claims. My use of the term “strategy” follows Michel de Certeau’s definition:

I call a *strategy* the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated. It postulates a *place* that can be delimited as its own and serve as the base from which relations with an *exteriority* composed of targets or threats (customers or competitors, enemies, the country surrounding the city, objectives and objects of research, etc.) can be managed (de Certeau 1984:35-6, italics in original).

Both official and counter-official narratives have access, albeit differential, to strategic resources such as press coverage, academic critique, political process, and propaganda publishing, all of which can be marshaled in support of one narrative vying for dominance over the others. These narratives are born out of relationships of power, and it is possible for counter-official narratives to supplant the official one.

The official and counter-official narratives of the conflict in Aceh are well-documented. The Indonesian state, backed by its powerful military and ample political will in Jakarta, told a grand official narrative about internal threats to the security and integrity of the unitary state. It mobilized symbols and forces of nationalism in order to exterminate these threats (Siegel 1998). GAM had their own official narrative to make its claims for independence, at first using an ethno-nationalist argument in opposition to colonial exploitation from Jakarta, and later relying upon a human rights framework in an effort to attract international sympathy for their cause, grounded in a history of resource exploitation and violence perpetrated against civilian Acehnese communities (Aspinall 2009; Kell 1995).

In this chapter I want to show that recovery narratives may also be understood in terms of official and counter-official narratives, each with access to strategic resources to communicate their version of the peace process to date. But with a focus on the ordinary rural people that the MSR researchers interviewed instead of the elite purveyors of competing recovery narratives, in our metaphorical volleyball game for peace, we turn to the spectators who watch the game from outside the court. I argue that the spectator narratives from rural communities heard most clearly are empowered because their stories adhere to the same proscribed parameters of the above-mentioned metaphorical volleyball game. Satisfied beneficiaries of a peace dividend as well as stridently critical adversaries each articulate their stories capably. Some of these are described briefly below. Other respondents find themselves left out of the discourse. Their stories resist easy interpretation and sidestep the well-rehearsed and taken-for-granted narratives of post-conflict recovery.

### **“Peace Beneficiaries” Echo an Official Narrative of Recovery**

Recovery through return to everyday life is the first and most enduring take-home message from our fieldwork. Respondents who gave optimistic and even euphoric support for the peace process consistently focused on the pragmatic and everyday benefits of peace rather than the politics and material benefits of reintegration efforts. The departure of government forces brought an end to violence and allowed the resumption of daily activities. The reunion of amnestied political prisoners and GAM combatants with their families also figure heavily and repeatedly among respondents who expressed unreserved support for the peace process and its continuation.

The first steps taken after the peace agreement were arguably the most successful and crucial, and that was the removal of imported so-called “inorganic” Indonesian police and military forces<sup>48</sup> from Aceh and GAM’s visible and symbolic surrender of arms and their transformation into a civilian organization. The conflict narratives of civilians unfortunate enough to live in the heavy conflict areas of Aceh are animated by the brutal acts of violence and humiliation perpetrated upon them by government forces and also GAM (Good, Good, Grayman and Lakoma 2007; 2006; Grayman, Good and Good 2009). The government’s strategy explicitly targeted rural communities, perceived to be the “roots” of GAM’s ability to wage its guerrilla war against the Indonesian state.<sup>49</sup> Narratives of violence, torture, displacement, and household economies ruined almost invariably feature the government security posts set up in villages all over the province. The phased removal of government forces from these posts in late 2005 brought an end to the oppressive threat of violence, torture, and extortion, a euphoric moment for these communities who suddenly “felt” the peace in very real day to day improvements in their lives. Respondents describe finally being able to go to gardens and fields again without fear of snipers; to markets without extortion of goods; to join with friends at village coffee shops without suspicion of informants; and to mosques or village halls (*meunasah*) after sundown and before sunrise to fulfill religious obligations, including religious instruction for children in the evenings, without curfews:

“I am so happy [about the peace], back then everything was difficult. To conduct one’s livelihood was hard, to even go to the doctor we were afraid. During the conflict I often had to borrow money from neighbors and relatives just so that my family could eat. But now, even though my

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<sup>48</sup> Most stories of conflict violence highlight the distinction between “organic” and “inorganic” security forces. Organic troops are the local recruits into the police or military by local command structures based in Aceh. Inorganic troops are the police and military troops that were brought to Aceh from other parts of Indonesia specifically for counter-insurgency. Inorganic troops answer to a command structure based in Jakarta, where distrust of organic forces often led to their disregard. Without ties to local populations in Aceh, inorganic troops had a reputation for more brutal and arbitrary acts of violence against civilian populations.

<sup>49</sup> see, for example: (Gatra 2003)

income is small, thank God I now have enough to support my family.” – Community Member, South Aceh

“During this peacetime we can move around more freely to look for work and we feel more comfortable with the current security situation here.” – Village Head, South Aceh

“In my opinion the peace process has gone well, people here are more relaxed, comfortable, and free to look for work. We don’t have fear and caution anymore.” – Community Member, North Aceh

“I heard about the MoU from the TV, the radio, and my friends. I felt so happy to hear that news because I have no interest in going back to Java; I want to stay here [in Aceh] until I have grandchildren. I am no longer fearful to go out and work at any time of day... I usually begin at three o’clock in the morning in order to reach the market to sell my produce.” – Transmigrant who fled Aceh during the conflict but returned after the MoU, East Aceh

“We expect that conditions will remain safe; security and economic prosperity are our hopes here.” – Village Head, Central Aceh

Finally, for a subset of respondents, narratives of family reunion with amnestied prisoners and ex-combatants most characterized their perceptions of the peace process:

“I am so grateful because I can now rejoin my family; if there was no peace I wouldn’t know the condition of my wife and children. Before the peace, I never dared go home because there were so many TNI soldiers in our village. With peace we can work without fear. I really support this peace process. I can look for work and even though it’s not much I spend my days working in the rubber tree garden owned by one of my neighbors, and my wife also works at the industrial rubber plantation in another village. Our lives are calm now.” – Former GAM Combatant, West Aceh

These are the narratives of success from respondents who fervently and unambiguously recognize the benefits of peace in Aceh. They are framed by some of the most important early benchmarks of the MoU’s implementation: the withdrawal of inorganic troops, the amnesty given to 2000 political prisoners, and the demobilization of GAM as an armed insurgency. The MoU gave rise to a large apparatus of local, national, and international agencies—both governmental and non-governmental—all working to support the peace process and ensure its success. The respondents quoted above represent the best outcomes of their work, and similar stories are well-documented in the published reports of these agencies, promoting their work and celebrating the successes of the MoU implementation. When approached by MSR researchers,



who represented the same network of stakeholders that supported the peace process, these “peace beneficiaries” (as the agency publications sometimes call them) are fully authorized to speak of their experiences, and they do so articulately. I conclude this section with a profile of Nur from Bireuen district, whose own story best exemplifies the official narrative of what is supposed to happen in post-conflict recovery.

### **Nur, Bireuen**

In 1998 when he was still a young teenager, Nur noticed that whenever TNI came to his village in the Jangka sub-district of Bireuen for a sweeping operation, the soldiers would take young men away who would never return. Those who did return had either serious physical or mental injuries. Nur decided it would be safer to leave his village and join GAM up in the mountains. While there he was not a weapon-wielding soldier for GAM, not least because he was so young; rather he worked as an assistant. When Nur came home to visit his parents, he discovered that the only men left in the village were the elderly, and he was the only young adult male in the community, so he was promptly arrested by the TNI stationed in his village and sent to prison in Porong, near Surabaya in East Java. He spent two and a half years of a life sentence there until the peace agreement in August 2005, when he was given amnesty by the Indonesian government and sent home.

Like all prisoners who were given amnesty in the weeks and months immediately following the peace agreement, Nur was able to access reintegration assistance provided by the government in collaboration with IOM. Immediately upon release, Nur was given two million rupiah (roughly USD200) for reinsertion assistance, and then received two more installments of 1.5 million rupiah (USD150) over the course of the next five months to help smooth the

transition back into his home community.<sup>50</sup> Several months later, Nur received an in-kind vocational assistance package from IOM worth nine million rupiah (USD900) for small business development that included management training and counseling for all beneficiaries in the program. Nur chose to sell fish in his community and other surrounding villages, for which IOM furnished him with a new motorbike. He also received an additional ten million rupiah (USD1,000) from BRA (*Badan Reintegrasi Aceh*, the Aceh provincial government's agency for post-conflict reintegration assistance), which he used to pay off debts that he incurred while he was in prison. Shortly after returning home, Nur proposed to a young woman and got married. As of July 2008, at age 23, Nur was living with his wife and together they have a 19-month-old baby son.

The MSR interviewers spent one hour interviewing Nur together with his wife and baby son at their home. Nur is obviously one of the luckier ex-political prisoners in post-conflict Aceh today, for he not only was able to access reintegration assistance, but he was also successful in his efforts to restart his life after prison.<sup>51</sup> Nur is grateful for the reintegration assistance he received, without which he would not have been able to pay off his debts, get married, and start a family. He spoke with enthusiasm, cheer, and confidence as he described the happiness, success, and peace in his new life since his amnesty:

“I am so grateful and give thanks to God because with the peace process I was able to get out of jail and return to my home village. Now I can live in peace, without fear. If there was never any peace I don't know what my fate might have been; without peace I certainly wouldn't have been

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<sup>50</sup> The use of transitional cash assistance for amnestied prisoners and ex-combatants during the reinsertion phase of a peace process is discussed by Knight & Özerdem, which served as a model for IOM's post-conflict program in Aceh (Knight and Özerdem 2004).

<sup>51</sup> In many ways, the political prisoners given amnesty immediately after the MoU were the luckiest of all post-MoU beneficiaries. The government had a set list and funds were channeled to them directly. There were no opportunities for government officials or GAM commanders to spread around or siphon off of funds. They not only received cash assistance at regular intervals but also in-kind vocational packages and basic training. Not all amnestied prisoners enjoyed outcomes as successful as Nur's, but at least they received comparatively good assistance without the politics and issues that many former combatants faced (see below, “Problems with Reintegration and Recovery Assistance”).

able to get married, I wouldn't have a wife. For sure I would never know the meaning of having a life with a wife and child, because I would have spent the rest of my life in jail. Now we are free to do our activities anytime and anywhere, and there is nothing left for us to fear.”

## **Critical Voices of Post-MoU Recovery in Aceh**

While peacetime has unquestionably improved lives in communities throughout Aceh, many respondents, while supporting peace in Aceh in principle, shared with MSR interviewers their criticisms and concerns about the peace process to date and their fears and pessimism about the future. They have at their disposal familiar discourses associated with historical precedent, lingering separatist ideology, grievance with corruption and inefficiency in government, and persistent conflict-era identities among both former combatants and victims.

## **Learning from History**

Historian Anthony Reid has shown how the histories of conflict in Aceh stretching back more than a century to the Dutch War have become indelibly sedimented into Acehnese identity (Reid 2006; 2004). This long history of resistance to external forces, whether the Dutch or the Indonesian state, leads to healthy skepticism and caution about the current peace process. A focus group discussion participant from North Aceh spoke about the current peace process with a realistic reference to Aceh's history:

Although the peace process continues to move forward and the Acehnese people as a whole feel free now to work for their livelihood, the potential for new conflicts can always emerge. The people have learned a lot from their history. Just for an example, take the Darul Islam rebellion [in the 1950s], after only 15 years of peace with Jakarta, warfare returned to Aceh. The lessons and experiences from this history continue to haunt us, to the extent that a feeling of caution and vigilance still rises up within us whenever we gaze into the future.

## **Left Out**

Critics of the peace process make a clear distinction between the two signatory parties to the peace agreement on the one hand, and ordinary people in Aceh on the other, noting that the people had no voice in the agreement and still feel powerless to say what they think about it. From the same focus group discussion in North Aceh quoted above, another participant explains this frustration, again with reference to Aceh's history but from the point of view of GAM's separatist ideology:

During the early days of the Helsinki peace agreement, not all elements of society had a chance to say whether they agree or not with peace between Indonesia and GAM. In fact many were disappointed because the peace agreement stated that Aceh was still within the unitary framework of the Indonesian state. For them, Aceh must separate from Indonesia because that is our history, when Aceh was Aceh, and Indonesia did not exist.

## **Problems with Reintegration and Recovery Assistance**

As many field researchers have discovered while conducting assessment work for NGOs and donor organizations in post-tsunami and post-conflict Aceh, it can be hard to remain an objective observer of conditions when respondents automatically see you as an agent of recovery for their community. Narratives tend to emphasize problems and maximize the need for assistance (*bantuan*). A common sentiment among respondent opinions about post-conflict recovery is antipathy and lack of confidence in local government to handle the assistance programs for their community in hopes that donors and NGOs will deliver assistance to communities directly without collaboration with local government agencies. MSR researchers heard complaints and problems about every step of community experiences with *bantuan*.

Starting with the data collection process for assessing conflict damage and victim status, communities are suspicious. A hierarchical assessment mechanism that extends from Banda Aceh down to conflict-affected villages allows for manipulation at several levels, and there have

been many reports of eligible beneficiary lists submitted by village heads not matching the lists at the sub-district, district, and provincial levels, and hence accusations of corruption with all kinds of motives. Additionally, local and international NGOs and donor agencies conduct their own assessment work (including the MSR), which leads to fatigue among conflict-affected communities who see too much counting and no results.

One of the biggest barriers to accessing post-conflict assistance reported by respondents is the government bureaucracy and its requirements for proving identity and verifying eligibility. The experience of conflict displaced families who may have returned to Aceh but do not want to return to their home community is a good example. Unable to prove their residency at the time of the conflict, or perhaps too far away from their original residence to collect documentation, conflict refugees are unable to procure the right data to establish their displacement status. Even for non-displaced conflict victims, the regulations and requirements are confusing and it is too expensive to travel back and forth to the proper government agency in the district capital.

“We were asked to provide letters that explained that we were tortured during the conflict by both national security forces and GAM, and we had to go to the military base, the police station, and the KPA office. Conflict victims were hopeful that they would receive some physical assistance, but nothing came of it.” – PETA Member (anti-separatist group), Central Aceh

Given the limited amount of post-conflict assistance to go around, and the seemingly unlimited number of conflict victims with claims for it, there have been allegations that various recovery plans were available to the highest bidder or the well connected. In other cases, the terms of the assistance were just ambiguous enough that some middlemen were able to claim fees when none should have been required.

“We are conflict victims because our shop was burned down during the conflict, and now we have to pay annual rent for the new shop we’re using now. The collector isn’t a village official but he collects a fee without any clear reason.” – Trader from Bener Meriah

“The assistance is only given if there is some bribe for the administrator.” – Villager from Central Aceh

“I’ve already registered with BRA and I even paid Rp1,500,000 in ‘administrative fees’ to cover my housing reconstruction, but until now there is nothing.” – Village Head from Central Aceh

One of the problems with livelihood assistance is the lack of adequate supervision. Without supervision, individual beneficiaries of post-conflict livelihood support sell the capital inputs that were given to them just to get some cash, which they use for “consumption needs” but are left without a sustainable livelihood program. In the case of small cooperatives or group projects for ex-combatants, for example, a lump sum is given to start a small business together such as a brick factory or to start a palm oil plantation cooperative. Without proper vocational assistance and supervision, the funds end up getting distributed individually and with cuts (or “fees”) taken out as it moves down the chain of command. A GAM ex-combatant from North Aceh told MSR researchers how it worked:

A portion of the government funds is passed through the district agencies. The North Aceh District Agency for Agriculture, for example, is managing a budget of three billion rupiah. We wrote a proposal to get assistance from this agency and then our group received 100 million rupiah (for ten people). Then we divided up the money amongst ourselves. I opened up a cellphone shop. Actually there is inequity among us because each person has a different ability to manage finances... Some used the money for consumption needs such as buying a motorbike, a cellphone, shoes, and so on. I was only able to suggest that they use the money for productive activities.

Communities recognize poor planning and careless implementation in post-conflict recovery projects right away since they are most directly affected by the results. In Bener Meriah district, for example, a housing reconstruction program resulted in the destruction of the road because the trucks carrying the materials to the construction site were too heavy. The beneficiaries think that the harm done by the loss of the road far outweighs any benefits conferred by the new housing. Other projects are started but remain unfinished such as a bridge to Burlah village in Ketol sub-district in Bener Meriah that was started two years ago but never finished, leaving Burlah and the neighboring villages disconnected from markets and the rest of

Aceh. In another village in the same sub-district, a clean water facility for public washing and bathing was built without a water supply to make it functional. Respondents describing these problems conclude that projects appear to benefit contractors and officials more than the supposed beneficiaries.

### **Meet the New Boss...**

During the conflict, the areas most affected by violence barely had a functioning government. Public health clinics were taken over as bases by state forces, effectively shutting down health services. Schools were burned down by GAM (or “as if” by GAM) as symbols of state propaganda. Markets were hijacked by extortion. Government officials were seen as either corrupted or hamstrung through their collusion with national security forces that were inflicting so much violence on civilians. In GAM’s heartland, this historical experience was an easy and effective propaganda tool for GAM to reinforce mistrust in government agencies, and partly explains why respondents tell their interviewers that they prefer direct assistance to their communities instead of through the government.

The years since the MoU have seen the emergence of a large and diverse conglomerate of former GAM leaders assume positions of political and economic power (International Crisis Group 2009). Many of them oversee or directly implement post-conflict recovery efforts across Aceh. GAM’s ex-combatants and Aceh’s conflict-affected communities are their primary constituency; their successful reintegration and recovery are essential for the GAM conglomerate’s political survival. Ironically, the story of government corruption and inefficiency that was part of GAM’s counter-narrative against the Indonesian state during the conflict has been turned around since the MoU and used against the GAM conglomerate as they

try to project their official narrative of post-conflict recovery that more closely resembles the earlier parts of this chapter.

### **Combatants and Victims: Persistent Conflict-Era Identities**

“A lot of people here have incorrectly received assistance. The conflict victims are the ones who should be receiving assistance, however so far it is always the conflict actors who have the power to disburse and receive assistance.” – Villager from East Aceh

The ostensible goal of reinsertion and reintegration assistance for former combatants is to help them leave behind their former identities as armed insurgents. However the incentive structure that was developed in Aceh has had the unintended consequence of reinforcing conflict-era identities. While former combatant groups aggressively secure their peace dividend, there is a strong sense among civilians that former GAM combatants and anti-separatist militia members have more access to recovery assistance than the ordinary civilian conflict victims that they claimed to represent during their struggle. In many cases this perception may be correct in that the peace agreement is meant to transform former combatants into civilians, and part of the deal is to coax fighters to lay down their arms in exchange for reintegration assistance. As a political arrangement, the terms can be perceived as unfair from a strictly humanitarian perspective. The balance between recovery and compensation for civilian conflict victims on the one hand and the reintegration benefits for former combatants and militia members on the other is one of the biggest sources of social jealousy and tension in post-conflict communities throughout Aceh.

“GAM members are now so rich. They build big houses, even with two floors, and they get a lot of contract work and assistance. Just look at that house on the corner of the road over there, that’s their house. Honestly, I feel so bitter to see it; [during the conflict] they used to ask for my help, they would even come to my house in the middle of the night and ask for food. I also sent food for them in the forest... We, the women in this community, were the ones ordered by the TNI to take the dead bodies of GAM combatants and bury them... During the conflict we pitied them because



they are our sons, Acehnese, from our community. But now they are arrogant; when they ride in their cars they don't greet us, they don't even lower the car windows. They [GAM] promised us, if they were successful in the struggle, the people would be happy; that's why we were so willing to help them and prayed that they would be safe and always healthy in their struggle." – A conflict widow from North Aceh

Rather than abandon his conflict era identity, the iconic GAM ex-combatant persists as a recognizable social type on Aceh's post-conflict landscape, leveraging his former (oftentimes mythic) identity as a mountain-dwelling guerrilla into a new politically and economically powerful subject (Aspinall 2009; Grayman 2009). But he does so at the risk of leaving conflict victims behind, and in this category I include the lowest rank and file non-iconic ex-combatants—farmers who joined the struggle, women, and child soldiers—in rural isolated areas who have not enjoyed the spoils of peace in the same way that their commanders and elite leaders have. These persistent conflict identities—combatants and victims—inhabit “core moral stances” that justify their claims for redress, but paradoxically work against reconciliation and recovery (Das and Kleinman 2001:25).

### **Social Jealousy**

Post-conflict communities carry the heavy burden of broken social ties that hinder reconciliation during peacetime (Good, Good, Grayman and Lakoma 2006:45). MSR respondents describe how reintegration and recovery problems lead to a perpetuation of mistrust within communities, suspicions of corruption, and a lingering sense of injustice and social jealousy. Some go further and suggest that the inequitable distribution of post-conflict assistance can be the source of new horizontal conflict in the community.

“If you visit the villages of conflict victims, and if you want to see the housing and other kinds of assistance, don't forget to visit the villagers directly, and if you can avoid it, don't visit the village head.” – Village Federation (*mukim*) Leader from Bener Meriah

“I don’t trust anyone anymore, everyone is a liar, an imposter... even the *ulama* (religious leaders) can’t be trusted anymore.” – GAM Ex-Combatant from Bener Meriah

“The government is trying to provoke the community against each other with their ways [between those who receive and don’t receive assistance]... We will demand our rights until death... Don’t blame us if something happens later.” – Arson Victim from Bener Meriah

“Some members of the community don’t want to demand assistance anymore, they’re tired... This becomes an accumulation of disappointment that can explode at any time.” – A clinic doctor from North Aceh

### **Sword Force Fighter, North Aceh**

The course of events in Sawang, a sub-district along the western interior of North Aceh district bordering Bireuen, where a group of disaffected GAM ex-combatants turned against KPA leadership, provides an instructive lesson in failed post-conflict reintegration efforts. In Sawang, all of the emergent critiques of the peace process described above came together in a potent and violent worst outcomes scenario. Attention to Sawang began with a series of high profile criminal acts in the area throughout April and May 2007 whose perpetrators were widely suspected to be a group of disaffected ex-combatants under the leadership of former GAM commander Teungku Badruddin, a local *ulama* in Sawang known for his charisma and compassion who rejected the current implementation of the Helsinki MoU and stood up for ex-combatants unable to access reintegration assistance. The details surrounding the wave of crime in Sawang and the complicated turn of events that culminated with Badruddin’s eventual assassination in December 2007 are available elsewhere, but in the immediate aftermath of his death there emerged the *Pasukan Peudeung*, The Sword Force, whose members are the remainders of Badruddin’s group of GAM ex-combatants in Sawang.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> In addition to my MSR case study titled “Sawang” (Grayman 2009), the World Bank’s *Aceh Conflict Monitoring Update* (ACMU) reports from December 2007, July-August 2008, and September 2008 address and analyze the chronology of events in Sawang. A forthcoming article in the journal *Conflict, Security, and Development* by my

The Sword Force pursues a separatist doctrine for Aceh claiming to be the “real” (*asli*) army of Aceh, assumes a religious ideology reminiscent of jihadist movements, and aims to reinstate the oft-referenced pre-colonial Acehese sultanate during which it is imagined that Islamic shariah law prevailed across the land. In practice, however, The Sword Force became known for intimidating and extorting NGOs working in Sawang, vandalizing the banners and flags of local political parties, and publicly rebuking women who do not dress with proper Islamic clothing. Wild rumors were circulating about the number of soldiers (up to 500 men) in the group, their access to weapons, their links with other anti-MoU groups in Aceh and outside of Indonesia, and the existence of a secret hit-list with the names of high profile GAM leaders who support the MoU targeted for assassination, one by one. By all realistic accounts, the Sword Force was little more than a loosely organized group of a few dozen young men from the northern part of Sawang who lacked clear leadership ever since Badruddin’s assassination. In September 2008, the Sword Force made international news after they briefly kidnapped an international aid worker. By the end of 2008, it was reported that the Sword Force had joined military training organized by the *Front Pembela Islam* (FPI, Islamic Defender’s Front) in the hills of Sawang to send “volunteers” to fight Israeli forces in Gaza.

MSR researchers had the chance to meet one of the members of the Sword Force during their fieldwork in Sawang. He was young, in his early twenties, participated enthusiastically in the interview, and gave detailed responses to the questions. The interview took place without interruptions at the young man’s house, where he served his interviewers coffee and banana chips. His narrative combines GAM’s foundational ideology of Acehese ethno-nationalist separatism with a veneer of Islamist jihad. The interview began with a question about the green

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colleague Bobby Anderson also recounts the events in Sawang from the perspective of a small NGO faced with extortion threats and an actual carjacking while trying to deliver post-conflict assistance (Anderson 2013).

*Pasukan Peudeung* flags with a star and sword that have been raised all over the northern part of Sawang sub-district where Badruddin's supporters prevail. The flags, he explained, use religious imagery to recall the pre-colonial glory of Aceh's sultanate:

Oh, that is the flag of 'Islam's Victory'. That flag was used in the old days of [Sultan] Iskandar Muda's kingdom as a symbol of peace and the upholding of Islam in this land of Mecca's Verandah. In those days Aceh had three flags, the first was red and used in times of struggle and war, while the green one is used in the times following Islam's Victory, and the third flag with the image of a 'winged steed (*burak*) with a lion' was used as a symbol of the nation.

Since the era of Aceh's sultanate, he explained, the history of conflict in Aceh is a response to a series of betrayals. He argued that Aceh never wanted to be a part of Indonesia because Aceh was standing on its own before the war with the Dutch began in 1873. Upon completion of that war, Aceh should have returned to its original form, not been lumped in with Indonesia. These are the well-rehearsed arguments that GAM have used since its formation in the 1970s. He ascribes similar invalidity to the peace agreement, again with reference to Islam as justification: "For me personally, the MoU is illegal and can not be acknowledged because it was facilitated by non-Muslims. Under Islamic law, the mediator for any dispute among Muslims must also come from the Muslim community; it can't be a non-Muslim. But that is what happened here."

The turn to Islam as a discourse of resistance is a departure from GAM propaganda and may serve to distinguish the Sword Force from their former brothers-in-arms while simultaneously opening themselves up to new allies such as FPI. While GAM's struggle may have been overtly nationalist and secular in its orientation, previous rebellions against the Dutch or the Darul Islam rebellion of the 1950s framed their struggles in terms of an Islamic holy war that are still familiar in Aceh (Aspinall 2009; Siegel 1979). "One of the Sword Force's goals is to rebuild Islam in Aceh," the young fighter explained, because the current implementation of Islamic law in Aceh has been half-hearted at best. But despite his insistence on a return to

Islamic law as it was imagined during the time of the sultanate, his emphasis on Islamic values and imagery seems more like a justification for their actions against KPA, local contractors, and NGOs working in their area. Avenging KPA's betrayal is the prevailing motive that drives The Sword Force:

We all took an oath to fight for the land of Aceh so that we can stand up once again... However now the reality is different; a lot of us who once swore an oath violated it only because of lust, materialism, and other priorities. Because of that we [The Sword Force] have returned to remind [KPA] that they were not the only ones who fought. The entire community is fed up, so many possessions and lives lost, everyone's peace of mind disrupted during the conflict. They should be able to feel that, but instead they prefer to advance their own interests over the people, creating new forms of social inequality here. They don't even pay attention to their own men. There are so many of us that carried weapons then but haven't received any assistance whatsoever. KPA has forgotten us. They have violated their oath so it is our duty to fight them. KPA may see us as an enemy that disrupts the peace, but we will continue to fight in order to straighten them out once again... We are looking for them, the ones who we think have violated their oath. They once swore: *'Uksimubillah ulon meusumpah, harta dan darah ulon lon serahkan keperjuangan untuk seuneboh nanggroe Aceh.'* ('In the name of Allah I swear on all my possessions and my blood. I offer it all for the struggle to redeem the Aceh Nation.') We often remind our former comrades in the struggle so that they won't forget themselves. But the strange thing is they interpret our reminders differently by accusing us of not supporting the peace. They call us thieves. They even call us new separatists. Now they are just killing and selling their nation for their own interests and money. KPA leaders just do whatever they want and have forgotten the meaning of this struggle. Before they swore to never salute the Indonesian flag, but now they salute with spirit, just look at Governor Irwandi... Yes, even though the people are still putting their trust in KPA to lead Aceh, we will continue to remind them of their broken promise, even if with spilt blood.

The ultimate betrayal, as this young Sword Force fighter told his interviewers so insistently, was KPA's betrayal of its oath to pursue Aceh's independence on behalf of the Acehese people. More specifically, he believes KPA was behind Badruddin's assassination. He is obsessed with "reminding" certain members of KPA of their oaths to the people of Aceh that they violated, of "straightening out" certain members of KPA so that they might see their mistakes more clearly. As KPA have spilled the blood of their assassinated leader, Teungku Badruddin, so too will the Sword Force spill the blood of certain KPA leaders, and they know exactly who they want.

In trying to understand what happened in Sawang, MSR researchers did not attempt to sort out the facts and fancies surrounding the Sword Force. What matters is that civilians and

disaffected young combatants in Sawang believe in this version of the peace process in Aceh. Their narratives reflect the perceptions of a community that fails to see the benefits of a peace process that, quite frankly, has not been beneficial to them. Moreover, civilian respondents expressed sympathy for the restless ex-combatants in their community; they have a clear understanding of the conditions that have led these youths back to violence. In a setting of this much despair and frustration, the rumors about the Sword Force take on a life of their own; their narrative has currency and legitimacy not least because it draws upon such familiar discourses of critique and resistance. Outsiders willing to listen, recognize, and amplify this counter-official narrative also leverage it toward their interests, and this includes not just the MSR research (or this dissertation chapter), but also KPA and other GAM-affiliated groups, and potentially Indonesian security forces and Islamic extremist groups such as FPI.

## **Unrecognized**

The voices recorded above could be said to be *strategically* engaged in a “politics of recognition”; in search of a validation of their experience spoken in authorized terms that are familiar to and echoed by the elite players on our metaphorical volleyball court described in the Introduction of this chapter (Das and Kleinman 2001:4). But apart from these more public and recognizable texts, “the most recalcitrant of tragedies,” as Veena Das and Arthur Kleinman remind us in *Remaking a World*, always accompanies the return to everyday life (ibid.4). Recovery does not easily leave behind the buried memories and experiences of the past, and their expression, sometimes incoherent or merely unfamiliar, evades the recognizable narrative strategies described above that have come to characterize the official and counter-official

versions of the peace process in Aceh. Steedly contrasts official discourse with subaltern experience:

Within the discursive field constituted by the “subjectless practice” (Bourdieu 1977:35) of an officially represented reality, the social experience of members of subaltern groups as such may appear less apposite or meaningful than that of members of dominant groups. Subaltern experience tends to be particularized from the official side, which defines it as private or anomalous insofar as it does not conform to official standards—indeed often defines it a priori as socially irrelevant, duplicitous, the inappropriate working of a “bad subject.” Subaltern groups and individuals may have fewer resources at their disposal for constructing a credibly official or counter-official representation of social reality, and less authority to make their version stick. In this situation, stories of personal experience, while not directly countering or opposing the authority of official representations at the generic level, may offer other routes to narrative plausibility and other avenues for pursuing individual and collective interests. Such stories engage what I call an “unofficial” vision of narrative experience (Steedly 1993:135).

If official narratives are strategic in their production, again following Certeau’s terminology, we might say that unofficial narratives are *tactical* in their production; that is to say they evade codification or replicability. Certeau sets up his definition of tactics in contrast to his definition of strategies. A tactic is “a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus. No delimitation of an exteriority, then, provides it with the condition necessary for autonomy. The space of a tactic is the space of the other” (de Certeau 1984:37). Tactical narratives may poach details and tropes from well-established narratives, and make clever use of externally imposed conditions, but fail (or refuse) to cohere in a manner that supports the official narratives told by elites.

In this section I share two more respondent narratives that have far less purchase on the imagination of Aceh’s wider post-conflict community, but I would emphasize first that unofficial narratives, and the tactical practices used to produce them, are not strictly “weapons of the weak,” as the first of the following two examples shows. Both respondents spent time in prison during the conflict; both blur the distinction between conflict actor and victim; both carry something from their incarceration experience into their recovery narrative; and both have failed to receive recognition or reparations for the losses and suffering they endured.

## **Hasbi Lacak, East Aceh**

Hasbi Lacak comes from a family of fighters: “I have relatives in *Kopassus* (TNI elite forces) and the police, as well as seven other relatives who joined GAM.” Hasbi never thought he would join GAM; in fact during the 1990s he once worked as a driver for TNI forces. When his uncle was shot dead in 2001, accused of being part of GAM, Hasbi moved to Malaysia and worked legally for two years. When he returned in 2003, TNI forces arrested him and accused him of being part of the overseas GAM contingent in Malaysia, and put him in jail for six months.<sup>53</sup> When released, feeling resentful and angry, Hasbi joined GAM for real in early 2004 and went through military training to become a GAM fighter, eventually handling mortar weapons in the Peurelak region of East Aceh. During the military emergency when TNI penetrated the interiors of East Aceh, GAM forces were severely weakened and dispersed, and Hasbi was forced back to the town of Idi Rayeuk where he lived undercover and on his own. Eventually he was captured and sentenced to a jail in Idi Rayeuk for nine years, but escaped after only nine months when GAM forces were able to burn down the jail and set the prisoners free. He rejoined GAM forces up in the mountains and stayed there until the tsunami. Hasbi called a relative in TNI and asked if he should surrender. His relative told him that he would be better off going to Malaysia. So Hasbi escaped to Malaysia and sought asylum through the United Nations Refugee Agency’s (UNHCR) mission there. Upon showing MSR interviewers his expired UNHCR ID card, Hasbi said, “During the conflict, it was more dangerous to carry a UNHCR refugee card than to carry a weapon because they were afraid that Aceh would become an

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<sup>53</sup> For more on the role played by overseas GAM during and especially after the conflict, see Antje Missbach’s recently published monograph, *Separatist Conflict in Indonesia: The Long-Distance Politics of the Acehnese Diaspora* (2011b).



international issue, an embarrassment to Indonesia.” Hasbi’s younger brother, also in GAM, was accepted for asylum and now lives in Canada. Hasbi returned to Aceh after the peace agreement.

Referring back to his experience in jail, Hasbi told a memorable story that highlights many of the lingering tensions that remain in closely knit communities where even relatives from the same family were involved with different and opposing armed forces during the conflict:

I had a memorable experience while I was in jail. A BRIMOB [mobile police brigade] officer, also from Idi Rayeuk, named TH, tortured me. But at that time there was another BRIMOB officer from Surabaya who watched over me, and he treated me well. For 28 days the BRIMOB officer from Surabaya never hit me. He even gave me food and cigarettes. One day, TH came into my cell and arrogantly asked “Where is the political prisoner?” He shouted at me: “You’re so great joining GAM, my men, my family, many of them are dead.” I answered, “Now I am in prison, you don’t have the right to hit me anymore.” TH didn’t care, he took a knife and brutally cut up my ears and my back. I said to him, “You, as a person from Idi shouldn’t act like that, the officer from Surabaya is nicer to me.” The BRIMOB officer from Surabaya actually forbid TH from doing that and told him, “TH, don’t do that, you’re from Idi, one day you’ll meet him again.” When I got out of jail, I called TH to let him know that I was out. He didn’t believe me, but I convinced him when I told him, “If you don’t believe me just ask your parents, I have already visited them.” Even though I held a grudge against TH, I didn’t do anything to his parents. When I visited TH’s parents, I reminded his father to tell TH not to bother returning home, because if I meet him again I will shoot him. After the MoU I once met TH again. I was sitting in a coffee shop with some other security forces. Suddenly he showed up and I said to him “I don’t know you, you’re better off just moving (your seat) away, I’m afraid something unpleasant might happen.” The last I heard about him, TH is sitting in the East Aceh police station prison for five months because he was involved in a crystal meth case, an undocumented motorbike, and a stolen car.

When Hasbi discussed his brother’s asylum in Canada, he compared the assistance his brother received to his own, claiming that while his brother received all kinds of transitional assistance from UNHCR and the Canadian government, he has not received anything here in Aceh despite his status as a former prisoner. Nevertheless today Hasbi Lacak is doing well for himself, even working together with TNI officers on local business projects. “I often meet with the people I once fought with, and we joke about it now... ‘Oh, you’re the one who shot me in battle!’ and we laugh together.” He has no interest in getting involved in future conflict, preferring to pursue business interests instead such as selling rubber and chocolate at prices that are much better now than they were during the conflict, and without extortion from security

forces. He is active in local *Partai Aceh* (PA) politics, the new local political party representing the political interests of former GAM, and manages the campaign activities for 16 villages, where he is convinced that PA will win 100% of the vote: “And that’s because the people support us and we’ve never had any problems with or treated the community badly!”

### **Rian, Central Aceh**

Rian is considered a member of PETA (*Pembela Tanah Air*, The Homeland Defenders), the largest anti-separatist militia group in Aceh, simply because he has joined their current enterprise of managing the tax collection and security of the Takengon bus terminal, though he claims not to have been part of their TNI-sponsored counter-insurgency operations during the conflict. He comes from an ethnic Gayo landholding family of modest means in Bener Meriah, and for many years of the conflict maintained a neutral position between the opposing sides as he worked primarily as a “marketplace thug” (*preman pasar*) in Timang Gajah sub-district, where he had friendly associations with some GAM members. His father is a retired TNI officer, and during the conflict GAM forces killed Rian’s younger brother simply because of his father’s connection with the Indonesian military. Because GAM targeted Rian’s brother, but not Rian himself, the TNI, perhaps aware of Rian’s friendly association with GAM in Timang Gajah, suspected Rian of having sympathetic ties with GAM, and so captured him, tortured him, and left him for dead at the Timang Gajah police station. He survived this attack, and the police were able to nurse him back to health and prevent TNI intelligence officers from hunting him down. Rian denies the TNI accusations, and as a son of a TNI officer claims he was educated to always support the unitary state of Indonesia. Today he rents a house in Takengon with his wife and

children, works at the bus terminal, and on the side Rian coordinates the documentation of human rights abuses for a local NGO in one of the sub-districts of Central Aceh.

Rian's story highlights the challenge of making sense of conflict events based on partial narratives, especially in the highlands where the anti-separatist groups are a significant but unacknowledged conflict actor, and particularly for ethnic Gayo, whose loyalties were often misrecognized and always suspect. His experience is hard to categorize and it is not surprising that Rian has received no reparations since he was released from prison. When MSR interviewers asked him about Aceh's future following the emergence of local political parties after the MoU, he shared a common rumor that reflects the worst fears of anti-GAM activists: "*Partai Aceh* [PA] has a mission to take over the parliament and if they can control the parliament then Aceh will become independent." From there, Rian digressed extemporaneously to describe the terrifying consequences of a PA victory in the 2009 legislative elections:

If Aceh declares independence, then NATO's aircraft carrier will be standing by in Aceh's waters, ready at a moment's notice to secure Aceh from attack by the TNI, who don't want Aceh to be free from the unitary state of Indonesia. But if NATO succeeds in assisting Aceh's liberation, Aceh will become the next East Timor; only four Acehnese will be left alive, the rest of them will be dead from the war, and then Aceh, all on its own, will be taken over by the West. Personally I disagree with PA's mission; it reeks of separatism. I was educated based on the nationalist ideology (*Pancasila*) held by my parents and throughout my surroundings. My father was in the TNI, and I was raised in the barracks, and I have never had any separatist thoughts, even though during the conflict I was once captured and tortured (almost until death) by the TNI because they accused me of being involved with GAM, whereas my younger brother was killed at the hands of GAM simply because he was considered the son of *Pa'i* (TNI).<sup>54</sup>

Rian's predictions reveal a wild paranoid imagination, and yet the component parts of his apocalyptic narrative each have their basis in small truths. The "NATO ship" recalls the United States ship, the USS Abraham Lincoln, which sat in Indonesian waters off the west coast of Aceh right after the tsunami, an imposing image for the TNI and other anti-separatists at a time before

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<sup>54</sup> The term *Pa'i* is Acehnese slang for TNI, with roots in the derogatory term *sipahi* from India that signifies Indian conscripts in the British colonial army. Mary-Jo DelVecchio Good writes about the multivalent historical resonance of the *Pa'i* (also *Si Pa'i*) terminology as it has been used in Aceh in a forthcoming chapter titled "Acehnese Women's Narratives of Traumatic Experience, Resilience and Recovery" (Good 2013).

the peace agreement was signed. The scorched earth policy that TNI used in East Timor after their referendum for independence makes the possibility of a similar response in Aceh all too possible should PA somehow succeed in declaring independence from Indonesia after they take seats in the provincial legislature. An independent Aceh falling pathetically under the sphere of Western influence recalls East Timor's dependence upon foreign assistance ever since their referendum. Rian imagines the realization of his worst fears in frightening detail, fueled no doubt by his own traumatic experiences during the conflict, which he inevitably returns to after he completes his description of the consequences of PA's rumored ambitions.

## **Conclusion**

“There is rarely an opportunity to observe how everyday life is lived in such communities of survivors, no long-term relation established between those who experience the violence and those who interpret it for others” (Das and Kleinman 2001:26).

The quote by Das and Kleinman nods to the unconventional fieldwork conditions under which the content for the MSR case studies and this chapter was collected. If the respondent descriptions have a somewhat flat narrative NGO-report quality about them, it reflects the remoteness of the fieldwork and the purposes for which we originally collected the data. Nevertheless in this chapter I have tried to describe some of the emergent narratives of recovery in post-MoU Aceh as they were told to our team of field researchers during several weeks of fieldwork throughout the province in July and August 2008. With limited time to cover so much ground, at best we can share what appears to be a set of coherent official narratives that describe successes and offer critiques of the peace process in Aceh. Using the metaphor of a “volleyball game for peace,” I started with the premise that all respondents saw themselves as spectators

rather than players in the peace process. I argue that the spectator narratives heard most clearly from the sidelines are the ones that adhere most closely to the “rules of the game,” that speak from within previously authorized discourses that have come to define the peace process (Caton 2006). In discussing the peace process, the MoU itself and its vast apparatus of international, national, and local implementing agencies appears to have successfully framed the rules and terms of the debate. Whether they agree with the MoU or not, this document remains a defining reference point when respondents measure up the successes and failures of peace in Aceh. But critics in particular are able to make strategic use of other well-known discursive frames ranging from GAM’s ethno-nationalist ideology, to anti-government sentiment, to Islamic holy war among others. Narratives framed by an authorizing discourse have more purchase on the wider community not just because they are familiar, but also because there are powerful interests (the figurative players on the court) that can leverage and amplify these versions of post-conflict recovery until they become legible and coherent versions of what happened after the peace agreement.

In contrast, the brief biographies and narratives of Hasbi Lacak and Rian, and to these I would also add Dona from Chapter Two, exemplify the kinds of stories that remain unrecognized in the emergent narratives of post-conflict recovery in Aceh, and it is worth emphasizing that they do not all derive from positions of the weakest and most disenfranchised. A small but widely acknowledged community of activists claims to speak on behalf of *inong balee* (GAM’s female ex-combatants) such as Dona, but they have been no match for a GAM conglomerate composed entirely of men who, on balance, have managed to erase the many contributions of women during the conflict and thereby leave them largely out of the peace process. To repeat what I said about Dona in Chapter Two, her hobby composing plaintive and disturbing song

lyrics, or her admirable dedication to supporting her family, are not legible contributions to a larger political narrative of recovery. Hasbi Lacak's family network in East Aceh that extends into both GAM and TNI allowed him first to evade capture by TNI and flee to Malaysia and then eventually collude in local business interests with them after the peace agreement, while simultaneously working to ensure PA's victory in the upcoming elections. Arrangements like these hardly support the GAM conglomerate's efforts to project their official narrative of reintegration, and those who would use the questionable details of Hasbi Lacak's activities in service of critique and label him a "bad subject" are easily censored. His experience with torture at the hands of a local BRIMOB officer and friendly protection from another from Surabaya does not corroborate the stereotypical image of inhumane "inorganic" forces imported from Java and the local "organic" troops that were put into difficult and uncomfortable combat situations against people from their own community. Meanwhile Rian's compelling interview provides a window into an imaginative process that poaches and reinterprets different moments from Indonesia's recent history in service of a paranoid fantasy of national disintegration. His narrative strikes the interviewer as fragmentary and incoherent at best, and yet it is not inconsistent with his personal experience. Steedly reminds us that unofficial narratives are always partial in both senses of the word:

They are on the one hand explicitly *partisan*, interested accounts, and, on the other, they are *incomplete*, fragmentary. Hence their fundamental indeterminacy: speaking only for themselves, and making no claims to narrative authority over another, they also accept no others' claims over them. The uncertainty they provoke is surely an effect of their (at best) tangential relation to the official interpretive fields of their reception. Ordinary standards of evaluation do not apply; we don't know where we stand with them. This narrative uncertainty is more than some epiphenomenal residue of official processes of exclusion or incorporation. Rather, it seems to me that this interpretive indeterminacy is the defining feature of an unofficial vision, and that this, more than anything else, is what makes it both subversive and open to official subversion (Steedly 1993:135).

In her ethnography *Shadows of War* about violence in settings of war and the profiteering networks that sustain those settings, Carolyn Nordstrom draws the reader's attention to the

systematic erasures in the narratives that emerge from the war zone (Nordstrom 2004:40). The stories never heard do not support the strategic interests that work to resolve or perpetuate conflict. In this chapter I argue that the same holds in the fragile and tentative setting of post-MoU Aceh. MSR researchers could regularly access the kinds of recovery narratives that animate the official narratives of affirmation and critique described above, but to access the unique stories told by Dona, Hasbi, and Rian required a more persistent attention to detail, and a sensitivity to the concerns of their respondents. Song lyrics, spirit possession, torture narratives, and paranoia do not easily survive a re-telling, and it is impossible to find respondents with the same experience, and yet these are the narratives that give us a fleeting glimpse of what life after conflict in Aceh looks like: momentary dispatches of singular experience, stories of tactical survival, not easily traced. Many thousands more stories remain untold, or even impossible to tell; MSR researchers often detected a palpable sense of hesitation, caution, and fear when asked about post-conflict recovery. As I described in Chapter Two, this was especially true in the central highland districts of Bener Meriah and Central Aceh where, at the time of fieldwork, anti-separatist militia groups were still active and served as a potent reminder of how powerful interests can not only shape narratives of recovery but also prevent them altogether.

## Chapter 4: Recognition

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### Introduction

In early January 2012, I took my first trip back to Aceh since I stopped working there full time 18 months prior; my first trip also in a strictly personal capacity to visit old friends and conduct private ethnographic research without the protective support apparatus that I had come to rely upon from international humanitarian and development agencies. My research goal for this trip was as straightforward as my social agenda to catch up with old friends and colleagues.



I conducted 20 interviews in which I asked my informants to tell me about their current situation and then reflect back upon their work during Aceh's extraordinary humanitarian encounter since the tsunami. While collecting details of family and work history, I used prompts to solicit stories about their most memorable experiences during the tsunami and conflict recovery efforts.

### **The *Longue Durée* of Fieldwork**

The results of these interviews tell us more than just a “where are they now?” tale of my friends and colleagues in Aceh that directly experienced and participated in the humanitarian encounter. After the urgency of the “humanitarian imperative” has subsided and “donor time” has expired, the relative *longue durée* of my fieldwork in Aceh offers a method that is uniquely suited to an anthropology of humanitarianism that answers Fassin and Vasquez's call to make ethnographic *and* historical sense of a “singular situation” at once grasped partly within *and* partly beyond “global designs” (Fassin and Vasquez 2005:390). The interviews gave my informants and me an opportunity to look back together at the humanitarian encounter through the lens of hindsight, permitting an analysis of the long term effects of humanitarianism in Aceh that was impossible during the urgent years of intervention. What follows in this chapter and the next is an account with several historical layers. In the first layer, my respondents and I recreate and revisit particular moments during what many of them called *jaman NGO*, the NGO era, from 2005 through 2009. Occasionally I asked informants to contrast their experience working with humanitarian organizations against their lives in Aceh before *jaman NGO*, i.e. before the tsunami, taking us back another layer to the conflict era. However in the next layer, we are compelled to look at the present historical moment of our reunion, not just to assess the long term residual effect of Aceh's humanitarian encounter, but also to acknowledge the socio-

political context of Aceh in January 2012 that persistently impinged upon our memories of the past, reminding us that the chronicity of crisis in Aceh continues to challenge the optimistic designation of “post-conflict” to the province (Vigh 2008). The final layer of this account filters all of the above through yet another analytical lens: the writing process itself, in dialogue with my interview recordings and other primary sources, the social science literature, and my ongoing conversations with academic colleagues.

### **My Aceh Informants in 2012**

A few words about my idiosyncratic sample of informants should quickly disabuse readers of drawing sweeping conclusions. Given the centrality of physical reconstruction in Aceh’s recovery, for example, there is a notable lack of civil engineers in my list of informants. My work experiences in Aceh introduced me to people with backgrounds primarily in medicine, public health, and social science, and a wide range of others in security, law, journalism, political or human rights activism, and public administration. Many of these colleagues were Indonesians from other parts of the country, and when I returned to visit Aceh in 2012, they had long since returned home. Others originally from Aceh have left to other parts of country, and some have also “gone international,” absorbed into the humanitarian apparatus or in pursuit of higher education abroad after their rewarding work experiences in Aceh. Therefore it is important to emphasize that my informants in 2012 were all from Aceh and still living there. At the time of our reunion, nearly half of my respondents were still working in the non-governmental and nonprofit sector, while the remainder had moved into a wide range of occupations in government civil service, politics, small business, journalism, public health, medicine, mining, and agriculture.

Though hardly representative of Aceh's general population, one important demographic trend among my interviewees stands out in a way that accords with my long term observations working in Aceh: marriage. During the conflict, young men typically had to flee villages to save their lives, and young women did not want to marry only to risk the social stigma of becoming a widow if their husband was killed.<sup>55</sup> After the tsunami, many observers from the NGO community took notice of a sudden increase in weddings after the acute phase of the emergency had passed in an effort to pair off widows and widowers (see, for example, Minza 2005). I even attended a wedding party in 2005 at a tsunami IDP barracks outside of Meulaboh, West Aceh, that was paid for by an international NGO as a psychosocial intervention for the whole barracks community. As for my limited sample of informants, only four out of 20 had spouses when I first met them, but twelve more had started families of their own when we met in January 2012.

### **Singular Situations, Clarifying Stories**

Apart from marriage, few factors among my informants allow for generalizations, and yet ethnography allows us to tease out the clarifying stories from "singular situations" in an effort to assemble an account of "local histories." The common experience of working for IOM's Post-Conflict Reintegration Program (PCRP) in some of the more remote districts of Aceh, for example, characterizes the informants from Blang Pidie in Southwest Aceh that I highlight in this chapter. A more diverse and cosmopolitan set of experiences characterizes the informants I interviewed in Banda Aceh, the subject of the next chapter.

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<sup>55</sup> A memorable scene at the end of Aryo Danusiri's 1999 documentary *The Village Goat Takes the Beating* features a rousing interview with a young woman in Tiro sub-district of Pidie, Aceh, who states emphatically that she will not get married until Aceh achieves independence from Indonesia because she would not risk becoming a widow during the conflict.

Taken in aggregate, these conversations approach some of the central questions about the political subjectivity of local staff working for international organizations in Aceh that I posed in the Introduction. I argue that for some Acehnese, the humanitarian encounter has facilitated the recovery of a coherent sense of both an Acehnese and Indonesian identity, a political subjectivity that comfortably contains a sense of both local and national belonging, typical throughout most of the Indonesian archipelago, but that had been radically foreclosed during the conflict. Recovery of Acehnese and Indonesian identity turns on James Siegel's concept of *recognition*. In this chapter, I introduce Siegel's definition of recognition through example and show how it works in peculiar ways at the intersubjective level. In the following chapter, I broaden the concept by following the larger social implications of recognition as it operates among affiliated individuals within and between institutions. But first, I begin with an "arrival tale" that marks the start of my trip to Aceh in January 2012 as a return that felt anything but familiar and nostalgic.

## **January 2012, #back2aceh<sup>56</sup>**

The driver's lament echoed the lovelorn lyrics of the Indonesian *dangdut* songs he played on his car stereo. His dilapidated charter car's air conditioner was broken, so the windows were open and the night breeze felt cool on the face as we cruised southbound from Banda Aceh along Aceh's newly rebuilt west coast highway. While Caca Handika's heartbroken voice crooned through the car speakers about the dangers of resorting to black magic to win back the heart of an ex-girlfriend, the driver complained to me and the one other passenger about a paradox: "I used to have girlfriends in every town on this highway when I was still cheating on my wife. In those

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<sup>56</sup> The details recounted in the first two paragraphs below are adapted from a serialized collection of tweets I wrote while traveling from Banda Aceh to Blang Pidie on the night of 3 January 2012. Following Twitter convention, I marked each of the serial tweets with the hashtag #back2aceh, hence the title of this chapter header. My Twitter username is @kopyor. I compiled the #back2aceh tweets for easier reference in a blog post at <http://jgrayman.wordpress.com/2012/01/05/back2aceh-day-1-2/>

days, I always had passengers, and a steady income. So how come ever since I repented and asked my wife's forgiveness I never have any passengers?" Pressed to keep up my end of the conversation I suggested a half-hearted explanation, "maybe this difficult time is your penance, maybe it's not finished yet." The other passenger agreed with me: "if, for example, you were cheating on your wife for five years, your penance will last at least as long even though you've asked for your wife's forgiveness." Genuinely confused with his predicament, the driver insisted that he had stopped philandering, that he was focused on supporting his wife and children at home, and quietly concluded that "maybe I need to start praying too."

Along a winding hillside the ongoing conversation among three strangers was interrupted and abandoned in an instant when—*DOR!*—we heard the unmistakable sound of a single gunshot in the surrounding forest.<sup>57</sup> The driver immediately pressed the gas pedal to the floor, doubled our speed, and propelled us toward the small town of Lamno. Adrenaline rushing, we quickly established that all had heard the same noise and were uninjured. The driver called the charter agent in Banda Aceh and asked him to warn the other night drivers behind us. On this route he would typically stop in Lamno for a late dinner, but after our fright he decided that it was better to stay hungry and continue onward past Calang and Meulaboh until we reached my destination of Blang Pidie, especially since we would draw attention to ourselves in little Lamno with a foreigner in tow. The driver's anxiety and concern for our collective safety, and not just his own, after the mysterious shot in the dark ironically put me at ease with my two traveling companions during the rest of the journey, for we had just established a "fable of rapport" of our own (Clifford 1988:40).

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<sup>57</sup> *DOR!* is an onomatopoeia in Bahasa Indonesia that signifies the sound of a gunshot, equivalent with BANG! in English.

After arriving in Banda Aceh on an afternoon flight from Jakarta, within hours I embarked on the aforementioned exhilarating seven hour night-ride odyssey to Blang Pidie. Even before we heard the shot in the dark, everything felt different, almost unfamiliar. I attuned my senses to every nuance, as if I had arrived in Aceh for the first time all over again, taking mental notes on language, accent, taste, music, weather, color, and scent, all around me. At the time I interpreted all of this as a less mediated, and more thrilling, immersion. Gone were the layers of humanitarian administration protecting my security and buffering my mobility while I pursued discrete objectives in the field. On the west coast highway, for example, foreigners working on either tsunami or conflict recovery efforts in Aceh were never formally permitted to travel in the evening, and certainly not in unmarked privately chartered vehicles (a euphemism for unregistered commercial transport) in questionable states of repair. Before the MoU agreement, in July 2005, when I was still working in Meulaboh under a curfew, two foreign humanitarian aid workers were injured by sniper fire within a few weeks of one another on the same highway while traveling after dark. More than six years after the peace agreement, the nightly curfews have ended and the humanitarian community has dispersed. On this journey across Aceh in early 2012, I came to look at Aceh's humanitarian encounter through a historical lens, but it was gunfire that conspired to keep the present impinging insistently upon my plans and conversations.

Between 4 December 2011 and 5 January 2012 there were five nationally publicized shooting incidents in North Aceh, Bireuen, and Aceh Besar districts that resulted in twelve fatalities and 13 seriously wounded.<sup>58</sup> All of the victims were ethnic Javanese, mostly temporary migrant laborers working in construction or on plantations. Everyone I spoke with and all media

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<sup>58</sup> I arrived in Aceh on 3 January 2012, two days before the last shooting incident, and three days after two separate fatal shooting incidents on New Year's Eve.

speculations were absolutely sure that there was a political motive behind the violence—namely to disrupt or postpone the upcoming executive elections for Aceh’s provincial governor and district heads (*bupati*)—and yet an attack on Aceh’s most disenfranchised itinerant residents had no obvious connection.

Less than two months after the last shooting, the International Crisis Group (ICG) addressed the killings and their possible connection to the elections in their tenth report about Aceh since the MoU (International Crisis Group 2012). Taken together, the ICG reports on Aceh since 2005 document the slow transformation of politics in Aceh from center-periphery conflict into internal conflict. Jakarta still plays a significant role in Aceh’s transition to peace, but the prevailing axis of conflict is now more localized, “GAM vs. GAM” as an earlier ICG report described (2011). Since its formal establishment in 2008, activists within GAM’s official successor organization, the local political party *Partai Aceh* (PA), have shown a routine willingness to use violence and intimidation to achieve their goals. Both before and after the killing of Javanese laborers, PA activists had been linked to acts of arson, murder, and assault against those who support their opponents, in particular supporters of the incumbent Governor Irwandi Yusuf whose support base also consists of former GAM members.

ICG’s careful chronology of events correlates the December and January violence against ethnic Javanese in Aceh with PA’s extraordinary lobbying efforts among various power brokers in Jakarta to postpone the elections until after Irwandi’s term ended on 8 February so that he would not have the organs of state at his disposal to support his campaign when he returns to private citizenship. ICG argues that violence against Javanese gets Jakarta’s attention and intimates at similar or worse violence to come if PA activists do not get their way. When the ministries, the constitutional court, and probably the president himself in Jakarta finally

coalesced upon a policy of appeasement to PA and agreed to postpone the elections for a fourth time, the violence against Javanese in Aceh ended.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless ICG points out that the evidence connecting PA to the shootings remains reliably inconclusive; their report sharply critiques the opacity surrounding police investigations into the murders that ensured PA's plausible deniability, while the implicit threats could not have been more clear.

I originally planned to visit Aceh after the elections specifically to avoid the violence that has historically accompanied post-MoU elections in Aceh, but since the elections had been postponed repeatedly I had no choice but to travel during the height of pre-election tensions to conduct this final round of fieldwork before I returned to the United States in mid-January. My two week itinerary included three principal destinations where I could find many of the people I had closely worked with in Aceh between the years 2005 and 2010. Most live in Banda Aceh, which posed no security risks, and I spent the majority of my time there. These interviews are the subject of Chapter Six. There were at least three key informants I wanted to interview in the southwest coast town of Blang Pidie, the subject of this chapter. None of the recent shootings nor any other electoral violence to date had occurred on the west coast, so I continued with plans to travel there upon arrival in Aceh. The gunshot in the forest that we heard in our charter car was probably just a hunter in the woods, but it had the unnerving effect of reminding us viscerally of the very recent shootings. As the gunshot colored the remainder of our ride to Blang Pidie, so too did the overall political climate color my entire visit and research agenda. And so following the recommendation of trusted friends, I cancelled plans to visit my third destination, Bireuen district on the northeast coast, where political tensions and violence were at

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<sup>59</sup> ICG lists the postponements: “the election was repeatedly postponed, from 10 October 2011 to 14 November to 24 December, then to 16 February 2012 and finally to 9 April. With the last change, Partai Aceh achieved its objective: on 8 February 2012, when his term expired, Irwandi stepped down as governor. The home affairs ministry appointed a caretaker, Tarmizi Karim, a native of North Aceh, who will serve until a newly elected governor is inaugurated.” (2012:1)



a fever pitch.<sup>60</sup> In retrospect, I think my acutely heightened senses upon my return to Aceh in January 2012 had more to do with awareness of these current events than any sense of rediscovered freedom I felt from my former humanitarian employers.

**Image 4.1: Tips for Living in Aceh**



**Caption:** In early January 2012, after several mysterious shootings in Aceh targeting migrant Javanese laborers, social media users in Aceh circulated messages such as this (the user's identity has been blurred). **Translation:** Tips for Living in Aceh. 1. Always speak Acehnese (so others will think you're a native); 2. Always wear clean clothes (so others will think you're not a laborer); 3. Those who do not fulfill tips 1 and 2 should always "WATCH OUT."

## A View from Blang Pidie, Southwest Aceh

Old Market Street (*Jalan Pasar Lama*) in Blang Pidie always looks desolate because the tall concrete shop houses on one side of the road all face the new market. But across from the flat backs of new market buildings, at least one shop in the otherwise boarded up row of single story wood shop houses on Old Market Street has survived the fates of haphazard city planning: a no-name Chinese noodle joint that has been serving coffee and *mie kocok* (yellow egg noodles

<sup>60</sup> The recommendation to cancel my visit to Bireuen was not taken lightly. In advance of the 2009 legislative elections, a European anthropologist and a Filipina humanitarian were arrested without charges, not by the police but by the TNI, for working in rural villages of Bireuen district.

and white rice noodles mixed in chicken broth) for breakfast since at least the 1970s. The elderly Chinese-Indonesian couple who own and manage the shop prepare their own noodles by hand in the back, guaranteeing a fresh product that has ensured customer loyalty for generations.

My close friend and former driver Alfian takes me to the *mie kocok* place at least once every time I pass through Blang Pidie, his hometown and the seat of government for Southwest Aceh district (*kabupaten*). I rushed to visit Blang Pidie immediately upon arrival in Aceh because within a few days Alfian would be returning to his new home in Padangsidempuan, a market town in the neighboring province of North Sumatra where he now lives with his new wife and baby son. Alfian comes from a well-known if not wealthy Blang Pidie family; everyone at the *mie kocok* place knew him even though he hasn't lived full time in Blang Pidie for nearly a decade. Amidst the Confucian iconography on the walls and the fluttering twitter of nesting swallows in an empty building across from us, I caught up on my field notes while the old timers exchanged news with Alfian and filled him in on the latest developments in town, or lack thereof. "Politics have abandoned development," I overheard one man grumble to Alfian. Such statements fit neatly into a Suharto nostalgia framework that bemoans the chaos of decentralized corruption and competing patronage politics in Indonesia's post-authoritarian representative government.

After breakfast we visited Alfian's grandmother's house in a village on the outskirts of town, where a neighbor who supports the leading challenger to the incumbent in the upcoming *bupati* elections for Southwest Aceh came over to speak with us. Inserted among his litany of complaints about the incumbent's corrupt governance and personal business interests, he told me that Southwest Aceh has the embarrassing distinction of being the only district in all of Indonesia that still does not have a traffic light, a potent symbol of what we had just heard on Old Market

Street, that politics are played at the expense of development. Just outside Alfan's grandmother's house, in a public space in front of the mosque, with a volleyball court and a small coffee shop, the village elders had rolled up the incumbent's campaign banner to cover half his face, claiming that the banner was "too big" (and joking that he never delivered enough money to their village), but leaving the challenger's banner across the square on full display. Frustration with the current *bupati* was a dominant theme during my entire visit in Blang Pidie, and the upcoming elections, to be held in tandem with the governor's election and thus postponed repeatedly, had an amplifying effect on the heated political discourse, but a paralyzing effect on Southwest Aceh's political economy.<sup>61</sup> In this persistent context of arresting political crisis, I interviewed three members of a large family, who each worked at IOM in the Post-Conflict Reintegration Program from 2005 until 2009: Fauzan, his wife Diah, and his uncle Pak Zak.

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<sup>61</sup> A series of reports from the World Bank's Conflict and Development Program in Aceh chronicle the controversies that have characterized the Southwest Aceh incumbent *bupati*'s entire term in office, illustrating some of the pitfalls of local patronage politics in the wake of Indonesia's decentralization. The incumbent, a former newspaper editor named Akmal Ibrahim, won his election through an effective grassroots campaign, funded through an abundance of magnanimous promises made to hopeful contractor donors expecting to reap patronage spoils when he won. When Akmal was unable to satisfy every constituency in his patronage network, dozens of disgruntled contractors turned against him, and have agitated for his removal ever since. Intra-GAM/KPA rivalries took sides for and against Akmal, occasionally resorting to violence, exacerbating Southwest Aceh's turmoil under Akmal's leadership. See (Clark and Palmer 2008:48-52), (World Bank 2007; 2007; 2007), and especially (2007) for a detailed summary of Akmal's troubled leadership in Southwest Aceh.

**Image 4.2: The Incumbent’s Campaign Banner was “Too Big”**



### **Fauzan & Diah**

Fauzan and Diah met through their work at IOM and married shortly after they finished their contracts. Fauzan jokingly describes their courtship using a recent Indonesian neologism, *cinlok*, a portmanteau that combines the Indonesian words for love (*cinta*) and location (*lokasi*). An approximate translation for *cinlok* might be “love at first sight,” where the setting of the “first sight” takes the foreground. The term frequently applies in workplace settings when two colleagues become romantically involved. We can safely assume that Fauzan and Diah would never have met one another without the IOM connection. Diah comes from a Gayo family in Kutacane, the remote district seat of Southeast Aceh in the central highlands close to North Sumatra province, and Fauzan comes from an Acehnese family in Blang Pidie. At the time of my visit in January 2012, they were living with their one-year old son at Fauzan’s mother’s

family compound, just a three minute walk around the corner from Alfan's family homestead in the center of town.

Fauzan and Diah named their son Syafa Al-Gumaisha, a name drawn from koranic scripture that they told me means "smart child." During my three days visiting Blang Pidie in January 2012, I enjoyed watching their son spend his days getting passed around the compound, especially among the friendly customers at the family-run cafe where Diah helps her mother-in-law serve *nasi gurih* (rice cooked in coconut with an assortment of savory side dishes) for breakfast and then coffee and snacks throughout the rest of the day. But rather than call the boy Syafa (as his grandfather prefers), or Umay (as Fauzan does in private), the rest of the family, neighbors, and cafe customers all call him Kenta, a Japanese nickname that was given to Syafa by Fauzan's and Diah's close friend—and former IOM supervisor—Yoko from Japan. Yoko thought of the name Kenta, which (according to Yoko's explanation) also means "smart child," when she came to visit Fauzan and his family in Blang Pidie shortly after the baby was born, and to Fauzan's surprise, the new nickname stuck (*lengket*) with his son.

Through his analysis of pre-colonial Acehnese epic poetry, the writings of GAM's founder Hasan Tiro, and contemporary interviews with Acehnese student activists, GAM rebels, and ordinary restaurant wait staff in 1999, James Siegel has argued that in Aceh, the recognition of self, one's social identity, must come from an external source which supplements the subject and thereby reveals an identity that was inherent to the subject all along (Siegel 2000[1999]:347-51). How Yoko conferred a lasting nickname that "sticks" with Kenta strikes me as a felicitous example of how this works. I interviewed both Fauzan and Diah separately, and what stands out from their otherwise dissimilar life and work histories before they met are the personal and decisive roles played by senior, foreign (i.e. not from Aceh) staff in their stories about working

for IOM. Since Fauzan and I share a longer relationship (since 2006), I focus on examples from his work history at IOM, then follow-up with examples from my interviews with Diah, and then Pak Zak.

### **Workplace Acronyms: IOM, PCRCP, ICRS, PIKR, GoI, GAM, MoU, NGO**

Fauzan, Diah, and Pak Zak all worked on the same project at IOM, so a brief review of the acronym-laden program provides a necessary background to their stories. IOM's Post-Conflict Reintegration Program (PCRCP) for Aceh had two phases. Chapter One of this dissertation describes some components of the first phase of the program, under the leadership of Mark Knight, which assisted with the formal reinsertion and reintegration of 2000 amnestied prisoners and 3000 GAM ex-combatants. In collaboration with the Government of Indonesia (GoI), IOM provided assistance to exactly 5000 beneficiaries because this was the total figure cited in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between GoI and GAM, which is to say the numbers—in particular the 3000 ex-combatants—were based on a political negotiation rather than the much greater actual number of fighters. The first phase delivered tailored vocational training and small business startup support for each beneficiary. PCRCP implemented its program through a network of satellite offices set up in former conflict areas across Aceh. In the earliest weeks of the program, when the outcomes of the peace process were far from certain, GoI representatives overseeing implementation of the peace agreement expressed concerns that nationalist Indonesian observers (in the military, or certain political parties in the national parliament, for example) would express outrage that the reintegration of ex-combatants was managed by an international humanitarian organization. To assuage these concerns, IOM designed a neutral brand for the PCRCP field offices, calling them Information Counseling and

Referral Service offices, using the ICRS acronym with its Indonesian translation, PIKR (*Pelayanan Informasi Konseling dan Rujukan*), and choosing office locations in coordination with the district level Indonesian Department of Social Welfare. For the first few months of the program, all staff were under strict orders not to use or show IOM attributes at the ICRS offices.

**Images 4.3, 4.4, & 4.5: ICRS / PIKR Branding**



PCRPP had success with the reinsertion and reintegration program for the 2000 amnestied prisoners, but faced barriers with registering the 3000 ex-combatants. Former GAM commanders were reluctant to hand over the names of their veteran soldiers to IOM for several reasons. In the early days of the peace process, GAM commanders refused to provide a list of 3000 names that might fall into TNI hands and put the lives of 3000 combatants and their families at risk should the peace process ever break down. GAM leadership postponed the release of 3000 combatant names as one of their final bargaining chips to win favorable terms on the implementation of the peace process. Furthermore, GAM commanders could not assign reintegration assistance to 3000 of their combatants while an estimated 12,000 more had to wait. They wanted to control and stretch the distribution of reintegration benefits in a more equitable manner while also consolidating their power over the rank and file during peacetime, which was antithetical to the goals of any post-conflict demobilization and reintegration program. IOM

reluctantly compromised with GAM and distributed benefits through local commanders until the end of the first phase of the program.

When IOM's international donors agreed to an extension of the program, PCRPP developed a new model. For the second phase, each ICRS office worked with two or three local partner NGOs to identify villages with the greatest number of so-called "vulnerable youth" instead of specifically targeting GAM ex-combatants. After selecting recipient villages, local partners initiated a community driven client selection process to identify the young men and women (mostly men) who would be the beneficiaries, not to receive individual vocational assistance, but to form local cooperative "self-help groups." The community driven process bypassed the GAM command structure, and while the selection of beneficiaries mostly included ex-GAM combatants, the flexible definition of "vulnerable youth" allowed IOM to target other combatant groups such as nationalist militia members or potential future combatants such as adolescent conflict orphans. "Vulnerable youth" suggests a measure of innocence among beneficiaries that satisfies the humanitarian imperative, but in a case study that I describe in more detail below, PCRPP's last manager, an American named Bobby Anderson, writes a more realistic definition of who the ICRS clients were in the second phase of the program:

Juvenile delinquents. This is a twist on reintegration. We work with ex-combatants; now we're targeting the future combatants. Poor kids, affiliated with these groups, from their strongholds. These kids have been volunteered by their communities as being 'vulnerable.' But vulnerability is not a sweet, innocent category. It means that they're either stubborn to the point of idiocy or they are completely naïve and pliable. They are generally the weakest AND the strongest kids in each community, the weak led by the hard ones in the front. But still, they are kids. They spout party lines they don't understand. They talk about hating the Javanese but they don't know any. They carry knives, smoke and deal marijuana... and participate in *preman* rent-a-mob activities. The communities have given us their spookiest youth element... in general they don't know how to read, much less have any vocational skills. They have ambitions but absolutely no tools to [achieve them.] Except for guns and knives. They're 'political,' but they aren't sure why. They hate [Indonesian] soldiers and cops because of the abuses from the past (Anderson 2009:2).

ICRS clients, in their interactions with the program, saw a temporary extension of the Indonesian Departments of Social Welfare and Health during the first phase of the program, and



local NGOs during the second phase, with donor and technical support in the background from IOM via the ICRS offices. The ICRS staff, on the other hand, always saw IOM and its PCRPP managers as the foremost authority. I discuss this consequential relationship below.

### **Fauzan**

After Fudhzil graduated from high school, he earned a three-year diploma in electro-telecommunications at the polytechnic vocational school in Lhokseumawe. While in school and also after graduation, Fauzan worked odd jobs as a welder, a driver, and roadside gasoline seller until the tsunami struck Aceh. Immediately after the tsunami, Fauzan rushed to Banda Aceh to check on his first fiancée, who was studying at the university, but could not find her or anyone else in her entire family, none of whom were ever recovered. Less than a month later, Fauzan's cousin invited him back to Banda Aceh to help with contract work as a painter for the renovation of government buildings damaged by the waves. With so many jobs available in the humanitarian effort at the time, I asked Fauzan why he chose such a low paying painter's job. "I still didn't know anyone in Banda Aceh." He had no connections yet. "I stayed with my cousin."

In March 2005, Fudhzil started working for IOM as a rental car driver, an important distinction from IOM staff drivers that enjoy a salary with benefits and a fixed number of hours per week. In order to avoid paying staff drivers overtime, IOM would distribute extra hours of driving time, including standby hours in the evening, among the rental drivers, resulting in a situation in which staff drivers earned a higher salary but drove fewer hours than the rental drivers. At any given time, a pool of on-duty IOM drivers would theoretically rotate through transport assignments on an as-needed basis, but in practice IOM office staff had particular

drivers that they depended upon routinely and came to expect for their transportation needs on demand. This was how I came to depend upon Alfa, and also how the staff in IOM's Counter Trafficking Unit (CTU) and Information Technology & Communications (ITC) came to depend upon Fauzan.

As he told me his story about his advancement from a rental car driver into an outreach coordinator for PCRCP, Fauzan started to mention the key roles played by Ana, a CTU officer from Jakarta, and Anjo, an ITC officer from the Philippines, who were both based at the IOM office in Banda Aceh throughout 2005. After two months working as a rental driver, when Fauzan realized that the owner of the car he was driving was not paying him fairly, it was Ana who arranged for IOM to rent a different vehicle that Fauzan could drive with better terms from the owner. His prospects improved much further, however, in late August shortly after the peace agreement was signed, when IOM assisted the Indonesian Department of Social Welfare in the rapid assembly of a low profile registration operation for amnestied prisoners returning home to different parts of Aceh. Fauzan's promotion at IOM required his own skills and initiative but depended also upon recognition from Anjo:

For IOM's first registration of ex-prisoners, including those coming home from prisons in Java, I was assigned to drive in the convoy traveling to Lhokseumawe. There was an ex-pat staff from the Philippines, Anjo, from the ITC unit, traveling to Lhokseumawe to assist with the documentation. He wouldn't ride in any of the other vehicles except mine. He said, "I know how the other drivers drive; I feel more comfortable riding with you than the other drivers." I was surprised! Why do the senior staff such as Anjo and Ana prefer to ride with me? At last we left Banda Aceh, and our cars were full with new computers still in their boxes for the registration. When we arrived in Lhokseumawe it was already *magrib* (evening prayers), and then we had a meeting with all the volunteers that IOM recruited from Syiah Kuala University. They were all sitting around and none of them took any initiative to set up and install the computers for the registration. Anjo asked me if I could do it, and I said I could. I set up all the computers. "I didn't know," he said, "why are you able to set up all the computers when your job is a driver?" I told him I was a graduate from a polytechnic vocational school, that I had more skills than just sitting behind a steering wheel. "OK," he said, "later when we need staff, I promise that I will recommend you." That's the story of how I was promoted from rental driver to staff at IOM, because of the recommendations from Anjo and Ana.

As Fauzan narrated the remainder of his work history at IOM, all of the key benchmarks in his career feature decisive roles played by foreigners. After Anjo and Ana referred Fauzan for hire in the nascent PCRCP, it was an American named Brian Kelly who interviewed and ultimately hired Fauzan as an Outreach Coordinator. Brian sent Fauzan to work at the newly established ICRS office in Tapaktuan, the seat of South Aceh district and the next major town heading southbound from Blang Pidie, which, along with the rest of Southwest Aceh, was included in ICRS Tapaktuan's coverage area providing services to GAM ex-combatants, amnestied prisoners, and communities affected by conflict violence. Shortly after moving to Tapaktuan, Fauzan met and forged close friendships with his two primary PCRCP supervisors who routinely monitored program implementation in the field: the aforementioned Yoko from Japan, and Mercedes from Mexico. When it was time to end PCRCP's first phase of implementation in late 2007, Yoko invited Fauzan to work with the PCRCP managers in Banda Aceh for two months to plan the second phase of the program. For three and a half years, Fauzan worked at PCRCP under the leadership of four different ex-patriate program directors, and he mentioned them one by one: from the prison release and early planning phase led by Brian, to the first phase of the program under Mark Knight, into the planning and implementation of the second phase under James Bean, and then its completion under Bobby Anderson. Although I had met and worked briefly with Fauzan whenever I passed through Tapaktuan in 2006 and 2007, I got to know him well in Banda Aceh in between the first and second phases of PCRCP because he lived at my house with a few of his co-workers. We have kept in touch ever since, and I always appreciate his considered appraisals and critiques of PCRCP, which is one more reason why I went out of my way to visit Blang Pidie and interview him in 2012.

Fauzan might have worked at PCRP until the program closed down in late 2009 if not for a crisis event in which his last boss, Bobby, played the role of both a brave champion in the field and an opaque manager in Banda Aceh who ultimately decided not to renew Fauzan's contract. What Fauzan and his co-workers described as a "hostage situation," Bobby described as an "enforced negotiation" (ibid.1). While conducting routine supervision of a local partner NGO's implementation of IOM's program for vulnerable youth in a remote village in Bakongan sub-district (*kecamatan*), South Aceh, the program beneficiaries (with tacit support from the village leaders) seized the NGO's car, two of their staff, and two IOM staff, including Fudhzil. The NGO owed 44 million rupiah (~USD4000) in back wages to 61 young adults (IDR750,000 each, roughly USD60) in the village for clearing activities conducted more than two weeks prior as part of a land grant and agriculture development program. These 61 young men intended to hold on to their "hostages" and the vehicle until they were paid in full.

Bobby was on a supervision trip of his own across Aceh when Fauzan and the others were kidnapped, and he happened to be traveling from Kutacane in Southeast Aceh to South Aceh just as the Tapaktuan ICRS district coordinator reported the news. Within a few hours, Bobby was able to visit the scene of the crime in person to try and defuse the situation before security officers in Banda Aceh would hear the news and issue travel restrictions in South Aceh that could jeopardize the program. He stopped first at the Bakongan police station. In Bobby's own words:

In the courtyard of the police station excitable young men are strapping on bulletproof vests and loading machine guns... The police want to ride with us in a big grey truck bristling with guns and men and Kevlar plate. No, we say... Two plainclothes police step forward and the commander announces that they'll accompany us. These guys are wearing tracksuits and they have submachine pistols... The guns are old; the black finish has worn off, burnished smooth and dull like an old American nickel. Now we're stuck. The cops see I'm a whitey. If something happens to me, it'll be problematic. They won't let me go without the cops. And the cops won't come without the guns... Another deal is struck; the police will stay inside the car and not enter unless there is commotion or gunfire. This is not an ideal situation. But I don't have time to puzzle over

alternatives. We drive. It's twilight. We're on dirt tracks many kilometers off the main road (ibid.2-3).

The Bakongan police considered the village a hotbed of GAM separatists, and reacted according to old habits, donning excessive armaments and preparing for a showdown, precisely what Bobby was trying to avoid. Bobby knew that if the situation got violent, or if IOM and UN officials in Banda Aceh even hear about a potentially violent “hostage crisis” in Bakongan, it could threaten PCRP’s ability to implement the remainder of the program. Such an outcome was Bobby’s bargaining chip with the village to get his IOM staff and vehicle released, and yet he desperately did not want anyone in Banda Aceh to find out what was happening. Upon arrival at a mosque “with a large crowd of men in front of it, 100 plus,” they stopped the car. Up until this point in his narrative, Bobby only refers to the characters in the field with generic terms like “juvenile delinquents” and “excitable cops,” but at the mosque he immediately recognizes his staff and refers to him by name:

I exit the vehicle and see Fujil [sic], my staff. He looks happy to see us. I walk towards him and then a large man steps forward and punches Fujil in the back of the head. Another tall, skinny thug hits him from another angle. Fujil is tiny; I step forward and I essentially envelop him, his head against my chest, face hidden, my hand across his back and my other hand out... They're yelling in Acehnese. Accusations against my staff are yelled by random men running at them. People are still throwing punches, but it strikes me as a show, even when I take a few hits. Of the hundred or so persons here, there are roughly four who are engaging in the violence, and they are shouting accusations about my staff being spies for TNI, for the Police, for who knows who... My driver takes the opportunity to drive the car away, with the police and their guns in it; this is good. The cops are not happy to be there. They are scared. In the conflict time, village mobs killed men like them... The whole time, I'm saying, while covering up Fujil, 'There's got to be some kind of leader here who I can speak to.' I'm saying it loud, and one of the thugs approaches, and I turn my back to him while continuing to speak. It's like everybody else is trying to fight us but we're ballroom dancing. I'm scared, because now I'm alone with [Fujil]... and we are surrounded by a crowd, and they look excited. Suddenly, it stops. The elders show up on the green felt-carpeted porch of the mosque in front of us. They were in the mosque, wrapping up prayers while excitable and ineffectual men were trying to kick our asses (ibid.3).

They removed their shoes, stepped into the mosque, and the “enforced negotiations” began. By both Fauzan and Bobby’s reckoning, Bobby successfully negotiated the release of his staff, without getting local police *or* security officers in Banda Aceh involved. The village

would release their hostages, but keep the NGO's vehicle, released only on condition that the 44 million rupiah would get paid within a week, else the village would burn (not keep, or sell) the car. One of the village elders drew up a handwritten contract for all stakeholders to sign, cigarettes were lit and shared, friendly conversation resumed, and Fauzan, Bobby, and the rest of their team were free to return safely to Tapaktuan.

During our interview in January 2012, I asked Fauzan to tell me about his biggest disappointments while working for IOM. Without hesitation, he told me, "the most bitter experience was the time I was held hostage." But when I asked him to tell me more about what happened, Fauzan did not focus on any of the event details from Bakongan, those crucial moments that were so descriptively written by Bobby himself. Rather, Fauzan's complaint in reference to the Bakongan story was IOM's inability to explain why his contract was not extended after it was over. According to Fauzan, when they got back to Tapaktuan Bobby told him to take a vacation to recover, and when he returned to work discovered that his contract would not be extended through the end of the program, which was already decelerating toward completion: "I asked Bob [by email], and he never told me why. He never answered." Fauzan went to Banda Aceh and appealed directly to his closest friend and immediate supervisor at IOM: "Yoko was sad about it, but she also wouldn't tell me why my contract wasn't extended. I consider her an older sister, and we try to separate work from personal business, but she still didn't tell me." In his summary: "I felt mistreated... When I asked, I never got the details from Yoko, Bobby, or the IOM HR officer... This was my worst experience with IOM. The bad side of working for IOM is their unclear accounting for their decisions."

According to Bobby's diagnosis of the Bakongan case, the fault lay almost exclusively with the local NGO, IOM's implementing partner, whose director was trying to cheat the

beneficiaries out of their land-clearing fees and had no sense of the rising tensions in the community. Bobby assigns a small share of blame to his ICRS staff in Tapaktuan: “Our outreach assistants might have sensed [the rising tensions in Bakongan], but they did not seek to alleviate it, nor did they seek to alert their superiors” (ibid.7). If we follow Fauzan’s assumption that he lost his job due to what happened in Bakongan, this is the closest explanation I could find for Bobby’s decision not to extend Fauzan’s contract. But apart from idle speculation, what matters here is that Fauzan never got a clear answer from Banda Aceh. To the extent that Fauzan ascribes his successful career at IOM to the foreigners that went out of their way to recognize and validate his skills, to recognize and release him from danger, he also ascribes the end of his career at IOM to a failure of recognition from those same superiors.

Despite the disappointing conclusion to his career at IOM, Fauzan went out of his way during our interview to emphasize that the majority of his work experiences were positive. Despite the frequent failures he faced in the field trying to meet the vocational and financial expectations of demanding ex-combatants, he points to examples of many others in South and Southwest Aceh who he assisted with the development of their small businesses, clients who remember Fauzan’s direct role in IOM’s post-conflict reintegration program and still keep in touch with him. From a financial perspective, Fauzan estimates that he earned upwards of 500 million rupiah during his four years of work with IOM, money that he used to build a house for his parents, buy a motorcycle, cover his brother’s college tuition, purchase land in West Aceh, enjoy his bachelorhood, and then pay for his own wedding.

After leaving IOM, Fauzan spent the next two years working for two different international organizations (Muslim Aid and Islamic Relief) that were slowly closing down their

programs in Aceh, and following that took a six month contract with the provincial government public works agency as a community facilitator. His last job was in the private sector, working as a human resources manager for a Chinese mining company that had recently set up operations in Southwest Aceh. But the company laid off all their workers a few weeks before my visit to Blang Pidie because the Chinese investors were in a dispute over licensing regulations with the district government. After all the coffee shop gossip I had heard over the past day about the incumbent *bupati* of Southwest Aceh, I was hardly surprised to learn that the mine was shut down over frustrated politics with his administration, and the investors had decided to wait until after the elections before resuming negotiations with the district government:

We heard rumors from the company that we were all going to be laid off, so early the next morning we all gathered at the company office, and the *bupati* showed up. He addressed all of the employees, saying that the mine would have to close because they hadn't paid their "reclamation fees," whatever that means! Can you imagine a *bupati* only concerned with the affairs of the company but not the citizens of his district employed by them? Behind our mine site, he has a concession for his own mining interests, and so we assume that's why he wants to throw out the Chinese.

During these weeks of unemployment, when Fauzan was not at the internet cafe applying for jobs (preferably outside of Aceh), he was spending his days with Diah at the family compound, helping at his mother's cafe and taking care of Kenta. I asked Fauzan if the mine would reopen after the election, and if so would he go back to work there. After his biting critique of local politicians, his answer surprised me for going one step further, criticizing the local mine workers, and referring to his own personal experience with intimidation and violence:

We heard that the investors are waiting for the situation to cool off. It's because of the elections, just like the recent shootings. All of these events are due to the election. But I don't want to work there again when it reopens because I'm also disappointed with the local employees. They have no gratitude for the investors that made their jobs possible in the first place. Governor Irwandi has said we should welcome Aceh's foreign investors with incentives, but the investors only meet with problems. Aceh's ingratitude toward investors ultimately blows back upon us Acehnese... it's harder to find work, and one disappointed investor returns home and advises future investors not to take risks here. That's the negative effect of our system. People here still prefer to operationalize violence over thought. They use intimidation. It's the same old story... I know from personal experience.



## **Diah**

Diah's professional transition to IOM from a local NGO in her hometown of Kutacane also turns upon the recognition of a foreigner who not only decided to hire her, but also explicitly validated her self-perception as a confident and assertive woman working in what most consider a man's vocation. After she graduated from college in Medan in 2006, Diah went to work for YELPED—*Yayasan Ekosistem Leuser dan Pemberdayaan Ekonomi Daerah*, or the Leuser Ecosystem and Regional Economic Empowerment Foundation—a local NGO in Kutacane managed by her older step-brother. YELPED worked as a local partner on several consecutive sub-contracts for IOM's ICRS office in Kutacane, whose coverage area included Southeast Aceh and Gayo Lues districts. As a YELPED administrator and manager for the IOM grants, Diah slowly got to know the staff at the ICRS office, and became familiar with IOM during the trainings that were held for all PCRIP local partner organizations. By the time Diah enquired about job openings at IOM, her friends there told her to submit an application because James Bean (the head of PCRIP at the time) already knew her and that would be to her benefit. James' familiarity with Diah's work at YELPED, more than any of the IOM trainings she attended or friends she had at the ICRS office, ensured that she would get hired. To illustrate how this came about, Diah recounted a story from the field:

James was in Kutacane for a monitoring trip on a day when YELPED conducted a focus group discussion (FGD) at a village mosque. I accompanied James to observe and we sat in the back while one of my staff facilitated the discussion. It turned out to be a complete embarrassment because one of the participants from the village started to yell at the facilitator, insisting that we shut down the meeting, because he didn't understand what an FGD was, and was confused by all of the facilitator's terminology. James couldn't understand because the man was speaking Bahasa Alas [the local language in Southeast Aceh], so he kept sidling up to me and asking what was going on, asking for translations, what the man was complaining about. I briefly explained what was going on, but he kept asking me for more information, so I told him: "I'm sorry, Pak James, but I can't attend to you now. I have to protect my facilitator." I left him there, went to the front

of the room, replaced my facilitator, and completed the FGD. I was brave enough to not attend to James, maybe that's why he remembered me.

Diah suggests that her courage to say no to James—the IOM ex-patriate manager who awarded a contract to YELPED as IOM's local implementing partner—when the needs of her facilitator dealing with an unruly crowd were more pressing and consequential, left him with a good impression. Much later, toward the end of our interview, I asked Diah to tell me about her most memorable work experience, and she told a marvelous story about the time she, as a Muslim woman, facilitated a FGD with male participants in a *tuak* [an alcoholic beverage] cafe in a remote, Christian area of Southeast Aceh. Her story left an impression on me because of the enthusiasm with which she told it, but also because her courage and initiative, of which she is justifiably proud, receives additional validation from James:

Diah: On that day I was wearing a *jilbab* [Muslim head cover for women], and I was surrounded by a group of older men drinking *tuak*. I had to muster the courage to facilitate the group because they chose the spot. I was alone. I was the only woman, wearing *jilbab*, surrounded by dogs. This was extraordinarily bold for me. They were drinking *tuak*, I just let them.

Jesse: Did you feel uncomfortable or unsafe?

D: Unsafe? No. Because I trusted them.

J: Were they nice people?

D: I don't know if they were nice or not, but I had to trust them, because I was thinking "I need them today, and I must do this."

J: How was the outcome of the meeting?

D: Oh it was so gratifying! I was congratulated and commended at the time.

J: By who?

D: The YELPED director [Diah's step-brother] came, and so did James. James said "Diah, why are you too brave?" I told him "I needed this data, today, Pak James." "Have you ever done something like this elsewhere?" he asked. "Never before," I told him. He joked to the others, "she's going to end up a regular *tuak* customer!"

J: So it was a success...

D: There was a policeman in the group. I didn't know he was a cop because he wasn't in uniform. I overheard his friend speaking with him later, and he must have known that I follow a different religion than them because of my *jilbab*, but he jokingly asked the cop, "Is that your girlfriend?" "yes, that's my girlfriend," and they laughed. The next day, when I went to the next village over, the women there came up to me and asked, "We heard that you're together with the cop in the next village over..." Oh my god, I started laughing so hard! I don't care about rumors spreading around because it's just so ridiculous. Anyone who hears it would say "ah that's impossible!"

Next I asked Diah to draw her own conclusions and tell me why she chose this particular story as her most memorable experience on the job:

Well, first of all, it's extremely unusual that a woman wearing a *jilbab* has the courage to hold a discussion with older men who are drinking *tuak*, with men she has never met before. They're also... [Diah pauses, with audible discomfort] I apologize to say this, they're predominantly Christian. The location was completely isolated, on the outskirts of a village, far from Kutacane. The cafe was in front of a swamp, removed from the residential part of the village. Most people think that anyone who drinks *tuak* would certainly be evil, but I didn't think so. I went there, confidently, without a notebook, only wearing my YELPED identification badge. They told so many funny stories. While sitting there, I felt so happy with them because they were laughing and I was laughing with them. So unexpected! What was also funny that day, Pak James came and he paid for all the *tuak* that everyone at the cafe was drinking. [Diah laughs] They were so happy.

As I wrapped up our discussion about Diah's work history, I briefly summarized what she had told me, and asked her why the two memorable stories that she chose to tell me both feature James Bean. Surprised, she exclaimed, "Oh ya, you're right! Why was he there? Isn't that funny, James was there! Well, in the first story, we were actually traveling together on a monitoring mission, but at the *tuak* cafe, he showed up later, also on one of his monitoring missions, but I didn't know he was coming."

After James hired Diah to work for IOM, he placed her at the ICRS office in Bireuen, far from Kutacane, perhaps to prevent any conflict of interest with YELPED and other local institutions that she was already familiar with in her hometown. Diah continued to have a series of extraordinary work experiences, as a woman conducting outreach and vocational support for "vulnerable youth." She might have told me any number of other stories that demonstrated her courage under pressure, and she admitted several times that Bireuen presented a much tougher work environment due to its intense conflict history, so I thought it was curious that the two illustrative stories she chose to tell me in some detail both feature James, witnessing, then validating, then authorizing Diah's work from the sidelines.

James did not confer self-confidence upon Diah, nor did Diah summon her confidence only in his presence; in fact her whole life history reveals an independent streak that has served

her well. As of January 2012, while she was raising her baby and helping Fauzan's mother at the cafe and around the family compound, Diah was also preparing for her lawyer certification exams so that she can open a private attorney practice in Blang Pidie. And yet the stories she chose to tell, in which she explicitly and repeatedly defines herself as a brave, bold, and confident woman, both feature James on the sidelines, an external figure that authorizes Diah to acknowledge and reveal her enduring character.

### **Pak Zak**

Fauzan's uncle, Pak Zak, maintains a garden on a flat half-acre of land up a hill on the outskirts of Blang Pidie, with a view of the Babahrot River and the irrigation works. Since he lost his job with the same mining company where Fauzan worked, Pak Zak was spending his days at the garden, clearing land and testing various seedlings in the soil. He bought the land in 2006 with money earned from his work at IOM since mid-2005. After my interview with Diah, I rode with Alfian and Fauzan to Pak Zak's garden, where he was working with his wife and kids. We spent the afternoon sitting in a wood hut, enjoying the greenery and the view while I interviewed him. A smoldering wood fire next to the hut kept a kettle of water hot enough for multiple cups of coffee and produced smoke that kept the mosquitoes away. A small transistor radio on low volume broadcast generic monophonic pop songs. The sky was overcast, and a downpour half-way through our conversation offered little relief from the stifling humidity.

**Image 4.6: An overcast view of the Babahrot River from Pak Zak's garden**



After Fauzan was promoted from rental driver in Banda Aceh to an ICRS outreach assistant in Tapaktuan, he recruited Pak Zak to take over the rental vehicle, but Pak Zak too soon joined the ICRS team as a driver and logistical support staff in Tapaktuan until the end of 2007. In between the first and second phase of PCRPs, IOM assigned Pak Zak to work for a few months in Takengon distributing farm equipment. When the second phase of PCRPs began, Pak Zak was promoted again to outreach assistant for the ICRS office in Kutacane, where he worked until the end of the program in 2009. I only knew Pak Zak peripherally when I worked at IOM because the ICRS offices where he was based in Tapaktuan, Takengon, and Kutacane, were the farthest from Banda Aceh, so it was an unexpected pleasure to get to know him better during this trip to Blang Pidie.

Pak Zak is a man of hobbies, starting with his garden, where he enjoys working by himself to clear his thoughts or spending time there with his family and friends as we did that afternoon. His other hobby is amateur radio. During the conflict, Pak Zak's radio equipment brought him trouble from both sides. At the time, he lived in Lhokseumawe where he worked as a machinist on the tanker ships delivering liquefied natural gas (LNG) from the Arun plant to

ports across Indonesia. When the TNI saw the amateur radio antenna at Pak Zak's house, they put a gun to his head, accused him of being a spy for GAM, and told him to take it down. When GAM saw the antenna, they asked Pak Zak to give the equipment to them as his contribution to the *pajak nanggroe* (GAM's extortionate "state tax"), so he solved his problem with the TNI by letting GAM take it. GAM operatives routinely came back to ask Pak Zak how to operate the equipment. After the tsunami, Pak Zak provided volunteer radio communication support to Aceh's Disaster Management Coordinating Board and other organizations involved in emergency activities such as the recovery of corpses in and around Lhokseumawe, until Fauzan invited him to takeover his rental car driving job at IOM. At the time of our interview, Pak Zak was the head of the 175-member strong Southwest Aceh chapter of the Indonesian Inter-Population Radio Association (RAPI, *Radio Antar Penduduk Indonesia*). When a plane crashed in the interior mountains of Babah Rot in Southwest Aceh at the end of 2011, Pak Zak provided radio support for the search and rescue effort.

A few moments later during our conversation Pak Zak returned to his interest in amateur radio as a metaphor to explain what he liked best about his years working at IOM, which he described as "sharing knowledge": "I enjoyed working at IOM because in addition to the opportunity to learn, I was also challenged to give some knowledge to the community. It's like the radio; in addition to being a hobby, I can also share information with the community. That's why I really loved working at IOM. I feel that my interests are with the community, when I see them content and doing well, I am also happy."

Pak Zak went on to list a number of other reasons why he enjoyed working at IOM. He felt valued as a member of the staff, reflected in the generous salary he earned, which he argued allowed him and his colleagues to focus on doing good work because there were no temptations

to resort to corruption to supplement his income. Pak Zak also appreciated the initiative that IOM afforded him to design and implement vocational support programs for ex-combatants and other vulnerable youth that veered from original plans as long as he could justify the revisions. As he worked in the most distant regions in Aceh, PCRCP managers at the main office in Banda Aceh had to trust Pak Zak's judgement in the field because of the logistical hurdles that prevented frequent supervision trips. He took pride in his project proposals that were sent to Banda Aceh, and approved for implementation: "the big shots in Banda Aceh see my proposal and the justification, and they say 'oh, this makes sense,' it's not a fabrication, so they approve it, and then we implement."

After speaking at length about how IOM allowed him a significant measure of independent initiative in the field, Pak Zak reserved special praise for Lucy, an Australian monitoring and evaluation specialist for PCRCP at IOM in Banda Aceh, who "would never give up trying to reach project sites in the field," even when it involved a long day's journey from the ICRS office. As with Fauzan and Diah, the illustrative story that Pak Zak chose to tell me features an external figure (Lucy) that recognizes and validates something that he personally believes and values about himself:

When Lucy is out monitoring, if we haven't reached our destination, she never gives up. That's Lucy, our data analyst. For example, if Client A has his garden way up in the hills, she says "Let's go!" We document the client's progress, and then she trusts us. That's what I liked. Why? Because she won't think that we in the field are lying, that we fabricate fictive client gardens. Lucy could see for herself, a fish farm for example. Lucy documented it. For me there was a certain kind of satisfaction in that.

On the flip side, Pak Zak's biggest disappointments with IOM occurred when the "big shots" in Banda Aceh did *not* travel to the field and validate project implementation, much less experience the reality of field conditions for themselves. He recounted the tale of a field mission

that required seven days of travel, but the project managers in Banda Aceh allowed Pak Zak and his team only four days instead.

They didn't understand the field conditions. We tried to get it done, but I ended up getting malaria because we were working so hard trying to finish in four days... They rarely go to the field, and have no sense of how one village differs from the other. They think it's like driving from Banda Aceh to Krueng Raya [a large river in Aceh Besar district, not far from Banda Aceh] with good asphalt roads. When they finally get out here, oh then they understand! When they have to spend a night sleeping in the forest, for example, and face other inconveniences.

## **Recognition**

Fauzan, Diah, and Pak Zak's stories recall Siegel's argument that in Indonesia, and especially in settings of violent conflict such as Aceh, one's social identity requires recognition by an external authority before it becomes legible and meaningful. Siegel draws upon Jacques Derrida's logic of the supplement, something that, allegedly secondary, comes to serve as a revelatory aid to a supposed "original" or "natural" subject (Derrida 1998). In the Aceh context, both before and during the conflict, Siegel explains this process with many examples, but the GAM members who risked their own safety in order to carry identity cards emblazoned with GAM symbols explains it most directly:

The difference is between the photograph alone, which shows only the features of the face, and the photograph on the identity card, which reveals what these features signify. The members of GAM believe that for their features to signify they require someone to identify them. The authority to do so is founded first of all on the wish of potential members, second on their feeling that they alone cannot make themselves signify but someone else can... The identity card expresses first of all that possibility of addition. When this capacity is taken advantage of, authority comes into existence. It is thought at once to add something not there and to make something appear that, after the fact, is assumed to have been inherent in the features of the person photographed. (Siegel 2000[1999]:350)

Siegel traces the origins of this process back to the development of Indonesian nationalism in his book *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution* (1997). The emergence of Melayu as a common "lingua franca" for colonial trade across the archipelago allowed for greater mobility of proto-national subjects, but could not effectively contain an enduring national subjectivity



because Melayu, which was ultimately domesticated and standardized into Indonesia's national language Bahasa Indonesia, was not the native language of most future Indonesians. Colonial hierarchy also prevented Melayu from becoming a language of authority and rights, the exclusive domain of Dutch. Rosalind Morris, in her review of Siegel's work, summarizes Siegel's argument based on these historical conditions: "The stage was set for a politics of connection rather than communication and identification (1997:44). Proximity to power and recognition by authority, rather than reciprocity or abstract equality, became the axes of political life in the new nation" (Morris 2007:380).

In Aceh, as in most regions of Indonesia, for those who aspire to middle class citizenship there has never been a contradiction in being simultaneously Acehnese (or Javanese, or Batak, etc.) and Indonesian. The authoritative arbiter of recognition lay with the organs of Indonesian state, which recognizes regional identities through a discourse of culture. One's regional or ethnic origins are neutralized into quotable cultural traditions as one takes on the attributes of Indonesian citizenship while rising up through the national education system, joining the civil service, participating in civil society organizations, and so on (Pemberton 1994). The sheer violence that the TNI brought upon ordinary Acehnese civilians during the latter years of the conflict, starting in 1989 along the northeast coast of Aceh, and especially from 1999 until 2005 across the whole province, effectively blocked this trajectory away from one's origins (Aceh) into middle class Indonesian citizenship.

Pak Zak's amateur radio story illustrates the quintessential *serba salah* (damned if you, damned if you don't) dilemma that so many Acehnese faced during the conflict. According to TNI, Pak Zak's radio marked him as a GAM spy, a dangerous misrecognition that might have cost him his life. Pak Zak had to distance himself from a kind of Acehnese-ness that had become

too closely associated with a competing recognizing authority, the ethno-nationalist GAM rebellion. On the other side, according to GAM, Pak Zak's radio signified a debt that he owed to an emergent independent Aceh. Not only did GAM take away Pak Zak's radio, they expected him to train them how to use it. Removing the radio further foreclosed Pak Zak's Indonesian-ness by denying his connections throughout the archipelago via RAPI, the national radio hobbyist organization. Much as he might have preferred, during the conflict Pak Zak could not be simultaneously Acehnese and Indonesian.

In January 2012, Pak Zak reflected fondly upon the acts of recognition at IOM, a new but temporary external authority, that restored his sense of himself as someone who enjoys sharing information with others. His salary enabled him not only to build a house for his family and buy land, but also to resume his hobbies, and he proudly told me that he leads the Southwest Aceh chapter of RAPI, at once local and national in its orientation. The "NGO worker" is a recognizable social type on the Indonesian political and professional landscape, most often seen championing the cause of civil society revival in the wake of Suharto's military dictatorship (Danusiri 2009). Through small instances of personal recognition, such as those recounted here in this chapter, I begin an argument that for some Acehnese NGO workers, the humanitarian encounter in post-conflict Aceh offered an alternative path for the restoration of stable social identities as both Acehnese and Indonesian within the framework of Aceh's transition to peace and Indonesia's transition to democracy. But as Morris notes, recognition by an authority also requires proximity, hence the stories I heard feature memorable encounters inside traveling cars, at community meetings (or forced negotiations) in mosques and cafes, and on monitoring missions to remote project sites up in the mountains. By contrast, recognition fails across the distance between IOM management in Banda Aceh and outreach coordinators at the ICRS

offices in the field when Fauzan can not get a straight answer from Bobby by email, and Pak Zak complains about the big shots in Banda Aceh who do not understand field conditions. Aji's story in Chapter One also illustrates this failure of recognition across geographic distances.

## **Interruptions**

Just hours before I caught an overnight mini-bus back to Banda Aceh, I was sitting in Fauzan's back yard interviewing another former colleague, and good friend, Sami Akmal, who first worked with me at IOM on a variety of research projects, and then went on to work with Fauzan and Pak Zak at the ICRS office in Tapaktuan. Sami's local roots in the Kluet River Valley region of South Aceh and his experience working on IOM's community driven assistance projects for conflict-affected communities have positioned him well for a political career in South Aceh's government. I admired his brazen ambition, and his remarkable transformation, as he explained his roadmap to becoming South Aceh's *bupati* within ten years. When I met Sami in 2006, he was still trying to finish college. Years before the tsunami, Sami's higher education was interrupted, first by his busy activism in SIRA, the student organization advocating for a referendum on Aceh's independence from Indonesia, and second by the consequences of his activism, when in 1999 a police officer confiscated his wallet, held a gun to his head, and threatened, "If I shoot you right here and now, there isn't anyone who would be able to identify you." Shortly after he survived that close call, the police came looking for him at his boarding house in Banda Aceh. Sami dropped out from school and his activism, moving around from place to place, until SIRA was able to negotiate a rehabilitation of his identity and police record. In 2012, Sami was married with two children, head of the Southwest Aceh Off-Roader Community (a four-wheel drive vehicle hobbyist group), working in the civil service as a

guidance counselor at a high school in Blang Pidie, and plotting his transfer to a more prestigious position in the South Aceh district civil service where he will strategically pursue his political aspirations. Sami explained his plans, and I marveled at yet another example of a young Acehnese man's trajectory into the middle class, once interrupted by violence, then resumed following another interruption, Aceh's humanitarian encounter, specifically due to his years working at IOM and other humanitarian organizations. During our lively and familiar conversation Alfan interrupted our interview when he drove into the yard with someone we had never met before...

I should interrupt the story here to quote historian Rudolf Mrázek, who quoted Walter Benjamin's thoughts on the subject of "misunderstanding" in André Breton's *Surrealist Manifesto*. As Mrázek listens to an interview he recorded with an elderly architect and pioneer of Indonesian nationalism in a Jakarta suburb, he recalls that the conversation was thwarted by the city's ambient noise, a shrieking parrot, and his informant's apparent deafness. Mrázek celebrates the fleeting and serendipitous fragments of experience that he shares with his informants, a method that reproduces landscapes of the past, if only for a moment, not least because the present always bears down upon it. I have tried to follow Mrázek's method and develop it further with the idea of encounter. But Mrázek also acknowledges that the fragments themselves are fraught with tone deaf misunderstandings of the other. Quoting Benjamin's interpretation of Breton: "dialectic misunderstanding is what is truly alive in the dialogue. 'Misunderstanding' is here another word for the rhythm with which the only true reality forces its way into the conversation. The more effectively a man is able to speak, the more successfully he is misunderstood" (Benjamin 1999:4, cited in Mrázek 2010:12-13). Mrázek exploits misunderstood fragments to excavate other true histories of Indonesian nationalism, and leaves

aside the smooth talkers. My conversation with Sami was easy and routine, smooth even; he is a politician in waiting, after all, and besides I know him too well, hence my decision not to give his story a more detailed treatment. Alfian's unexpected guest, on the other hand, turned out to be a huge misunderstanding; what I thought was an annoying and inconvenient interruption at first had a certain kind of truth worth exploring in retrospect.

Alfan took me aside: "Here's the story... this guy is from my grandmother's village, where we always visit. He once met with someone from the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in Malaysia. Now he wants to talk to you, just ask a few questions. Is that all right? It's nothing really, let's just give him a little change of scenery." In other words, Alfian asked me to humor his grandmother's neighbor with some idle, ineffectual chit chat. Curious, but cautious, I knew that UNHCR had a role managing conflict refugees from Aceh in Malaysia. UNHCR played only a brief and limited role in Aceh's tsunami recovery effort precisely because the Indonesian government condemned the organization's role in internationalizing the conflict, drawing attention to what Indonesia considered a domestic issue, by processing and resettling Aceh conflict victims who escaped to Malaysia.<sup>62</sup> This guy, I will call him Junaid, probably had some interesting stories to tell, but I also knew from experience that Junaid had probably gone out of his way to meet with me because he expected something that Alfian certainly knew I could not offer.

When I first asked his name, and to tell me something about himself, Junaid did not speak but rather handed over two expired immigration cards from the Malaysian government. I observed from his date of birth on the cards that he was in his mid-thirties, which meant that Junaid was in his mid-late twenties when he fled to Malaysia shortly after President Megawati

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<sup>62</sup> UNHCR's removal from tsunami recovery served as a cautionary tale to all other international humanitarian organizations eager to spend their aid money in Aceh, ensuring that they did not combine post-conflict with post-tsunami recovery efforts, cementing and exacerbating the equity divide in humanitarian assistance (Zeccola 2011).

declared martial law in Aceh in May 2003. He would not tell me whether he was an active (or mistaken, or deserting) member of GAM trying to save his life, or an economic refugee disguised as an asylum seeker hoping for employment in the more prosperous, higher income, neighboring country. He returned to Aceh in early 2008, when Malaysia formally stopped the extension of temporary residence permits for Acehnese living in exile originally due to conflict but then extended after the peace agreement due to humanitarian concerns related to the tsunami. When Junaid spoke, he stammered through an abbreviated story of his exile, with repetitive questions and refrains, in a thick acquired Malaysian accent mixed with a characteristic Acehnese style of using context-dependent shifters whose references are hardly clear. After Sami's expertly chronological narrative, attuned specifically to answer all my questions, Junaid presented a difficult and awkward challenge for both of us.

“Before these cards were issued,” he explained, “during the conflict, the UN gave us a white card. I want to ask about this. Mister, are you from UNICEF?” I told him that I no longer work for any agencies; I am a student. “Connected with UNICEF?” he asked again, “because UNHCR and UNICEF were here. When UNHCR left Aceh, their work was handed over to UNICEF.” I affirmed that UNHCR handed its mandate over to UNICEF when it left Aceh, but I had to tell him also that I never worked for either organization. “Oh, I thought you were from the UN. When UNHCR was here, we were still still in Malaysia, still in Malaysia. After UNHCR, after UNHCR handed over to UNICEF, you remember that, over to UNICEF, we still had not returned yet from Malaysia.” And then he arrived at the crux of the matter:

I wanted to ask about this, because what happened, when we were in Malaysia, the UNHCR official asked us, “when you return to Aceh, if it is safe to return to Aceh, how can we help?” So when we got back to Aceh, was there any assistance from them, was there any? We were never able to find out, you see? That's what we want to know, was there anything or not? Because he asked us a long time ago, he asked, “when you return to Aceh, how can we help you?” So we came back here, but by that time, he had already left because the conflict was over. When we got

back here, they weren't here either, but we could see all the signs from UNHCR and UNICEF [branding logos] from all their assistance. But we who held their cards, we didn't get anything.

Junaid continued repeating his main point (“I came back here, but they were gone,” “the card holders received nothing when they came home,” and so on), but woven through, new details and complaints emerged. He described UNHCR’s rigorous interview to determine his refugee status when he first arrived in Malaysia. He told me the UNHCR card was a sign of international protection, “it protected those of us caught up in the conflict.” If Junaid still possessed his UNHCR card, he did not show it, but I gathered through his non-linear piecemeal narrative that after the peace agreement, when UNHCR’s mandate to assist asylum seekers from Aceh ended, he traded in his UNHCR card for the residence permits issued by the Malaysian immigration department that he did show. But he still hoped UNHCR would make good on its promise to assist after he returned home, and he wanted me to explain how or when this might happen. I had to remind him again that I was not affiliated with UNHCR or UNICEF, and I also repeated what he already knew, that both organizations left Aceh a long time ago.

I tried another line of inquiry: had Junaid ever pursued redress through the provincial government’s Aceh Reintegration Agency (*Badan Reintegrasi Aceh*, BRA)? I read his answer, combined with his unfulfilled yearning for UNHCR’s return, as a stark contrast to Fauzan, Diah, and Pak Zak:

Since UNHCR left, I’m not sure. It’s supposed to be safe here now, but we’ve been hearing about these shootings in Banda Aceh lately, so is it really safe? For the people who hold this card, the government makes it sound as if we brought information outside the country, because they know UNHCR asked us about intimidation [and other human rights violations in Aceh]. Better not look for trouble. The only reason I had the courage to ask about it now is because when my wife told me she saw you with Alfian in the village, I thought I would ask Alfian about you. If not, I wouldn’t dare! It’s OK, better not look for trouble, better if we just stay calm.

Recall the interview with Hasbi Lacak (in Chapter Three) who still held his UNHCR card when my MSR research team interviewed him in mid-2008. He told us “it was more dangerous

to carry a UNHCR refugee card than to carry a weapon because they [the Indonesian government] were afraid that Aceh would become an international issue, an embarrassment to Indonesia.” The danger of showing signs of recognition from an authority other than Indonesia prevents Junaid from seeking redress from a government institution that was set up (with a mix of government and international donor support, poorly understood by its beneficiaries) to manage the reintegration of ex-combatants and conflict victims, even years after UNHCR has left and apparently reneged on its promise to Junaid and others like him.

When Siegel visited Aceh in 1999, he met people that remind me of Junaid. “Tell them what is going on here in Aceh,” they urged him, and when he mentioned that he was returning to Europe, one person asked him to tell Hasan di Tiro (GAM’s founder living in exile in Sweden) that “we yearn for you” (Siegel 2000[1999]:345, 395). The Indonesian state, committing senseless and sadistic acts of violence to prove its monopoly on power, could no longer authorize an Acehese Indonesian identity if they were trying to exterminate the Acehese in all sectors of society. Siegel concludes that “against the incomprehensible violence of the army, there is a wild call for help to anyone at all from its victims, past and potential,” a yearning for recognition from any authority but Indonesia (ibid.420). That was 1999, but research on Aceh’s diaspora has shown how overseas Acehese have lagged behind their compatriots’ adaptation at home to post-MoU conditions (Missbach 2011). Many left Aceh under conditions of intolerable violence and terror, and their view of Indonesia as an incomprehensible force that forecloses and prevents recognition remains steadfast.

I suggest that Junaid, like many others that have joined the Aceh diaspora, remains caught in that violent era, when “no authority holds the confidence of the Acehese,” partly because he missed out on Aceh’s transitional humanitarian encounter (Siegel 2000[1999]:395). Junaid



prefers to avoid recognition from the government (“better not look for trouble”), and he is left without the protective recognition he once enjoyed from UNHCR. By his reckoning, the humanitarian logos on the physical structures they built are all that remains of the organizations he hoped would keep their promise to him. Junaid’s uncertain condition, evident to me in his stammer and repetition, clinging to a Malaysian accent, suggests a kind of political subjectivity that gets left behind when the “supra-colonial” humanitarian “mobile sovereign” implements its particular forms of governance, but then picks up and moves on without accounting for the remainders of its intervention (Pandolfi 2003). Junaid himself mentioned that the UNHCR mission in Malaysia quickly preoccupied itself with the Rohingya refugees from Myanmar after its Aceh mandate ended. Although I may personally question Junaid’s claims about his relationship with UNHCR, the promises he said they offered to him, and his motivations to meet with me, what matters here is that Junaid sees himself left behind and without options. Junaid could only resort to a politics of connection and proximity (“my wife told me she saw you with Alfian in the village”) in a forlorn search for recognition, however unlikely in 2012 Aceh, from a non-Indonesian authority.

## **Conclusion**

Junaid clearly yearns for some kind of recognition; he looks to the international humanitarian community to provide it, but his is a story of failure, including the story of our encounter in Blang Pidie. After a half hour of awkward misunderstandings and repetitions, when Junaid finally realized I had nothing to offer, he wished me a safe trip back to Banda Aceh, and took his leave. Since our meeting was unexpected and somewhat off topic from the goals of my journey, I might have even forgotten about our encounter altogether if not for the recording of

our interview that reminded me something was amiss if I only relied upon the easier and more relatable stories that my friends had shared with me. But even with the recording, I could not make sense of our conversation until I had a chance to listen to it a few times, to sort through the ambiguous pronouns, the rhythm of looping repetitions, and the heavy accent peppered with vocabulary more typically spoken in Malaysia. This dialectic misunderstanding, this productive misfire, that brushed against the planned narrative of my reunion tour, inserts another truth about Aceh's humanitarian encounter into the story.

In Chapters Two and Three I introduced Dona, Hasbi Lacak, and Rian as unrecognized figures that populate Aceh's post-MoU landscape as a way to challenge and interrupt what might otherwise have been an overly neat and coherent description of official and counter-official narratives of recovery. Here too I offer Junaid's story as a challenge and interruption to some tentative ideas about humanitarian recognition and restoration of national subjectivity that I have begun to develop. After focusing in this chapter on how humanitarian recognition succeeds or fails at a personal, intersubjective level, in the following chapter I recount my return to Banda Aceh, with a more diverse set of informants that hints at some of the larger social and political implications of recognition as it generates and restores hierarchy and authority in one of Indonesia's most challenging frontier provinces.

## Chapter 5: Humanitarian Subjects

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## **Introduction**

After the relative intimacy of the interviews I conducted in Blang Pidie among a dense network of old friends and work colleagues that have neighborhood and family ties to one another, I returned to the more cosmopolitan provincial capital, Banda Aceh, where I lived for most of my working years in Aceh from late 2005 until mid 2010. For ten more days in January 2012, I continued what I started in Blang Pidie, meeting with old friends and some new acquaintances who were involved in Aceh's post-tsunami and post-MoU recovery. But before I turn to the content of these interviews, I begin this chapter with a review of two contrasting short essays written by young Acehnese intellectuals, and a third by James Siegel, that were published in 2005 and 2006 during the urgent early years of humanitarian intervention in Aceh. The writers take us back to the utter catastrophe of tsunami, at an acute rupture in Aceh's history, but do not neglect to acknowledge how the conflict has had an impact on recovery efforts. For me these essays start a conversation that frames this chapter about how the humanitarian encounter in Aceh has produced a diverse array of new "humanitarian subjects" and their impact on the tentative revival of Aceh's civil society during and after the NGO era.

### **"When I got to Calang via a helicopter..."**

Within months of the tsunami, before the peace agreement that ended the conflict between GAM and Indonesia's security forces, a number of Aceh and Indonesia observers published their initial reactions to the unfolding humanitarian emergency, at once exposing Aceh's bitter history to a wider audience (often for the first time) and looking for signs of radical possibilities for reconciliation. Saiful Mahdi, who hails from Pidie district in Aceh, and in 2005 was still a PhD student at Cornell University, recorded for Cornell's journal *Indonesia* a brief set

of vivid images from the tsunami-devastated west coast town of Calang in Aceh Jaya district that illustrates a new kind of recognition produced by the humanitarian encounter:

When I got to Calang via a helicopter owned by an international NGO, I saw right away that the [Indonesian] marines were the ‘owners’ of Calang and a large portion of the west coast... The marines have the most tents on the plain that contains the remains of Calang... the IDPs live in the hilly region around Calang... Almost all of the inhabitants of Calang who became refugees stated that they were afraid to get too close to the marines... [They] also said that they were free to receive humanitarian aid only if foreign troops were present. I myself saw how refugees swarmed down from the hills to the Calang coast to get the aid they needed when the US Navy unloaded it from the USS McHenry in hovercrafts. They were busy choosing clothes, food, and drink, which they were free to take as they liked... But as soon as the foreign troops left, the IDPs immediately went back to their camps. They said, “The marines don’t let us take things [supplies] ourselves.” For the people of the coast, the American troops are heroes. And the marines? Well, they are heroes too, but viewed with a certain reserve (Mahdi 2005:162-4).

Under the protective banner of “an international NGO,” and in the context of a hitherto unimaginable emergency, Saiful records how tsunami survivors, “the people of the coast,” report a different set of responses to the Indonesian and American soldiers delivering urgently needed humanitarian aid. They welcome the American navy and fear the Indonesian marines. He also observes that the tsunami forcibly opened Aceh to the world, including the rest of Indonesia, for the first time in decades. The Indonesian military response to Aceh’s sudden visibility on the world stage was to control and manage the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the Acehnese rather than to oppress and violate them, as a kind of cynical public relations gesture. But Saiful’s description notes that tsunami IDPs remained unconvinced and kept their distance.

In the next article in the same journal, James Siegel picks up on the sudden outpouring of concern and generosity directed to Aceh that Saiful discussed, but restricts his remarks to the Indonesian response based on his observations in East Java, where he was conducting fieldwork at the time. He revisits his argument from 1999 (summarized in Chapter Four) that “no authority holds the confidence of the Acehnese,” least of all Indonesia and its military. Aceh’s governor in 2005 was in jail on corruption charges, Aceh’s religious leaders had long since allowed their authority to be co-opted by national political parties, and GAM proved too extreme and

unreliable for urban middle-class Acehnese searching for an authorizing figure that could speak on behalf of “Aceh” and its grievance. The tsunami, unlike most natural disasters in Indonesia, was a “democratic catastrophe” in that it annihilated high officials, public intellectuals, police and army barracks, urban poor, and fishing villages all at once (Siegel 2005:166). Such a wholesale devastation, compounded by a total absence of authority figures who might speak on behalf of “Aceh,” enabled ordinary Indonesians to identify with Aceh in a new way:

Before, to identify with Acehnese victims meant to oppose the army [hence decades of a willful ignorance of Aceh by other Indonesians]. Now however, such identification was possible... We could be them. The “them” in this formulation had been identified for many years as the victims of the Indonesian army; then, following this catastrophe, “Acehnese” became victims of a natural force. Humanitarianism replaced politics; “they” became “like us,” rather than those who suffer in a political conflict... Better to think of the unimaginable tsunami, a foreign force with a foreign name, capable of affecting anyone, than of the Indonesian power that murders fellow countrymen and has done so for decades, scarcely pausing in the face of natural wrath, raging on still today (ibid.167).

The tsunami brought Aceh back to Indonesia for Indonesians, but Siegel worries that the very unimaginability of the catastrophe will produce only a fleeting empathic identification. This may have been true for the majority of ordinary Indonesians, especially after Indonesian authority was able to reassert itself after the stunning shock of the disaster. But I would argue that during this moment of rupture, in the absence of an authority with the ability to speak for Aceh—to Acehnese and other Indonesians alike—when “humanitarianism replaced politics,” when the USS McHenry sent its hovercrafts to Aceh’s wrecked coastline, the stage was set for a longer term recognition of the Acehnese, especially for all stakeholders in the humanitarian encounter. That the humanitarian imperative allowed the US Navy to enter Indonesian waters, along with dozens of other sovereign agents, signals the arrival of another kind of politics, with its own figures of authority and modes of governance, and not a temporary blank placeholder in lieu of politics, as Siegel seems to suggest. Included among the humanitarians arriving en masse from around the world were thousands of Indonesians from other parts of the country who were

either sponsored by their religious, civic, and professional organizations, or hired by international organizations in need of translators, technical skills, and local knowledge.

The authority to recognize “the people of the coast” from the helicopter of an international NGO as victims of natural disaster instead of the Indonesian army allowed Saiful to launch his critique against the Indonesian marines. These everyday observations and critiques from the humanitarian community signaled to the Indonesian military that the world was watching, and prompted them first to deliver aid instead of blows to the Acehese, and second to begrudgingly accept the long term presence of humanitarian organizations in Aceh. But what makes Saiful’s critique even more interesting to me is his social identity as a successful middle class Acehese Indonesian academic, wearing a humanitarian’s hat, during the tsunami emergency. As Acehese looked in desperation to the international community and finally found recognition during Aceh’s humanitarian encounter, it turns out that many of the humanitarians doing the work of recognition were Acehese, whose connections to Indonesia, for one reason or another, were still intact. If the tsunami brought Aceh back to Indonesia for Indonesians, one of the topics I explore in this chapter is the extent to which the tsunami and the humanitarian encounter it unleashed brought Indonesia back to Aceh for the Acehese. I look to people like Saiful Mahdi to partially answer this question.

### **Tale From A Coffee Shop**

Compare Saiful’s dynamic participant-observations from Calang against the desultory paralysis depicted in a short essay that appeared in Indonesia’s national news magazine *Gatra* a year and a half later titled *Hikayat Dari Kedai Kopi* (“Tale From A Coffee Shop”). The byline identifies the author, Reza Idria, as a “writer and activist in the Tikar Pandan Aceh Culture

League,” who begins his piece with an epigram attributed to Dôkarim, an Acehese bard from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century: “These are bad times for the mind and the imagination, / So we build our own stories” (Idria 2006).<sup>63</sup>

Reza begins by informing the reader, “This time I will tell a story about my friend Murtadha, affectionately called Todhak. I am sure that as I am writing this, he is sitting and sipping a coffee at a shop in front of Banda Aceh’s great Baiturrahman Mosque.” The 600-word essay first meditates upon the coffee shop as a resilient Acehese institution, as durable as the mosque Todhak sits in front of, capable of surviving decades of conflict and the tsunami. “Trust me,” Reza attests, “after the infamous rogues have burned them down or after the recent tsunami’s pounding waves, the very first places to rebuild and receive visitors here are the coffee shops.” Not much has changed in Aceh’s coffee shops: the owners still welcome their patrons to sit all day long; the crowded din sounds the same as always; the newspapers with finger-smudged headlines, pulled apart, and strewn across the tables continue to stimulate collective conversation; and the coffee apparently remains as delicious as ever. What has changed, Reza suggests, is the social world around the coffee shop, changes that relate directly to Aceh’s humanitarian encounter. Many of the patrons who “now contribute to the din” are “unfamiliar to the eye.” Before, coffee shop patrons, “with chests pounding, would watch army trucks pass by; now we admire the luxury cars whose taxes were paid to the neighboring province.”<sup>64</sup>

Reza then pivots back to his friend Todhak, who has become a fixture at the coffee shop, but no longer reads the front page headlines of the newspaper: “He believes there is no truth

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<sup>63</sup> “*Ini zaman buruk bagi pikiran dan imajinasi, / maka kami membangun cerita sendiri.*” I discuss Reza Idria, the Tikar Pandan Aceh Culture League, and Dôkarim later in this chapter.

<sup>64</sup> Reza here refers to all the NGO vehicles that were purchased in Medan, the capital city of Aceh’s neighboring province to the south, North Sumatra. The tax revenues from vehicle sales support North Sumatra, but the vehicles drive on Aceh’s roads. Reza taps into a prevailing critique that Aceh’s economy has long been subservient to the Medan markets that effectively control the northern half of Sumatra.



there, especially when it comes to news about the government's disaster relief agency [BRR], which is busy defending itself over its miserable performance." Whenever he hears about the outrageous salaries that BRR staff earn "(in return for their slacker labor)," the news is so bitter that Todhak must add spoonfuls of more sugar to his coffee. "That is why Todhak only reads the back pages with the job vacancies, looking for job opportunities with the donor agencies." Todhak has told Reza that he wants to work for an NGO, not an LSM, but he worries that his English is not good enough because he was never able to afford a higher education. Reza tries "to explain to him that NGO and LSM are synonymous. But Todhak argued back, saying that 'NGO' designates international organizations, and 'LSM' local ones. According to him, working for an NGO earns a bigger salary with which he could keep his mother happy at home."<sup>65</sup>

Jealousy permeates all of Todhak's unhappy thoughts. He wonders what will happen two or three years later when all the NGOs leave Aceh. He fears a new social disease will emerge, an Aceh full of "high class" unemployment. What will happen to all the NGO staff who worked comfortably with such high salaries and all the perks? "Whenever we talk about things like this, we usually gulp down our coffee quickly." Reza concludes:

Todhak (and I as well), may be among those who are struggling with the rapid pace and multiplicity of changes here. For too long we have passed our lives in the midst of arresting times. We can not celebrate with a feast after disaster. Instead we must tremble and shudder, over and over again, and look for spaces to build our own stories.

"Tale From A Coffee Shop" distills the anxieties that some young adults certainly felt during the heyday of Aceh's humanitarian encounter little more than a year after the MoU. The

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<sup>65</sup> Reza is correct to the extent that the official term LSM, short for *Lembaga Swadaya Masyarakat* (more technically translated as Community Self-help Organization), has been the accepted Indonesian gloss for NGO (Non-Government Organization). Todhak is correct to the extent that in post-tsunami Aceh at least, NGO came to be associated with any and all international organizations present there (including the UN and donor agencies), with all the expected salaries and benefits associated with them, while LSM was reserved strictly for local organizations, frequently dependent upon the international NGOs for their operational funds during Aceh's recovery.

unchanging certainty of Aceh's coffee shops invites Todhak to remain there. He trembles with jealousy over the advantages that BRR and the international NGOs offer to some, which Reza likens to a celebratory feast after a disaster, but Todhak cannot break free of the arresting history of conflict that has left him so disadvantaged.

### **Humanitarian Subjects**

Saiful Mahdi and Reza Idria's essays published during the urgent days of Aceh's rehabilitation and reconstruction present two contrasting examples of the wide range of subjects produced by the humanitarian encounter. Saiful's piece evokes what Didier Fassin calls a "humanitarian politics of life based on an entrenched standpoint in favor of the 'side of the victims'" (Fassin 2007:511). The people of the coast that Saiful writes about "are indebted to the world... those whose life is passively exposed" (ibid.512). What little agency the tsunami survivors display is to choose from which soldiers they will seek out their humanitarian assistance. "Providing assistance," Fassin continues, "is of course important, but so is bearing witness," though I would use the term recognition as I defined it in the previous chapter (ibid.516). The ability to speak on behalf of survivors and name them as such "introduces another distinction into the public arena—the distinction between those who are subjects (the witnesses who testify to the misfortunes of the world) and those who can exist only as objects (the unfortunate whose suffering is testified to in front of the world)" (ibid.517). It is in this sense that I consider Saiful Mahdi a humanitarian subject, with a power to recognize and name the survivors that simultaneously works "as an autobiographical account for the former and the construction of a cause for the latter" (ibid.519). Reza Idria is a humanitarian subject as well, though he wields his power to narrate as a tool of resistance. He uses his encounter with

humanitarianism in Aceh to launch a critique against BRR and the international NGOs, highlighting the inequalities of the encounter and giving voice to people like his friend Todhak who feel paralyzed by history and left behind, enjoining the cause of those who are unable to enjoy the feast that follows disaster.

The distinction between those who can narrate in the first person and those whose lives can only be narrated is only one aspect of a “complex ontology of inequality... that differentiates in a hierarchical manner the values of human lives” in Fassin’s humanitarianism as a politics of life (ibid.519). Other aspects of the humanitarian encounter according to Fassin that implicitly either introduce or reinforce a hierarchy of human life include a distinction between lives that can be risked (humanitarians) and lives that can only be sacrificed (victims), and also, within humanitarian organizations, the distinction between expatriate and local staffs, who not only earn salaries on radically different pay scales but also receive differential entitlement to security protections during an emergency. In the aftermath of a rupturing “democratic catastrophe,” these are the ways in which hierarchy and authority are reconstituted through the humanitarian encounter. The humanitarian subjects that I write about in this chapter are examples of the diverse local agents in Aceh who do this reconstitutive work.

## **Champions**

Around mid-2009 I noticed a new word circulating among donor agency and NGO staff in Jakarta and Banda Aceh. In workshop presentations, meeting minutes, project proposals, case studies, assessments, and logistical framework matrices, the discussion of programs turned with increasing frequency upon the identification and support for so-called “champions” who possess a potent combination of charisma, knowledge, skills, passion, and connections that match the

donor's interests, and might oversee and shepherd the program to success.<sup>66</sup> The term frequently applies to receptive and interested bureaucrats of rank within Indonesian government partner agencies, respected academics, and well-known civil society leaders who are uniquely situated to understand, support, and advocate for policies and programs that reflect the agenda of donor agencies. When I visited Banda Aceh in January 2012, I interviewed two Acehnese friends of mine who moved to Aceh from Jakarta immediately after the tsunami and were still living in Aceh working on humanitarian and civil society programs at the time of our reunion. They illustrate for me what defines a champion in this setting, and with enough self-awareness to critique the concept as well.

### **Geumala and the Multi-Donor Trust Fund for Aceh and Nias**

I first met Geumala Yatim in October 2009 at Balohan Harbor, just before boarding the 40-minute ferry back to Banda Aceh from Weh Island (referred to by most Acehnese and other Indonesians as Sabang, the small harbor town that governs the island). I had just completed a strategic planning retreat with the newly established Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution Studies (CPCRS) at Syiah Kuala University with funding from The World Bank (my employer at the time) and The Asia Foundation. Geumala worked in Banda Aceh for the Multi-Donor Trust Fund for Aceh and Nias (MDF) for tsunami rehabilitation and reconstruction, which was administered and co-chaired by the World Bank, but she spent most of her weekends on Sabang. Half of my research staff at CPCRS knew Geumala because they had previously worked at The World Bank's Conflict and Development Program; they rushed to greet her when we arrived at the harbor, then introduced me to her. We ended up sitting together on the ferry; she told me stories about MDF during the entire trip, and we have kept in touch ever since. In January 2012,

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<sup>66</sup> See Table 5.1 below for specific examples.

we met over tea and fresh fruit for a long afternoon conversation at a quiet cafe in a Banda Aceh residential neighborhood.

Geumala comes from a well-known family in the world of Jakarta's civil society activists. Her sister Debra is a published author and poet who works with women's groups, and her brother Danny (who coincidentally I have known since the mid-1990s when he studied at Harvard's Education School) is a long-time AIDS activist and lecturer in psychology at Atma Jaya University. The Yatim family has ethnic roots from all over Indonesia, but their father, himself a mix of ethnicities, came from Aceh. During our interview in January 2012, Geumala told me that her father was a member of the "*kongsi* Aceh," the organization of Acehnese businessmen who famously donated the funds to purchase Indonesia's first aircraft to aid the war effort during the Revolution for independence. But shortly after the war, he moved to Jakarta and raised his family there. Although her siblings all have western names like Debra and Danny, her parents decided to give her the characteristically Acehnese name Geumala. Geumala's parents come from different religious backgrounds, so they let their children choose their own. In short, Geumala is a rare example of an Indonesian who self-identifies as both Acehnese and Christian, was raised in Jakarta with little prior experience in Aceh, but decided to live in Aceh permanently after the tsunami. Her Acehnese name, she told me, prophesied her destiny, to "return" to Aceh on her father's behalf.

Geumala's career in Aceh matches the experience of many Indonesians (and expatriates too, such as myself) who came to Aceh immediately after the tsunami to help in any way possible, and ultimately found full time, well paid employment with international agencies. Through a small group of activist friends at the Aceh Kita Foundation in Jakarta, she went to Banda Aceh to volunteer four days after the tsunami. In a blog post that Geumala wrote for The

World Bank website on the five year anniversary of the tsunami, she recalls offhand observations that contrast the life she would soon leave behind in Jakarta with the emergency in Aceh when she first arrived:

[An] odd occurrence was running into two celebrity friends at the airport [in Banda Aceh], Nurul Arifin (a former actress who is now a parliament member) and Ria Irawan (a stage and film actress). Both came with virtually nothing, except the will to help. My memories of the situation in Banda Aceh that day however, are far more vivid. I distinctly remember seeing a fully-decorated Christmas tree just days earlier, and comparing that to a real live tree “decorated” with dead bodies and debris. Never before have I seen a bus stand upright, nose to the sky. Never have I also seen a fisherman’s boat marooned on asphalt, wedged between two buildings. In the midst of this chaos I helped set up a base camp for volunteers and coordinated their activities. I also made time to give help to the village of Ulee Lheue, where my father was born. This was ground zero of the tsunami (Yatim 2009).

In Jakarta, Geumala had worked in public relations for various film production houses, and was new to the humanitarian enterprise when she first arrived. Geumala adjusted to the chaos of emergency, and deployed her skills in novel ways, “visiting survivors in their barracks, monitoring the flow of aid, acting as focal point to visiting foreign journalists – even acting as a ‘treasurer’ of sorts, taking care of food and cigarettes for volunteers, also their plane tickets once they finish their ‘tours of duty’” (ibid.). After volunteering for four months she returned to Jakarta for one month, but without her knowledge, Geumala was recruited with three recommendations from board members of the Aceh Kita Foundation, including her sister Debra, to return to Aceh as a community outreach consultant for MDF. She moved up through the hierarchy of consultant and staff contracts at the World Bank, and after a few years realized that Aceh had become her home.

As a community outreach officer for MDF, Geumala’s work entailed translating MDF programs and projects in legible terms to a variety of stakeholders. Starting at the top of the humanitarian industry hierarchy, she writes in her blog post about routinely hosting “a steady stream of visits from ambassadors and presidents of various countries and donor agencies” (ibid.). She also describes her frequent supervision visits to project field sites, and her blog post

features an image of her wearing an Islamic headscarf meeting with beneficiaries of a housing program:

Locals would come to us with a variety of basic questions. How does the project work? Where does the money come from?... My job was simply to help locals understand what was going on around them. For instance, communities in Aceh... often did not know the difference between donor countries, NGOs, the Red Cross and the UN. And who could blame them? Nobody ever imagined that these big international organizations would be crisscrossing through their homeland, so I did my best to explain the differences in the simplest way possible (ibid.).

When I reunited with Geumala in January 2012, she had just quit her job at MDF two months prior, and was making ambitious plans for the future. Her friends told her, “when you leave the World Bank, you are nothing.” But that, she said emphatically, was not true! “You bring your strengths into the organization (that’s why they hired you) and you take their strengths away with you. More importantly, you also take your connections and networks with you.” After nearly seven years working at MDF, Geumala now hopes to mobilize her connections with international and local donors in Jakarta to open up a production house in Aceh that brings together commercial and nonprofit interests. She imagines a photography school for young adults, and her ultimate dream, she told me, is to take over the enormous and poorly managed empty tsunami museum and use the space to open a theater. “Here is an opportunity that no one has taken advantage of yet,” she said, “A sense for production is returning to Aceh, but they need help.” As an example, she cited the recent folklore festival in Banda Aceh that failed to provide rehearsal space or changing rooms for the visiting artists that came from other countries.

Geumala compared herself favorably to one of our Acehnese colleagues, Malik, who also came up through the ranks and has done well at The World Bank mission in Aceh. He used to be an English teacher at the state Islamic university in Banda Aceh. When Malik volunteered for some World Bank projects, the expatriate managers first noticed his English skills, then learned

about his background in peace activism and his personal access to Aceh's conflict areas; they ultimately hired him as staff. But Geumala complained that "he let The World Bank take his identity." I think she meant that Malik has allowed the prestige and patronage power that comes with his job to define his status within the humanitarian and development community in Banda Aceh. Malik holds court at the coffee shops in Banda Aceh where the NGO activists congregate every afternoon, and I have noticed that everyone uses the respectful title "Pak" when speaking to him even though that is a rare convention among current and former NGO activists, especially of the same generation. Rina, one of my research staff that I introduced in Chapter Two, once told me that she always makes sure she is wearing her headscarf when he is in the room, not for religious reasons but because she thinks he expects her to show him respect, though she almost always prefers not to wear it. Having assumed the status of "Pak Malik," Geumala has noticed that he tends not to ask questions at the office, perhaps because it might reflect poorly upon him if he appears to not know something. Since he does not ask questions, sometimes he makes mistakes. Furthermore, Geumala wonders what Malik will do after the World Bank's work in Aceh is complete if he believes, as some have told her, that "when you leave the World Bank, you are nothing."

If we compare Malik and Geumala, Malik strikes me as another version of the social type I described in the previous chapter, in search of recognition by an external authority, anything but Indonesia. This does not surprise us once we learn that Malik's brother was killed by Indonesian security forces during the conflict. In contrast, Geumala has never had to foreclose one identity for the other; raised in Jakarta, she is capable of acknowledging and celebrating her Acehnese-ness, in brackets, which makes it easier to reconcile with not just her Indonesian citizenship, but also her Christianity. She has made Aceh her home, but it does not arrest her in



the same way as it does someone like Todhak, not least because she can fly to Jakarta at a moment's notice when she needs a break. For these reasons, Aceh does not touch Geumala, even as she honors her heritage and makes Banda Aceh and Sabang her new home. This was especially apparent when I asked her to describe the challenges of working at MDF over the years:

There really hasn't been a problem working at MDF, because we are the donor, not the implementer. When something goes wrong, it is rarely MDF's fault, but we take the blame as a way to provide cover for our local partners when there are problems with the implementation. Behind the scenes, my job is to facilitate. We give monitoring grants to local NGOs, such as the local corruption watch organization, but they are afraid to get caught up in rumors. They close their eyes to protect themselves rather than confront the local government. They don't want to meet each other, but they have to. I bring them together as a go-between.

Geumala elaborates on similar themes in her blog post: "Since the donors under the MDF are not allowed to intervene in [problems related to projects in the field], part of my job was to either convey these complaints to the right project people, or facilitate meetings between the disgruntled parties. How these issues are settled is ultimately up to the project teams" (ibid.). MDF provides cover for its implementing partners, but MDF's local partners must ultimately solve their own problems. Local NGOs fear accusations and rumors of collusion with the government agencies and contractors they were hired by MDF to monitor, but the rumors do not affect Geumala. Behind the scenes, she will not intervene; she merely facilitates.

Geumala's other project after she quit her job at MDF is to complete a book that she has been writing. Her goal is to answer some of the basic questions that her friends and family in Jakarta have been asking her ever since she moved to Aceh. The questions are remarkably similar to ones that project beneficiaries frequently asked her such as "What is The World Bank, UNDP, UNESCO, IFRC?" "What is an LSM?" "What is an NGO?" "What is a donor?" Geumala's outline for the book has twelve chapters; each one recounts a story, or an incident, based on her experiences working on Aceh's rehabilitation and reconstruction from disaster.

Along the way, she hopes to answer another question: “Who are the Acehnese?” Geumala describes her book as another act of public relations. Her job at MDF and her proposed book are both attempts to translate the humanitarian encounter in Aceh, but for different audiences. As a humanitarian subject, who by my reckoning fits the agency jargon definition of a champion, Geumala is authorized to act as the go-between.

### **Azwar and the Aceh Revival Forum**

The only person I knew from Aceh before I took my first trip there in late June 2005 was an acquaintance named Azwar Hasan. We had met only once, briefly, two years prior at a social occasion in Jakarta through a mutual friend, but I distinctly remembered the introduction because I thought it was rare to meet Acehnese Indonesians among my circle of friends. Azwar comes from a respected family of religious leaders in Pidie district, but he left Aceh after high school to go to college in Jakarta, then pursued a student exchange in Australia and later a master’s degree in Holland.<sup>67</sup> When I first met him in 2003, he was a lecturer in public administration at the University of Indonesia, and a routine consultant for USAID and AusAID. Immediately after the tsunami, he flew to Banda Aceh and started helping survivors, starting first with his family and personal network, but his work slowly evolved into an organized program that he incorporated into a local NGO called *Forum Bangun Aceh* (FBA, The Aceh Revival Forum). When I met Azwar for the second time in July 2005 we truly got to know each other and become friends. He was living with several of the FBA staff in their crowded ramshackle office, an old house they rented next to the Banda Aceh fire department. At that time FBA’s programmatic reach focused on tsunami areas in and around Banda Aceh. In 2012, FBA owned a generous plot of land where

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<sup>67</sup> Azwar writes about the disruption of his worldview when he took his first trip abroad on a three week youth exchange trip to Australia in a blog post on his NGO’s website titled “Opening My Eyes and Seeing the World from Both Sides Now” (Hasan 2011).

they have built a large and spacious building with plenty of office space, a library, meeting rooms, and open areas inside and outside the building that can be utilized for training activities. Their programmatic reach in 2012 extended into tsunami and conflict areas in twelve out of Aceh's 23 districts and municipalities.<sup>68</sup>

Azwar credits FBA's success to the historical moment when the donor community prioritized Aceh after the tsunami, but his connections to both international donors *and* local communities, along with a consistent vision, conspired with the historical moment to set FBA apart from the other local NGOs that mushroomed all across Aceh during the NGO era. Azwar prioritized two guiding principles in FBA's development, one external and the other internal. The public face of FBA advertises a "person to person" approach, connecting donors with their beneficiaries, and FBA beneficiaries to one another. Their programs focus on micro-finance and lending cooperatives for small business owners, and educational exchanges that bring student interns and professionals from abroad to volunteer at the FBA office in Banda Aceh and send adolescents and young adults to study abroad. Internally, FBA has prioritized capacity building and institutional development to ensure its long term survival and sustainability long after Azwar stopped his daily involvement in FBA's management. FBA will not accept grants that do not allow for a significant percentage of the budget to be allocated for capacity building activities.

In January 2012, Azwar and I met for breakfast at our favorite *nasi gurih* cafe in Banda Aceh to catch up and reflect on the past seven years of his work in Aceh. He had recently returned from a weeklong course at Harvard Business School called "Governing for Nonprofit Excellence" for leaders of local NGOs around the world, part of HBS's series of Executive Education programs. After describing what he learned at Harvard about how NGOs operate in

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<sup>68</sup> More information about Forum Bangun Aceh, including a description of their programs and a list of their national and international donors, is available on their website: <http://www.fba.or.id>

the United States, I noticed with interest that Azwar used the language of “champions” to describe what distinguishes Indonesian from American NGOs. He came away from Harvard even more convinced that champions are at least a temporary requisite component for an NGO’s success in Indonesia

In America, a board of directors steers and oversees the direction of a nonprofit organization. The board includes trusted public figures whose reputations as philanthropists or civil society leaders legitimates the credibility of the organization they advise. But not in Indonesia; the board members just sit there, they don’t understand the role of a board because the organization’s structure and program depends upon the outsize role played by the leader, the figurehead, the champion. The NGO is driven by personality; when the champion leaves, the NGO falls apart. Our nonprofits depend upon the individuals who lead them.

I asked Azwar to define what makes a champion. “To be a champion,” he said, “passion is the number one ingredient. You also need a network, capacity, opportunity, and managerial skills, but you need passion first. You can learn or get the rest later on.” Although he never explicitly called himself a champion, when I asked him how to reconcile the need for champions if an Indonesian NGO is going to succeed with the need for sustainability if the NGO falls apart when the champion moves on, he referred to himself as an example for navigating this challenge:

Well, let’s see, for myself and FBA, I still have the passion. I can still sit and talk about FBA’s ideas and future all the time, but at some point I realized that I have to move on. I’m not there forever. I think you need a champion to establish an organization with a strong foundation, but there is a time when the champion must play a different role. At the policy level, or maybe at the symbolic level. Like Hasan Tiro for GAM; he founded the organization but now he operates at a different level, with a different role. It’s not easy to make the transition from a traditional organization to a modern one. The function of the champion must change, and that requires someone with a different way of thinking. At the beginning, when you transfer some authority and trust, it requires a big heart. It’s like sending your kid to college, you have to accept it, to trust.

Azwar’s college metaphor here is important, because it echoes the official state narrative in which education is the route for Acehnese (or Javanese, or Batak, etc.) to escape their traditional village origins and actualize themselves as the modern, middle class Indonesian subjects that they are destined to become. So too must nonprofit organizations leave behind their dependence upon charismatic champions. By 2012, Azwar had long ago left the day-to-day

operations of FBA to a team of two, then three, full time managers. He now serves as the chairperson of FBA's board of directors, and has worked hard, through FBA's determined capacity building provisions, to ensure FBA's longevity as a "modern organization."

With his training in public administration, Azwar has internalized the work of Fred W. Riggs and his theory of fused, prismatic, and diffracted societies, which has its roots in the sociology of Max Weber by way of Talcott Parsons (Chapman 1966; Riggs 1964). Azwar used terms like "symbolic society" and "prismatic society" freely during our conversation. Despite the incipient evolutionism in Riggs' work, this was Azwar's route to what struck me as a rare and strident critique of the prevailing ideology in Aceh, and why the need for champions continues. He even managed to surprise me when he said,

Here I am, Azwar Hasan. I could be an atheist for all anyone knows, but with my family background, all I have to do is put on a *peci* hat, grow a small beard, and wear a prayer shirt to suddenly become a *teungku* [traditional Acehese religious leader] in my village. It's easy. I can go to the mosque and say whatever I want. Those are symbols.

The champion is a symbol that embodies the perceptions, emotions, ego, and spirit of the community. As long as that continues to exist, is the champion important? Yes! These are the social facts. People believe in miracles, for example. It happens. Suppose I am a KPA leader like [GAM's former military commander] Muzakir Manaf, and you get into some kind of trouble, such as an accusation of murder or selling *ganja*. If I can get you out of trouble, and set you free, you will definitely believe in me, with an irrational element. I was able to set you free in spite of the law. It's a miracle! That's why the champion exists. Is it good in this context? Yes, it's good!

Like Geumala, Azwar appears immune to the burdensome ideology that Aceh imposes on the less cosmopolitan humanitarian subjects I have described. He could be an atheist, but still go to the village and instantly become a respected *teungku*; it is simply a matter of manipulating symbols.

Since Azwar mentioned Hasan Tiro's and Muzakir Manaf's names during our conversation, I asked him about the ex-GAM leaders such as Manaf who now lead Partai Aceh (PA), and whether or not they are also "social value creators," which was how he described the village *teungku*. Muzakir Manaf, in fact, was a central character in Aceh's electoral paralysis in

January 2012. He was the vice-governor candidate on PA's ticket opposing the incumbent Governor Irwandi's reelection, playing a politics of strategic delay in order to postpone the elections until after Irwandi's term in office ends. Again I was surprised how Aceh's latest political impasse that had immobilized the rest of Aceh did not touch him:

Muzakir Manaf may be a high figure in KPA, but he is not a social value creator. Those KPA guys have almost no influence in the community. Sure they have a lot of power in the district councils and provincial parliament, but it's just temporary. They use pressure and intimidation. When they die, they will disappear. But the *teungku* have a lineage. The social values they teach have been passed down and are more persuasive in the community. The media talk about KPA and PA because it's more tangible. When someone gets shot, that kind of news is easier to digest, just as it's easier to identify a fever than to diagnose the cause. The fever is just a symptom.

Bearing in mind that Azwar comes from a family of *teungku* but managed to avoid the intimidation and violence of everyday life in rural Aceh as he pursued his higher education and career outside of Aceh, I detect some bias in his instant social analysis, but what matters here is his ability to sort out the ideological constraints on social life in Aceh and turn them into easily manipulable signs that he can keep at a distance, or dismiss altogether. Azwar strategically leverages this skill to consolidate his champion influence among various stakeholders: among FBA beneficiaries as a credible and respected Acehnese community leader; among his FBA staff and peer organizations as the dedicated architect of an influential local NGO with an inexhaustible passion for helping others; and among the international donors who see him as an established professional, a safe and productive conduit for investing in Aceh and, just as important, throughout Indonesia.

Azwar's dream plans for the future illustrate the imagined ease with which he deploys his skills as a champion. As he talked about the passion required for being a champion in Indonesia's nonprofit sector, Azwar made occasional reference to the passions that continue to motivate him now that FBA no longer requires his daily attention. At one end of the spectrum, he remains focused on his origins, the rural *teungku*, Aceh's social value creators. The organs of

state have an antagonistic history in rural Aceh, and limited contact besides, but the *teungku* are always there, attending every religious ritual and family rite of passage. In a more neoliberal idiom, Azwar described the *teungku* as a kind of clearinghouse “helpdesk” for rural Aceh. Before people go to the local *polsek* police station to settle disputes, to the sub-district *camat* office to pursue legal administrative matters, or to the *puskesmas* clinics for health services, they go to their village *teungku*. The *teungku* already have community organization skills, Azwar argues, they just need more knowledge. Imagine, he wondered aloud, if instead of preaching an ossified religious doctrine about “us and them,” “paradise for the believers,” “hell for the infidels,” and proper Islamic dress codes, what if FBA or some other NGO could teach the *teungku* about transparency, corruption prevention, and sustainable development where the day to day activities of local governance actually occur?

At the other end of the spectrum, Azwar imagines replicating FBA’s success with microcredit and lending cooperatives in the urban slums of Java such as North Jakarta. He has a short list of international donors that support his “person to person” approach to sustainable aid. “It doesn’t really have to be in Jakarta,” Azwar clarified, “but I really want to do something like FBA, for another community... What matters is that it directly reaches the beneficiary communities. I’m happy when I go to the field and I see success. That is where my passion is. That’s what keeps me going.”

Shortly after our Banda Aceh reunion in January 2012, Azwar moved back to Jakarta, where he worked briefly as a consultant advisor to the Minister of Administrative Reforms in the president’s cabinet. As of late 2012, Azwar was planning a vacation across Latin America while waiting on the results of a huge tender bid to AusAID for which he was nominated to a country manager position by an Australian contracting firm that implements AusAID development

projects throughout Indonesia. Whether he chooses to impart good governance knowledge to Aceh's rural *teungku*, to replicate FBA's success in Java's urban slums, to advise ministers in the president's cabinet in Jakarta, to implement a nationwide development initiative funded by AusAID, or to don a tourist's hat and travel across Latin America, Azwar knows he can do all of the above.

### **Donors Need Indonesian Champions**

A champion has the ambition and capacity to deliver a program to beneficiaries and get the job done. A champion must also have the right network of connections among different groups and levels of stakeholders to mobilize the necessary support and resources, through a "person to person" approach, that ensure the program's success. People like Geumala and Azwar fit this criteria, and there is no shortage of demand for people like them in the aid world. In my own experience, especially during the final years of my work in Aceh, donor identification of local champions became a routine "risk mitigation measure" in strategic planning meetings and documents. Table 5.1 quotes some examples.



**Table 5.1: Donors Need to Identify “Champions”**

Source	Quote
Interview in March 2010 with managers of a prominent think tank in Jakarta	“It helps to identify in advance a charismatic ‘champion’ who donors can depend on to develop the partner organization and ultimately deliver research products that reflect the quality and commitment of the organization, that are policy relevant, and can also be used to attract donor support in the future.”
Risk assessment matrix from a World Bank proposal in July 2010 to support policy-relevant research about conflict-sensitive development and other peacebuilding programs for Aceh	“Risk: weak management structure Mitigation Measures: selection criteria for managers is particularly important. Must be a champion.”
Logistical framework matrix from a World Bank proposal in April 2010 to develop a “decision support system” for including conflict-sensitivity in the Aceh provincial government’s development policies	“Proposed Activity: Establish and provide capacity building training for a champion team (CTV) of visionary young government officials to lead and implement a gradually changing process for effective development planning and implementation.”
Power-point presentation from a World Bank Conflict and Development Team strategic planning retreat in August 2009 that summarizes the day’s discussion about the evolving context in Aceh and identifying needs and opportunities for future programming	The program secretariat in Aceh should: “Improve coordination with internal and external stakeholders by designating focal point ‘champions.’” “Conduct a mapping exercise of key persons among all partners (identify our ‘champions’)”
July 2012 AusAID program design document titled “Australia-Indonesia Partnership for Pro-Poor Policy: The Knowledge Sector Initiative”	“There is a growing number of champions among policy makers who demonstrate real interest in using evidence.” (p.14) “Taskforces will be required to support relevant champions to develop a long term policy assistance strategy.” (p.39) From Annex 5: Risk Matrix (pp.89-91) “Risk Event: Lack of GoI policy maker support for reform agenda. Risk Management: Identify and support champions within GoI who have authority and interest to bring about change in policy.” “Risk Event: Research agenda captured by adversarial elites (e.g. change in government) Risk Management: The program will reassess and identify champions after change in GoI/GoI personnel.”

These documents do not define the term “champion,” leaving its apparently self-evident meaning for readers to discern in context. In one donor assessment, however, a frank discussion under a header titled “Personal Connections, Nepotism and Collusion” lays bare the underlying assumptions that make “champions” such a necessary figure on the nonprofit landscape in

Indonesia. This example relates to AusAID's plan cited above in Table 6.1) to support Indonesia's knowledge sector:

One of the central concerns of every individual and institution involved in the knowledge sector is that relations with government are dominated by personal connections rather than institutional networks or processes... The director of one well-known research organization observed that it was essential to have a 'champion' within a government institution in order to be able to work with it. In order to be asked to produce research or other input into the policy process, good personal links with a minister or well-placed insider are a prerequisite (Sherlock 2010:30).

The champion, not a bureaucratic institutional process, secures government support for the donor's agenda just as, in Azwar's example, Muzakir Manaf gets the poor Acehese troublemaker out of jail in spite of the law. To secure government support for an NGO program is, like Azwar said, a small miracle. The argument here is not to reveal donors' cynical motivation to identify champions, or to unmask champions themselves as agents of Indonesian-style *korupsi*, *kolusi*, and *nepotisme* (KKN), but instead to place champions within the broader framework of recognition (a politics of proximity and connection, as described in the previous chapter), a uniquely Indonesian and historically situated political process that establishes hierarchy and reinforces authority.

### **Double Agents of Recognition**

In the more specific setting of Aceh's humanitarian encounter, champions well-versed in an Indonesian politics of connection ultimately perform an act of reintegration, a gradual transfer of recognition from one external authority (the humanitarian mobile sovereign) back to another, former authority (Indonesia). Champions effect this transfer of recognition partly through the skillful and detached ease with which they manipulate symbols of identity. Even though she is Christian, Geumala puts on a Muslim headscarf when she visits a tsunami barracks. She can take her public relations skills in Jakarta's entertainment industry and retool them to become a

humanitarian at the World Bank. When she leaves the World Bank, she emphatically does *not* become nothing; she takes her connections and networks with her and redeploys them in yet another work setting. Azwar can wear a *peci* and a prayer shirt to convincingly project himself as a respected *teungku* in an Acehese village just as easily as he can circulate among the donor community or Jakarta's social elite with a shirt and tie. Both Azwar and Geumala have written strategically about their Acehese backgrounds in productive ways on the public blogs hosted by their respective humanitarian organizations (Hasan 2011; Yatim 2009). Clearly they each acknowledge and celebrate their Acehese identity, but they also subordinate it easily.

The capacity to dissociate and subordinate aspects of one's identity in this way has a distinctly Indonesian genealogy that arguably has its colonial roots in Dutch efforts to pacify Aceh, where the ethnologist and Adviser for Native Affairs in the Dutch East Indies, Dr. C. Snouck Hurgronje, strongly advocated for the separation of ethnic customary law (*adat*) from religious law (*hukom*), in order to neutralize the latter as a motivating force for rebellion. Hurgronje cites the well-known Acehese proverb, "*hukom* and *adat* are inseparable, even as God's essence and his attributes," but the theme that underlies his classic ethnography about Aceh is not just that the proverb is a falsehood, but that one is subordinate to the other: "To make the [proverb's] sense complete we may well add, 'but the greatest of these is *adat*'" (Hurgronje 1906:72).<sup>69</sup> Throughout the Malay world, in fact, the phrase *masuk Melayu*, to enter or become Malay, is synonymous with conversion to Islam. Suharto's New Order revived Dutch colonial policy, encouraging a process of dissociation so that religious and ethnic identities would no longer overlap. Ethnic diversity would diminish religious unity, and religion would foster ethnic pluralism (Kipp 1996, as cited in Nordholt and van Klinken 2007:35-36). In this

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<sup>69</sup> This proverb has persisted into the present, and has been cited repeatedly to mobilize support for the implementation of Islamic law in Aceh.

way, we can say that Geumala and Azwar, who both came of age during the New Order, are thoroughly Indonesian subjects, subordinating ethnicity, religion, and other aspects of their social identities in ways that can be mixed and matched according to whatever their current setting demands.

In their roles as Indonesian humanitarian champions, people like Azwar and Geumala act as double agents of recognition. At first they authoritatively translate their humanitarian programs with generous international funding for their staff and program beneficiaries in a way that generates the longed for recognition of Acehese as a righteous cause for humanitarian intervention. They escort donor officials on site visits, further legitimating their access to a foreign source of authority. But just as importantly, they must take the time to coordinate with and secure support from local and national government agencies, bearing in mind that the national government channeled all international aid through its temporary ministerial level agency, BRR, the Aceh-Nias Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency, whose central offices were built in Banda Aceh instead of Jakarta. This includes coordination with Indonesian security forces, especially in former conflict areas. The programs that our nonprofit sector champions deliver bear the seals of not just their international donors, but also the Indonesian government.<sup>70</sup>

### **From (Acehese) Combatants to (Indonesian) Contractors**

As the peace process moved forward and former GAM leaders assumed political office, NGOs quickly discovered that they had to coordinate their programs with local rent seeking KPA agents. Oxfam's difficulties with KPA on Pulo Nasi (as described at the start of Chapter One)

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<sup>70</sup> It is worth recalling here that in some cases, such as in the early days of IOM's Post-Conflict Reintegration Program, no international logos were visible at all (see Images 5.3-5 in the previous chapter), as if international humanitarian assistance for amnestied prisoners and other conflict victims came not just *through* the government, but exclusively *from* it.

easily illustrate this trend in post-MoU Aceh that grew increasingly brazen and prevalent throughout 2007 and 2008. Edward Aspinall suggests that this too was a sign of national reintegration, however counterintuitive that might appear at first glance. In a well-researched 2009 paper titled “From Combatants to Contractors: The Political Economy of Peace in Aceh,” under the header “Building Relations and Winning Contracts: How the Construction Sector Works,” Aspinall describes how GAM members transformed themselves into construction contractors, hijacking one of the largest sectors of Aceh’s post-tsunami economy (Aspinall 2009:17-22). Aspinall’s summary of how his KPA informants describe what it takes to be a successful contractor bears a remarkable similarity to our working definition of nonprofit sector champions above:

They typically described a loose set of exchange relations, using terms like *melobi* (lobbying) and *membangun relasi* (building relations). Big contractors typically say that being able to ‘mix with all kinds of people,’ having ‘*pergaulan luas*’ (wide social relations), and being able to ‘bridge all sides’ are keys to their success. In short, this is a world where, in order to be successful, a contractor must invest not only funds but also a considerable amount of time and energy in getting to know all manner of bureaucratic and business players who might one day be useful, and distributing lots of petty and informal favors and gifts in all directions... One senior GAM member, who is a successful contractor on the east coast, explained the system in very direct language: ‘...It’s lobbying... you have to have insiders, people in the tendering committee or among the *kepala dinas* [government line agency heads]. You approach the people in the committee... You have to know them.’ (ibid.19).

The transition from combatant to contractor begins with political access to the GAM leaders assigned by quota to work at BRR after the peace agreement and those elected to office at the end of 2006. From there, ex-combatants are drawn into a “tight web of mutual dependence” among a “great variety of actors from the executive government, security forces, law enforcement agencies, the legislature, and business... a world where rivalries and competition do occur, but where the key to business success is the ability to build wide networks of influence and familiarity” (ibid.22). GAM ex-combatants have an edge over the competition that seals the deal thanks to their history of violence and intimidation, a strategy still easily

deployed to get what they want long after the peace agreement.<sup>71</sup> Once absorbed into this tight web, however, combatants-turned-contractors reported to Aspinall that they have assimilated to their former “enemies’ habits,” “their methods” and “old ways.” They realize retrospectively how they have been corrupted and “compelled by the sector’s structure and norms” (Aspinall 2009:31). Aspinall concludes that GAM has settled for a “patrimonial peace” based on a patron-clientelistic distribution of post-tsunami and post-conflict reconstruction funds, absorbed and reintegrated into a resilient and thoroughly Indonesian political economy; a “predatory peace,” but “a stable one” nonetheless (ibid.31-34). The figure of the GAM combatant transformed into an Indonesian contractor presents the negative mirror image of the nonprofit sector champion, a stark and crass example of post-MoU Aceh’s biggest reintegration “success.” The ex-GAM combatant-to-contractor and the Acehnese nonprofit sector champion both leverage the humanitarian encounter to bring Aceh back under the sign of Indonesia.

### **Other Humanitarian Subjects and the Reconstitution of Civil Society in Aceh**

I should emphasize here that the figure of the Acehnese nonprofit sector champion (or the ex-combatant contractor) who does the symbolic work of bringing Aceh back under the sign of Indonesia is but one rare and elite version of the humanitarian subject. However Azwar’s metaphor of the college student for the modernization of Indonesia’s nonprofit sector, and the trajectory toward a specifically Indonesian middle class subjectivity that it suggests, with the capacity to reflect upon then sort and subordinate aspects of one’s social identity, applies to the broad spectrum of humanitarian subjects as well. In this way, the emergence of the humanitarian

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<sup>71</sup> I have noted, coincidentally in the same edition of *Indonesia* where Aspinall’s article appears, that the figure of the GAM ex-combatant can be leveraged in creative ways for ordinary Acehnese businessmen to win contracts in Aceh’s post-MOU political economy. GAM’s implicit association with a history of violence and intimidation often enough does not require actual recourse to violence or intimidation. See: (Grayman 2009)

subject in Aceh has a certain compatibility or affinity with an Indonesian national subjectivity, and perhaps this is why the double agents of recognition described above are able to facilitate a transition from humanitarian to national recognition. But that does not mean that humanitarian subjects automatically or necessarily have a synergy with the modern nationalist project of becoming Indonesian subjects (though that might be a path of least resistance for many). It is worth mentioning briefly, for example, that some Acehnese have leveraged their humanitarian encounter to bypass Indonesia altogether and join a cosmopolitan mobile elite working with UN agencies and other international organizations around the world.<sup>72</sup> These people are beyond the scope of this chapter because they no longer resided in Aceh when I visited in 2012, but I think of them as textbook examples of the supermodern (or supra-modern, as opposed to Pandolfi's supra-colonial) character of the humanitarian encounter that I described in this dissertation's Introduction. Those who do fall within the scope of this chapter however are the humanitarian subjects that continue to work in diverse ways for the reconstitution of Aceh's civil society after the peace agreement, and after the NGO era has ended.

### **Aceh's Civil Society Before The Tsunami**

A brief review of the rise and fall of Aceh's civil society before the tsunami helps contextualize the discussion. An oft-overlooked but exhaustive survey of civil society in Aceh prior to and during the imposition of martial law titled *Neither Wolf, nor Lamb: Embracing Civil Society in the Aceh Conflict* straddles the academic and human rights literature on Aceh's conflict. The book's author, Shane Barter, and the publisher that commissioned the research, The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), strongly advocate for the participation of civil society actors in any peace process to settle Aceh's conflict—advice that

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<sup>72</sup> And perhaps not coincidentally, some of them were independence activists for Aceh before the tsunami.

has been largely ignored—but they do not refrain either from criticizing the prevailing voices of Aceh’s civil society from 1998 until 2004 alongside their criticisms of GAM and the Indonesian government (Barter 2004). Two general criticisms stand out for the purposes of this discussion. First, the florescence of local NGOs in Indonesia immediately after Suharto’s resignation in 1998, particularly those with an interest in Indonesia’s democratization and redress for human rights abuses during the New Order, tended to depend upon foreign donors, leaving them vulnerable to the whims of donors’ changing agendas and funding cycles, and subject to the suspicion of nationalist politicians and security forces. The second critique reflects Azwar’s description of Indonesian NGOs’ dependency upon charismatic leaders, reinforcing hierarchical and less transparent systems of governance.

These two critiques highlight a larger point that I take away from Barter’s book, which is that for a brief period after the end of Suharto’s New Order, Aceh’s civil society blossomed and flourished just as much as it did throughout the rest of Indonesia, with an orientation toward external sources of recognition beyond Indonesia. Many of these new organizations placed an emphasis on exposing the abuses perpetrated during (and after) the DOM period of Aceh’s conflict. After watching East Timor’s historic referendum for independence from Indonesia, Aceh’s NGO activists and student groups coalesced upon a common agenda of demanding the same for settling Aceh’s grievances, what they saw as a peaceful alternative to GAM’s armed struggle, and a bargaining chip to pressure the government to take action on human rights violations (Aspinall 2002). But even before the imposition of martial law in May 2003, Aceh’s civil society organizations came under attack as indiscriminate counter-insurgency operations against a resurgent GAM cast an excessively wide net. Barter recounts multiple examples of activists that were arrested, tortured, killed, disappeared, or forced into exile. The death knell



came one month into the martial law period when on 16 June 2003 President Megawati issued Decree Number 43 on the “Control of the Activities of Foreign Citizens, Non-Governmental Organizations and Journalists in the Province of Aceh.” Barter translates Articles 2.1 and 2.2 of the decree:

Non-governmental organizations, whether foreign or Indonesian are forbidden from carrying out activities that are incompatible with the implementation of the objectives of the Military State of Emergency in Aceh Province. Humanitarian aid that comes from friendly countries, world bodies and non-governmental organizations, whether foreign or national in Aceh province will be coordinated by the State Coordinating Minister for Public Welfare (Barter 2004:113).<sup>73</sup>

Local NGOs quickly discovered that the burden of proof fell upon them to demonstrate that they had an agenda different from GAM, and in most cases were forced to shut down and disperse. NGO activists who survived the crackdown went underground, into exile, or back to school. The tsunami, as it bashed through urban coastal areas, disproportionately killed many of these organizations’ former leading members, dealing a final but not entirely irreparable blow to the scattered remainders of Aceh’s civil society.

### **Bachtiar and RATA Before the Tsunami**

Bachtiar’s long career with humanitarian NGOs since he graduated in 1997 from a vocational nursing high school has been profoundly shaped by the rise and fall, then reconstitution, of Aceh’s civil society. Bachtiar comes from a rural village on the slopes of Mount Seulawah, an extinct volcano in Aceh Besar district less than an hour from Banda Aceh. Graduates from his nursing high school typically do several years of service in underdeveloped villages across Indonesia before they can formally join the civil service as a government health worker. Bachtiar had no interest in leaving Aceh, so he began volunteering at a sub-district

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<sup>73</sup> The original Indonesian text of Presidential Decree No.43-2003 is available here: [http://portal.mahkamahkonstitusi.go.id/eLaw/mg58ufsc89hrsg/keppres43\\_2003.pdf](http://portal.mahkamahkonstitusi.go.id/eLaw/mg58ufsc89hrsg/keppres43_2003.pdf) (accessed 12 October 2012)

clinic roughly mid-way between Banda Aceh and Seulawah. He might have followed a much longer and arduous path into the civil service at the clinic if a friend had not invited him in 1999 to apply for a job with a new local NGO called Rehabilitation Action for Torture Victims in Aceh (RATA) that was recruiting a range of health workers.

Pak Nurdin Abdul Rahman, one of GAM's intellectual leaders, established RATA in 1999, during the brief post-DOM surge of new civil society organizations in Aceh. The inspiration to start an NGO that addresses the physical and psychological needs of torture survivors came from Pak Nurdin's own experiences with torture and humiliation while he was in prison. He spent three and a half years in prison without trial for his GAM sympathies from 1977 until 1981, and then again for eight years during the DOM period from 1990 until he received amnesty in 1998 shortly after President Suharto resigned. RATA staff received training, and eventually accreditation as a member organization, from the Denmark-based International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims (IRCT).

When I interviewed Bachtiar privately in a Banda Aceh hotel room in 2012, he told me that he was too young and naive to know anything about the conflict when he accepted the offer to work at RATA, partly because the DOM-era violence that was concentrated along Aceh's northeast coast never reached Banda Aceh while he was in school nor his home community near Seulawah. For his first three months on the job, Bachtiar continued his daytime work at the public clinic and worked evenings at RATA's office in Banda Aceh, when patients usually arrived from Pidie, Bireuen, North Aceh, and East Aceh, the four northeast coast districts where RATA had active outreach programs. Bachtiar screened the patients as they arrived and assisted RATA's doctor, Aidarus Idram, who was the only specialist in Aceh trained in forensic medicine at the time. Together they would treat the patients or make referrals to other specialists in Banda

Aceh. When I asked Bachtiar what motivated his eventual decision to leave the public clinic and focus exclusively on his NGO work with RATA, he went out of his way to explain that it had nothing to do with salaries, since both were essentially volunteer positions. Instead, he recalled the late night patient intake sessions with Dr. Aidarus:

When they arrived from their villages in the middle of the night with all of their troubles, we felt moved (*tergugah*) with pity. That's what I remember... They wouldn't tell us what happened right away. We focused on their symptoms. I would ask them about whatever harvest was in season in their villages and other small talk. We didn't really get into their stories, except for the patients who required counseling. There were a few of those.

Bachtiar told me he felt *tergugah* by all of his patients' troubles. The term has a multivalent sense that includes feeling emotionally moved or touched, but also physically awoken or struck, shaken with realization or awareness. Dr. Aidarus and Bachtiar's late night interactions with their patients were career-defining moments that persuaded Bachtiar to dedicate his work not to the government's public health service but the humanitarian nonprofit sector. And yet, Bachtiar reported to me that "we didn't really get into the stories," which I realize in retrospect was his tactic to avoid repeating them during our interview. When I gently pressed for additional information, Bachtiar resisted.<sup>74</sup> When I asked about RATA's tragic turning point, he lowered his voice and hurried through a fractured version of a consequential incident that Barter describes in his report:

RATA is unfortunately known for the tragedy which occurred on 6 December 2000; on this date, several of its staff members were executed. The lone survivor of this attack, Nazaruddin A. Gani, identified the four civilians and four officers who killed his colleagues... The assailants were jailed, but were allowed to escape by guards as the trial stalled, the case later falling apart. As a result, RATA closed for several months and several employees left the group; this experience

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<sup>74</sup> Bachtiar (not his real name) told me as we left the hotel to have dinner with friends: "I'm still afraid to talk about those days [under martial law], especially with the current situation." He was referring to the current electoral crisis and the recent killings of Javanese transmigrant laborers. As I turned off the digital recorder, Bachtiar asked me twice to make sure that we did not bring up this subject of conversation while we were out in public spaces with our friends. I decided to change his name and remove more specific details of his story out of respect for these concerns despite the key role Bachtiar has played throughout my work in Aceh.

showed the necessity of traveling with international partners. Nazaruddin was later granted asylum by the United States (ibid.142).<sup>75</sup>

The RATA incident garnered enough international attention that Peace Brigades International (PBI), a non-partisan human rights defender organization, dispatched a team of volunteers to Aceh. PBI volunteers accompany members of local human rights organizations facing violent threats without getting involved in the details of their work. Their very presence as international witnesses, in theory, deters perpetrators of violence who threaten their work. PBI volunteers accompanied staff from RATA and other local NGOs until the declaration of martial law in May 2003 forced them out of Aceh.

In the wake of their devastating loss, RATA was forced to reduce their mobility in heavy conflict areas. In 2001, Bachtiar reduced his involvement with RATA to a part-time commitment so that he could enroll in Muhammadiyah University's School of Public Health in Banda Aceh and pursue a college degree in occupational health. When martial law was declared, RATA's work effectively ended when Pak Nurdin was forced to seek asylum in Australia. Bachtiar found his safety on campus, completing his degree requirements just before the tsunami, but when the waves struck Aceh's coastline, Bachtiar lost his friend and mentor Dr. Aidarus. From his exile in Australia, Pak Nurdin compiled for *Inside Indonesia* magazine a collection of memorials written for five of Aceh's well-known civil society leaders that died in the tsunami, including his own tribute to Dr. Aidarus (Abdul Rahman 2005).

### **Bachtiar and RATA After the Tsunami**

I describe the reemergence of civil society in Aceh after the tsunami as a reconstitution because many of its dormant institutions and exiled leaders were still available for mobilization,

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<sup>75</sup> Barter notes in a footnote that Nazaruddin A. Gani testified before the Congressional Human Rights Caucus in the United States House of Representative on 23 July 2003.

albeit extremely weakened, when international humanitarian and donor agencies arrived on the scene en masse. The case of Bachtiar and RATA is again instructive. Bachtiar spent the emergency period working for UNDP as a field manager for clean-up crews. He befriended one of UNDP's local office managers whose English skills were good enough to write grant proposals that would raise money for RATA. Their projects were strictly oriented toward tsunami recovery efforts throughout 2005 to match donors' interests, subordinating their original mandate to assist victims of torture. But when Bachtiar's UNDP contract ended, he did not return to work for RATA even though he was living at RATA's newly reopened office in Banda Aceh. Instead, one of Bachtiar's old associates from PBI, now coordinating the UN Volunteers (UNV) program in Aceh, offered him a paid "volunteer" placement opportunity with either the International Organization for Migration (IOM) or the World Health Organization (WHO).<sup>76</sup> IOM's Migration Health Program Manager for Aceh recruited Bachtiar based on his impressive work experience with RATA during the conflict, and by the end of 2005 he was working with me full time to manage IOM and Harvard Medical School's psychosocial needs assessment in conflict-affected communities all across Aceh. When Bachtiar's six month UNV contract expired, his ex-PBI friend at UNV offered him an extension, but IOM hired him instead as one of its full time Migration Health Nurses, first assisting me with our ongoing research and analysis throughout 2006, and later moving to Bireuen where IOM implemented its mental health intervention from 2007 through 2009 based on our research findings (Good, Good, Grayman and Lakoma 2007; 2007; 2006; Grayman, Good and Good 2009). Bachtiar's salary

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<sup>76</sup> Although I never met this particular former PBI volunteer that helped arrange Bachtiar's UNV placement at IOM, I met at least three other former PBI volunteers that returned to Aceh with international agencies after the tsunami including Yoko Fujimura from Japan, who I introduced briefly in Chapter Four; Paul Zeccola, whose published academic work I cited in the Introduction and Chapter Four; and Lina Frödin, whose documentation work for AMM, the EU, and BRA I also cite in the Introduction. These expatriate humanitarians brought crucial historical background knowledge about Aceh based on their former work with PBI. As agents of recognition that were able to bridge both eras of Aceh's civil society activism, they also helped in the process of reconstitution that I write about in this chapter.

with UNDP and even the UNV program far exceeded the subsistence wages he once earned from RATA. Although I distinctly recall that Bachtiar's job security at IOM was far from certain when we first hired him, he took the risk to join us at IOM rather than extend his UNV contract because IOM offered him a salary more than twice as high. Bachtiar invested his earnings in a plot of land that he bought in Bireuen, and saved enough to get married in 2007.

Meanwhile RATA's founder, Pak Nurdin, after having given several international lectures on human rights issues in Aceh around the world during his exile, joined GAM's team of negotiators during the peace talks with the Indonesian government in Helsinki, Finland. With his fluency in English, and biography as a former political prisoner and RATA's founder, Pak Nurdin turned into an eloquent spokesperson for peace in Aceh, attending numerous conferences and giving lectures at the local, national, and international level.<sup>77</sup> Upon his return to Aceh, former GAM leaders recruited him to run for political office as the *bupati* (district head) of his home district Bireuen, and won easily, serving a five year term from 2007 until 2012. While in office Pak Nurdin was still technically the chairperson of RATA's board of directors, but he had very little involvement with the NGO he founded to avoid appearances of favoritism.

After RATA's initial round of tsunami-oriented programs, the organization returned to its original mandate, downsized and moved its base of operations from Banda Aceh to the former heartland of conflict violence and torture in Bireuen district. They entered into a collaborative applied research project with the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) and a team of Johns Hopkins University researchers, conducting a rigorous qualitative study of mental health needs, dysfunction and coping mechanisms of violence-affected populations in Bireuen (Poudyal et al. 2009). During a brief period of unemployment in late 2009 after IOM's mental

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<sup>77</sup> Pak Nurdin also attended a 2007 conference at Harvard University sponsored by the Asia Center and Harvard Medical School's Department of Social Medicine titled "The Peace Process in Aceh: The Reminders of Violence and the Future of Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam."

health project in Aceh ended, Bachtiar returned to RATA for a few months to help raise additional funds from a Korean donor to train rural Bireuen community leaders in conflict resolution skills and human rights awareness. RATA has also renewed its working relationship with ICRT, which now provides a baseline level of support for office operations and public awareness activities such as performances and art exhibits every 26 June, the UN's International Day in Support of Victims of Torture (Sultan 2012).<sup>78</sup>

My interview with Bachtiar in 2012 illustrates some of the tensions that the humanitarian encounter has left behind. After his brief period back with RATA in 2009, he explained that even though the Korean donor was interested in continuing its support for RATA's outreach program to community leaders in Bireuen, "the program was too small." Instead Bachtiar accepted a job with another international NGO, Handicap International, implementing their programs along Aceh's northeast coast. He was still working with Handicap in 2012, but looking ahead for new opportunities, anticipating the imminent end of Handicap's projects in Aceh at the end of the year. RATA has become Bachtiar's fallback option when all of his other more preferable options have been exhausted.

Bachtiar described one of RATA's recent projects with a sense of resigned but amused disapproval. RATA received funding from USAID's signature peace building program in Indonesia called Serasi. According to their website, Serasi "supports the peaceful, just equitable, and democratic evolution of communities across Indonesia. Serasi promotes community

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<sup>78</sup> The newspaper article cited here from atjehpost.com notes that Bireuen's public square was packed with spectators to watch the arts performances and other events organized by RATA and other NGOs on 26 June 2012, but regrets that none of the invited government officials attended. The snub reflects not just the traditional antagonism that has characterized the relationship between civil society NGOs and the Indonesian government, but also the attitude of Bireuen's current crop of political leaders (nearly all from Partai Aceh, i.e. ex-GAM) toward the issue of torture and other human rights abuses perpetrated against the civilians that they claimed to represent during the conflict.

solutions to issues in local governance, development, and access to services.”<sup>79</sup> The method by which Serasi achieves their goals is through small grants to local NGOs and other community institutions. No single grant from Serasi during its operation in Aceh exceeded USD\$100,000, so in order to achieve larger goals with tangible results for USAID, Serasi mobilized creative coalitions. RATA participated with five other local civil society organizations in Serasi’s Participatory Village Development Program for 138 villages in two conflict-affected sub-districts in North Aceh, including the restive Sawang sub-district described in Chapter Three. According to a Serasi flyer, the program provided “comprehensive, multi-sector assistance, linking communities and government to increase trust and create longer-term development opportunities.” Activities included “capacity building of village leaders, spatial planning initiatives, the settling of contested borders within and between villages, and the implementation of community-driven livelihoods, alternate education, and other social projects.”

Bachtiar’s description of the program was less flattering. RATA had the task of facilitating village communities to decide which village institutions or assets they wanted to revitalize, such as youth groups or soccer fields. “But,” he explained,

The administration of the program was divided, the advocacy component was given to another NGO, a research and evaluation component was given to another. When you have a bunch of NGOs involved in one area, new problems arise. The exchange of information was unclear, residents were confused by the coming and going of staff from different NGOs. When people asked one NGO staff person about aspects of the program handled by another NGO, they gave the wrong information and sent mixed messages, confusing expectations.

Bachtiar also told me two times quite frankly that RATA needed a lot of staff to implement the program, but he refused to participate because he did not want to work in Sawang even though it’s less than an hour away from his home in Bireuen. I could understand his reluctance to work in areas with a notorious history of kidnapping and extortion of NGO workers.

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<sup>79</sup> <http://www.serasi-ird.org/index.php/about> Accessed on 13 October 2012.



Bachtiar expressed two contrasting attitudes toward his work for RATA in the same interview that offer hints about the reconstitution of civil society in Aceh during and after the humanitarian encounter. First he described the innocent enthusiasm with which he embraced working for both RATA and the public clinic at the same time in 1999, when he earned less than subsistence wages and said he only needed enough money to cover the transportation costs between the clinic and the RATA office, because he “enjoyed it” so much. By 2012, Bachtiar had settled upon a pragmatic reluctance to work for RATA because the programs are too small, poorly managed, and inherently risky. His professional experience working for UNDP, UNV, IOM, and Handicap has left him with an orientation toward the international humanitarian organizations (and to be sure, their pay scales) that have mostly left Aceh by 2012. Meanwhile other international agencies such as USAID-Serasi and ICMC have subordinated RATA to the position of a local implementing partner that carries out their agenda instead of the vision that Pak Nurdin originally brought to the organization. RATA might benefit not only from Bachtiar’s professional development since the tsunami, but also Pak Nurdin’s since he fled to Australia in 2003.

It might be tempting to argue that humanitarian subjects like Bachtiar and Pak Nurdin have been abstracted out of their local civil society activist roots, that their roles have been distorted along with the local economy by the “mobile sovereign” forces of humanitarianism. But there are at least two pernicious implications in such a critique. First, it suggests that when the international NGOs leave Aceh, Bachtiar and Pak Nurdin are somehow overqualified and unfit to work among the remainders of Aceh’s civil society, as if an army of well-trained humanitarian subjects has been left behind with skill sets that far exceed Aceh’s pay grade. I do not underestimate the frustration that this situation poses for Bachtiar and others like him, but the

critique sounds like the human capital equivalent of the so-called “appropriate” and “sustainable” medical technologies discourse that Paul Farmer so passionately critiques because it denies the best treatments to the poor communities that need them the most (Farmer 1999:21). Second, it denies humanitarian subjects the creative agency to make do with the “distorted” remainders of Aceh’s civil society and become the agents of its reconstitution, for they will be in the best position to prevent organizations like RATA from simply becoming the passive handmaidens of donor agencies. But we are still left with the awkward and interesting contradiction that humanitarian subjects such as Bachtiar pose for the future of Aceh’s civil society, the kind of situation that the mobile sovereign distortion critique in its very dismissiveness also fails to acknowledge: Bachtiar has excellent qualifications, a commitment to public service, and no plans to leave Aceh, but he expresses reluctance to return to the local NGO that inspired him to join the nonprofit sector in the first place. In my two final profiles of humanitarian subjects that bring this chapter toward its end, I discuss some of the strategies that others have used to face and make sense of the challenges that face Aceh’s civil society sector during and after the humanitarian encounter.

### **Intan on the Dynamic Outside**

As office hours drew to a close, Intan and I settled into chairs on the second floor terrace in the quiet NGO home-office where she works on the western city limits of Banda Aceh. To the west, we had a magnificent view of the northern head of the Bukit Barisan mountain range that forms a spine down the entire length of Sumatra. The recording of our interview preserves the gentle sound of a rusted gate opening and closing with the afternoon breeze somewhere in the

neighborhood below us. As we talked, Intan spoke with a laid back and disarming honesty that made our interview especially rich and productive:

About a year ago, my father said to me, “Most of the NGOs have closed, Intan, why not try and join the civil service?” I answered, “How many times have I told you, Dad, that I can’t stand the civil service!” He didn’t object. After all it’s been eleven years since I first left home to go to college, so my family doesn’t question me too much anymore. He just wants to see me settled, with a decent salary. That’s all that matters.

Indeed since Intan graduated from a three-year diploma program in marketing at Syiah Kuala University just before the tsunami, Intan has been working for NGOs full time and running small street-side cafes with her friends in her spare time. Intan’s work history with NGOs and her strident refusal to join the civil service led me to ask how and why she decided to join the NGO world in the first place. She caught me off guard again with her utterly mundane but self-assured answer:

I can remember even when I was in junior high school that I always wanted a job where I can wear casual clothes, my Keds sneakers and blue jeans. I don’t know why I felt that way, maybe because I’ve seen my father wear a uniform to work his whole life, and I had to wear school uniforms all through elementary, junior high, and high school. That’s too long for one’s clothing to be arranged by others. Since junior high I wanted to protest the uniforms, and I always told my friends that no matter what the future holds I am going to work somewhere that I can be myself, with no one telling me to wear this or that.

Intan’s protest against others telling her what to wear extends to Aceh’s shariah laws that require women to keep their heads veiled and prohibit tight clothing, especially jeans.<sup>80</sup> At the office and out with her friends, Intan never wears the veil and always wears pants. She has managed to avoid arrest by Banda Aceh’s shariah police who frequently set up roadblock sweeping operations because, she says, “I have a community of friends who all refuse to obey the regulations, and we always text warnings to one another whenever the shariah police set up

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<sup>80</sup> West Aceh district, for example, has passed their own law prohibiting women from wearing jeans. Shariah police roadblocks in Banda Aceh stop women wearing pants on their motorbikes. I have documented this on my blog here: <http://jgrayman.wordpress.com/2010/05/09/razia-wh-20100504/>

another roadblock.” For unavoidable tricky situations or formal business at government offices or banks, Intan keeps a scarf in her bag.

But Intan’s protest against both state and religious fashion regulations, like her decision to work with NGOs, is not grounded upon an ideology of social justice, gender equality, or any of the other beliefs that stereotypically characterize the “Indonesian NGO worker” (Danusiri 2009). Instead, without naming it as such, Intan adheres to a kind of secular individualism. She just wants to work someplace where she can be herself, and the NGO world comfortably suits her. I asked her how a woman born and raised in Aceh reaches such a conclusion, and she credited “reading whatever I can find, especially on the Internet, *starting about six years ago*” (emphasis mine), and likened it to “opening a window” that has “broadened her insight” (*membuka wawasan*). Intan has concluded that “tradition is not really compulsory, but more about the power of suggestion.”

During our conversation, Intan did not make an explicit connection between her work in the NGO sector and her private process of demystifying Indonesia’s and Aceh’s compulsory state and religious traditions respectively, but she set up a strong argument for doing so when she dated the start of her personal growth to the same time when she started working at IOM. Also “about six years ago,” in August 2005 upon the signing of the peace agreement between GAM and the Indonesian government, Intan’s friends working at BRR told her that IOM was looking for volunteers to assist with the first release of amnestied prisoners immediately after the MoU. IOM sent her to work with the team in Bireuen, which had an enormous caseload of prisoners. The team worked into the night, past two o’clock in the morning; some of the other volunteers quit while working, “complaining this was nazi work.” The expatriate IOM manager overseeing the release apologized to the volunteers, explaining that IOM was still waiting for the signal from

Jakarta to move ahead with the registration. “But she promised us,” Intan recalled, “that if we had the passion to really work hard and get through this registration process, then she would recommend us for jobs at the ICRS offices that IOM was preparing to open all over Aceh.” Intan was hired to work at the ICRS office in the city of Langsa, covering the East Aceh and Tamiang districts, the northeast coast districts closest to the provincial border with North Sumatra. She worked for 18 months in Langsa as an Outreach Assistant, the same job that Fauzan, Diah, and Pak Zak (from the previous chapter) had in other ICRS offices around Aceh.

Jesse: What was your first impression when you started working at IOM?

Intan: Very exciting! Everyone was speaking English, we had to write our reports in English too. It was a shock to work in an office that had an organized system. IOM taught me so much about office procedures, field experience, project management, and so on. It was great.

Intan told vivid stories about her reluctance to speak Acehnese while meeting with ICRS beneficiaries in villages throughout East Aceh:

At first we used our boss’s theory, that we should speak Acehnese in the villages, to let the beneficiaries know that we speak their language. But during our monthly meetings in Banda Aceh, I spoke up. I said I don’t want to speak Acehnese in the villages anymore because if you’re trying to assess the number of conflict victims in the village, then everyone in the entire village is a victim. And when they find out we can speak Acehnese, the whole village attacks us with stories of their suffering and requests for help. So I decided not to speak Acehnese until we were in the homes of the selected beneficiaries, behind closed doors, when all the neighbors were out of the house. “Ah! So you *can* speak Acehnese!” [Intan exclaims, in Acehnese, quoting the grateful surprise of the ICRS clients.]

Every day we got back to Langsa after 9PM. The people in East Aceh, you know how they are, so very confrontational, very very confrontational! So when we came to a village and didn’t take the time to listen to someone’s story, they would yell at us: “This woman was really tortured, little girl! So listen to her!” It was always like this even though our job was to only find a few people whose names were given to us by East Aceh’s Department of Social Welfare.

J: If you knew who you were looking for, why did you have to speak to the whole community?

They came to us! They saw the NGO car, they want to know what’s going on, and the first thing they ask: “can you speak Acehnese?” So I had an agreement with the IOM drivers, to spread the word upon our arrival that I don’t speak Acehnese. They crowd in the front yards of the beneficiary homes, everyone comes! They bring the old guy in a wheelchair, the man walking hunched over with a cane. They ask “what can I get? what help is there for me?” They bring the torture victims, even the worst cases of sexual violence. Sometimes I couldn’t bear to look at them; we saw the most severe human rights violations in all of East Aceh.

J: What were your impressions as a city person? Was this your first time facing the remnants of this kind of conflict violence?

When I was growing up in Meulaboh [the district capital of West Aceh], we knew about a few people who were shot dead, about others who were raped, but we never had to face it directly. We knew there were human rights violations, but to meet a living witness, the ones who survived, it was [Intan makes a hissing sound for emphasis, and says in English] *very amazing*. Sometimes we can't face the saddest of the sad. But they showed it all to us. They showed us their bodies, "Look at this!" they would say. Torture everywhere.

After a brief phone call interruption, Intan told me the story of her most troublesome and stubborn client in East Aceh, when even Intan's driver feared for her safety, but her curiosity drove her to try and understand:

One of the ex-prisoners almost refused our assistance. I was talking to him at a coffee shop, explaining the benefits of our vocational assistance and training, and he turned on me in anger, then asked: "Do you want to come to my house?" My driver said "No Intan, don't go!" I talked it over with the driver, and we agreed that he would standby outside the house. This man's face was full of anger, and I wanted to know why, so I went to his house. He showed me his parents, severely injured from torture; his father's eyes were bashed in. All his sisters were raped; they are too afraid to even look at other people now. "This is what happened to my family!" he yelled at me, "how will ten million rupiah [roughly US\$1000] help me?" This was the worst I'd ever seen. I thought he refused our program because he was arrogant and cocky, but then I could understand how insulted he was. After what happened to his family, all we could offer was to build a small kiosk in front of his house! There was nothing we could give that would cover even just the medical bills for the rest of his family. After that, I didn't want to go into people's houses anymore.

I dwell at length upon Intan's experience working in East Aceh because her stories, and more importantly her reactions, closely match my own from the same time period (2006-07), when Bachtiar and I, with our teams of field researchers, conducted the psychosocial needs assessments in conflict areas such as East Aceh. We went into these communities with a desire to find out what happened there, and to help if only in the smallest and insignificant ways that IOM could provide. But after we faced the communities both in the public spaces of mosques or front yards and in the private spaces of people's homes, and after we learned the history, heard the personal stories, and saw the wounds, our impulse was to turn away. Intan stopped speaking Acehese. After the "saddest of the sad" encounters, she decided to avoid people's homes. To repeat a common theme of my fieldwork in Aceh that I first mentioned in Chapter Two, when I was all too willing to comply with my employer's suggested methodology for expatriate team

leaders to avoid direct engagement with informants while the team of local researchers do their fieldwork: we are deeply touched by our informants, but in a way that unavoidably leaves us touched away (Mrázek 2010:247). Practical considerations turn into justifications for avoidance.

### **Intan on the Recycling Inside**

I also emphasize Intan's visceral field experiences in East Aceh to set up a stark contrast with the next phase of her IOM career. After 18 months at the ICRS office in East Aceh, Intan requested a transfer from the field-based implementation of IOM's Post-Conflict Reintegration Program (PCRIP) to its office-based administration in Banda Aceh. At first I thought Intan wanted to continue her flight from difficult encounters with ICRS clients, but her reasons again were mundane: "I loved my job at ICRS in East Aceh, but I resigned because I felt all alone in Langsa. All my friends were in Banda Aceh." She also hoped to upgrade her three-year diploma to a four-year college degree with a few more semesters of study at Syiah Kuala University's extension program.<sup>81</sup>

With the benefit of hindsight, Intan acknowledges that switching from program implementation to administration was her biggest mistake. Her supervisors and friends at IOM all warned her against it. Her friend Tini distinguished between support and project staff: "Tini told me that if I switch to support, then I'll be stuck *recycling* there forever."<sup>82</sup> From one job to the next, she predicted I will only get support staff positions. But if I stick with the project staff, there is a lot of room for professional growth." Intan readily admits she was stubborn: "honestly, I just did what I wanted to do, and not what was best for my future. My friends

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<sup>81</sup> As an aside, Intan was unable to finish her degree because the extension program, held on weekends, closed. Intan explained that all lecturers at Syiah Kuala were making so much money working as consultants for NGOs in their spare time that the school could not mobilize enough of their teaching staff to keep running the program.

<sup>82</sup> Intan uses the English word "recycling," which I find relevant to the discussion that follows.

warned me, but I didn't listen, and Tini was right." Ever since Intan moved back to Banda Aceh, she has only held office-based administration and finance positions in the NGO sector. But even before she could see that Tini's prediction would come true, Intan's move to support and administration, to "the inside" of IOM as she called it, had negative short-term consequences as well:

In the end I discovered that IOM has a disease called "*under pressure*" [laughing], mainly for the support staff.<sup>83</sup> The work was incredibly stressful. I realized too late that my only problem in Langsa was boredom with living there all by myself but I hardly had any problems with work. Here in Banda Aceh, however, the problems at work were extraordinarily high stress. Very very stressful at IOM. Our work tended to trigger conflicts among us internal staff, between us, only amongst ourselves, because we don't know people on the outside. Maybe I was meant to work on the outside, like with our *beneficiaries*, for example. What Tini said was correct, I've just been *recycling* through support positions, and always will. Wherever I *apply*, that will always be my position.<sup>84</sup>

Intan resigned from IOM in July 2008. She dropped hints about an incident between herself and one of her colleagues on the inside that triggered her departure, but then insisted that her contract was finished, and she simply could not stand working "under pressure," the condition she likened to a disease. Intan then performed a sassy and unflattering imitation of a stereotypically aggressive Acehnese woman with a sharp, high-pitch voice to depict the sentiment from her co-workers upon her departure from IOM: "WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?" "They think I can't possibly find another job with a salary as good as IOM offered," Intan explained. The sentiment echoes the comments Geumala heard when she left her job at the World Bank: "Once you leave the Bank, you are nobody."

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<sup>83</sup> Words in *italics* in this block quote were spoken by Intan in English.

<sup>84</sup> The emphasis of her words in Bahasa Indonesia, repeating obsessively the difference between an "internal" that can only recycle and a more dynamic "external" is what struck me most about this interview. Here is an excerpt from this block quote, as I transcribed it from the recording: "*jadi pekerjaan yang lebih cenderung konfliknya antara kita internal staff gitu, kita ke kita, kita ke kita, karena kita nggak tahu orang di luar. kalau kita orang diluar kayak kita sama beneficiaries mungkin memang disitu jiwanya tapi, kayak bilang sama Tini benar itu. Intan udah di recycle support akan seperti itu, apply dimana aja akan terus posisinya, jadi lama-lama memang posisi kayak gini...*"



Intan's contrasting descriptions of her work on the outside versus the inside of IOM takes us back to my description of IOM's email network in Chapter One. The staff on the inside of IOM are the people whose jobs require the endless reproduction and circulation, or, to use Intan's word "recycling," of formulaic emails and their attached template-ready documents, sent with a carbon copy to everyone. This is Riles' definition of the closed network, as endlessly reproductive of itself on the inside as it is productive of nothing on the outside, a structure that is all form without meaningful content (Riles 2000:3). Intan captures the sense of entrapment that she felt with her repetitive emphasis on the inside, to the exclusion of the outside, with language such as "us internal staff, between us, only amongst ourselves, because we don't know people on the outside." From the outsider's perspective, recall from Chapter One as well the manager who thought that the biggest barrier to project implementation was not extortion threats from ex-combatants or the corruption in local government, but rather IOM itself, whose internal administrative operations he likened to an energy-absorbing black hole. For my part, I found it touching that after all of the harrowing tales Intan described from East Aceh, she wishes she had stayed there instead of letting herself get drawn into IOM's administrative apparatus.

### **Reza and the Tikar Pandan Community**

The last interview of my January 2012 reunion tour in Aceh, just hours before I caught a flight back to Jakarta (and then two days later to the United States), was with Reza Idria, the author of "Tale From a Coffee Shop," the essay I summarized in this chapter's Introduction. Appropriately, we met in Banda Aceh's most famous coffee shop, Solong, in the Ulee Kareng neighborhood. Solong has a geography of seating that is easy to grasp after a few visits. Newcomers, officials, older men, and formal groups typically sit in the front hall with the marble

table tops. Large groups of friends, students, and academics enjoy sitting in the back room, which opens up into a backyard where all the NGO activists sit near the parking lot. Upon arrival at Solong with my friends Mercedes and Dafi, we made a beeline straight through the front hall past the back room and into the backyard. We knew where to find Reza.

In 2002 when he was a college student at Aceh's State Islamic University, Reza co-founded the Tikar Pandan Community with a small group of like-minded students from other schools. Tikar Pandan translated in English is a plaited or woven mat made with dried pandanus leaves, a common and multipurpose handicraft in Aceh used in households, mosques, and other communal spaces for sitting, sleeping, or prayer. When guests arrive, hosts open up their *tikar* for their guests to sit. As a name for their organization, the image of the *tikar* has appeal as a symbol of rural Aceh's tradition, simplicity, utility, and hospitality. At a time when dozens of newly established civil society organizations with an orientation toward human rights, humanitarianism, and referendum activism were increasingly under threat of closure and violence, Reza and his friends decided that the safest way to launch a protest against the political violence in Aceh as the conflict raged on was through an idiom of cultural critique. One of their achievements *before* the humanitarian encounter was the publication in 2004 of Tikar Pandan co-founder Azhari's award winning anthology of short stories set in Aceh titled *Perempuan Pala* (Nutmeg Woman), which features one eerily prophetic and abstract piece titled "*Air Raya*" (The Great Water) about the impending arrival of Noah's flood that portends the separation of a husband from his wife (Azhari 2004).

As noted earlier in this chapter and in Chapter Four, the Indonesian state has for generations developed a discourse on culture that neutralizes regional, ethnic, or religious identities into sets of subordinated and fixed traditions, manipulable signs that can be mobilized

and quoted on an as needed basis without threatening the state as the sole and authoritative source of recognition. In this way the Tikar Pandan Community, as a self-declared culture organization, does not appear to threaten established order, but anyone who reads Tikar Pandan's vision and mission statements on their website will detect the traces of Antonio Gramsci and other cultural critics on their philosophy: to generate critical awareness among the Acehese people about cultural hegemony and structural oppression; and to create, with support from Aceh's civil society, an emancipatory culture in Aceh based on principles of social justice.<sup>85</sup> In short, an ethos of cultural resistance permeates through all of Tikar Pandan's activities and publications, to draw attention to everyday and taken-for-granted forms of cultural hegemony in Aceh. "Tale From a Coffee Shop" exemplifies the Tikar Pandan Community ethos by relating the militaristic oppression of the conflict era ("with chests pounding, [we] would watch army trucks pass by") to the oligarchic oppression of the humanitarian era ("now we admire the luxury cars") from the perspective of coffee shop patrons who are left paralyzed by the scenes that pass before them.

### **Dôkarim and The Song of the Dutch War**

The figure who inspires and symbolizes the Tikar Pandan Community's ethos of resistance is the late 19<sup>th</sup> century bard poet Abdul Karim, popularly remembered as Dôkarim, the illiterate composer of the epic poem *Hikayat Prang Gompeuni*, The Song of the Dutch War. What little we know about Dôkarim comes from Snouck Hurgronje's colonial ethnology reports, researched and written with the goal of helping the Dutch pacify Aceh. Hurgronje records that Dôkarim made his living performing The Song of the Dutch War, which glorifies the great deeds

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<sup>85</sup> <http://www.tikarpandan.org>, accessed on 17 October 2012.

of Acehese warriors, especially the famous resistance leader (and national hero) Teuku Umar.<sup>86</sup> Dôkarim's performances were always flexible and subject to constant revision, tailored for his audiences in every situation, not least because the war was ongoing as he traveled the countryside singing his songs. Even Hurgronje acknowledges that "the events of which [Dôkarim] sings have not yet reached their final development, so he keeps on adding, as occasion arises, fresh episodes to his poem" (Hurgronje 1906:101). Nevertheless Hurgronje captured one version of Dôkarim's poem when he commissioned a transcription of all 3128 verses, noting that "until I had it taken down from the poet's lips, there was not a single copy extant in writing" (ibid.101).

Epic poetry throughout the Malay world often features the poet himself as a character within his poem who not only introduces the story but interrupts the story as well to comment upon it or summarize lessons for the audience, all within the proscribed metrical conventions of the epic poetic genre. In the Introduction to *The Song of the Dutch War*, Dôkarim begins by describing the king's prophetic dream and its apocalyptic interpretation by his scholars, an opening scene that borrows directly from an earlier epic poem, the *Hikayat Pocut Muhamat* (Siegel 1979; Wieringa 1998:302). After 26 verses about the king's prophetic dream, Dôkarim abruptly announces that he is changing the subject, "Praise and glory be unto God. Now I am going to tell a story about the Holy War" (ibid.303). But before he begins telling stories about the Dutch War, he inserts a sermon of his own. He exhorts his audience to join in the holy war against the Dutch with visions of paradise for martyrs and hell fires for those who do not heed the warning foretold in the king's dream. He ends with a final warning: "Please listen, dear younger brothers, they will put chains to your thighs. / Perhaps, just like that, without reason,

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<sup>86</sup> See the Indonesian Ministry of Social Affairs registry of national heroes: "*Daftar Nama Pahlawan Nasional Republic Indonesia*" at <http://www.kemsos.go.id/modules.php?name=Pahlawan&opsi=mulai-1>, accessed on 18 October 2012

they will bring you all to Batavia,” then explicitly signals the end of the Introduction in order to talk about himself:

Now the Introduction is finished. / Others are absorbed in their military operations, but I, I only compose verses, one line at a time. / I compose verses in my heart. For five years I have been forever busy thinking them out. / One night I was not able to catch any sleep, I intended to recite a story. / The name of my village is the VI Mukims, Teungku Dôkarim is from Keutapang Dua (ibid.298-300, 307)

Dôkarim earned his reputation for hailing the heroic deeds of the rebel leader Teuku Umar, who was one of Dôkarim’s most generous patrons, but in the end it was also Teuku Umar who ordered Dôkarim’s execution in September 1897 on the grounds that Dôkarim had acted as a guide to Dutch troops. Teuku Umar’s betrayal is especially unsettling because he himself had pretended to “defect” to the Dutch two times as a means of learning more about them behind enemy lines (in a way the inverse of Hurgronje’s work), but he did not extend the same strategic motive to his poet, who never had the opportunity to “finish” his epic (Hurgronje 1906:102; Wieringa 1998:299). I focus on the Introduction to Dôkarim’s only extant version of his poetry in order to establish some of the flexible conventions of Malay authorship and citational practices (from the perspective of modern Western conventions), which in my reading below has been a source of playful inspiration for Reza and the Tikar Pandan Community. Dôkarim’s fate at the hands of his hero and benefactor also provides Tikar Pandan with a cautionary parable that guides its ambivalent attitude toward political alliances with figures in government and other civil society organizations.

### **The Tikar Pandan Culture League and/is Reza and/is Dôkarim**

Dôkarim has literally become the iconic face of the Tikar Pandan Community. Reza scanned Dôkarim’s 19<sup>th</sup> century portrait photo from Hurgronje’s book, cropped a circle around his magnified grainy face, and turned it into Tikar Pandan’s logo in both standard and playful

contexts. Azhari and Reza took strategic advantage of Aceh's humanitarian encounter to seek donor support and develop their small community into a more widespread Tikar Pandan Culture League. Reza used the word "cells" to describe their approach to this league of organizations:

We asked, and tried to imagine, how do we build a cultural movement? We found it difficult to find other people that understand our ideas about cultural emancipation. So we split up into cells. We have a writing school. We opened a book store. We started a journal. Each has their own name, their own organization, and their own projects. It looks like a large league, but we are only two people! [laughs] It's a deliberate strategy. Are we cultural critics, writers, activists, poets, teachers, artists...? You can't figure us out.

Reza exaggerates only a little; an examination of each cell reveals that the same three or four names appear repeatedly on each organization's masthead. They assigned Dôkarim's name to their first cell, the Dôkarim Writing School. In a subsequent email exchange with Reza, I asked him why:

We chose Dôkarim as the name for our creative writing school because his name is easy to remember and his role during the colonial war still needs more exploration. Dôkarim is a representative figure that supports our goal of combining writing and traditional storytelling as the basis of our writing school's curriculum. It followed that we then gave the same name to our bookstore: Dôkarim Book Store.

The Tikar Pandan Culture League started the *Jurnal Kebudayaan Gelombang Baru* (New Wave Culture Journal). They opened a multi-purpose space in the Ulee Kareng neighborhood called Episentrum that has been used for film series, art shows, performances, book readings, lectures and discussions. The Metamorfoza Institute is a research organization that focuses on social, cultural, and political issues. Results from Metamorfoza's research serve as a source of information and inspiration for Tikar Pandan's other cells, including contributions to the New Wave Culture Journal. Tikar Pandan also started a publishing house, Aneuk Mulieng Publishing. The proceeds from the Dôkarim Book Store and Aneuk Mulieng Publishing support the league's other activities. In June 2011, the Tikar Pandan Cultural League added another cell into its network, a Peace and Human Rights Museum that documents the abuses perpetrated against

civilians during the conflict.<sup>87</sup> Tikar Pandan activists opened the museum (Reza is the museum's director) without any support from the national or provincial government, and its very existence has served as a public rebuke against both the government's and ex-GAM's refusal to honor the provisions for a truth and reconciliation commission that were stipulated in the peace agreement.

As the Tikar Pandan Culture League has grown, the figure of Dôkarim has assumed the status of a myth. Beyond the writing school and book store, Reza and his friends "have produced a lot of slogans and pamphlets using his name, and of course some people believe that the words really came from Dôkarim. One might say that we created a myth about Dôkarim for our own purposes, however it works." I asked Reza to clarify what it means to create a myth about Dôkarim for their own purposes. Was Reza saying that he essentially invented the epigram that he attributes to Dôkarim ("These are bad times for the mind and the imagination, / So we build our own stories") at the beginning of "Tale From a Coffee Shop"?

Haha yes Jesse, I (and we) were making it up and attributing it to Dôkarim. We have nothing to read of his work except a few sections of his Song of the Dutch War. We (especially me and [one other member of Tikar Pandan]) have created a lot of advertisements that we place in newspapers and billboards to introduce our book store and the writing school. We use old Indonesian spelling (*ejaan lama*) and look for words in old Malay to give our Dôkarim quotes the appearance of authenticity.

Another way that we have developed the Dôkarim myth is through UN-DOC. Look at my pictures on facebook from the first year anniversary of the Human Rights Museum. You will find Dôkarim's face in front of the podium where I gave my speech. If one does not pay close attention, it looks like any of the UN logos, but it is actually our own Dôkarim logo that we called UN-DOC, the United Nothing for Dôkarim Committee. It's our satire about the presence of the UN organizations in Aceh after the tsunami and everyone seemed to be in love with working for the UN, because it pays a high salary and confers prestige (*gengsi*), therefore we mock these people with UN-DOC in our presence.

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<sup>87</sup> <http://museumhamaceh.org/> (accessed 18 October 2012)

**Image 5.1: Dôkarim is the Iconic and Playful Face of the Tikar Pandan Culture League**



**Caption: The Director of the Tikar Pandan Culture League’s Peace and Human Rights Museum, Reza Idria, speaks at an event celebrating the museum’s first year anniversary. Dôkarim’s face adorns a logo for a fake United Nations member organization: UN-DÔC, the United Nothing for Dôkarim Committee.**

The real Dôkarim liberally quoted from the *Hikayat Pocut Muhamat* in his Introduction to the Song of the Dutch War partly to establish his lineage among Aceh’s epic bard poets that preceded him; Dôkarim establishes, so to speak, his inheritance of a poetic license. To my surprise and delight, I discovered that the Tikar Pandan Culture League has taken, in turn, poetic license with Dôkarim’s literary legacy as well, creating supplementary Dôkarim myths that suit their own purposes.



The Tikar Pandan Culture League does not categorically oppose the presence of international humanitarian organizations in Aceh. The league has been the recipient of generous funding from international donors such as The Asia Foundation, the Netherlands Embassy, The Japan Foundation, and the European Commission, among others. Rather, they critique the inequalities that the humanitarian encounter has produced in Aceh, the misallocations and questionable priorities of reconstruction budgets, the pseudo-veneer of community participation in reconstruction projects, and the outright corruption that siphons so much aid money away from its intended targets. For this, Tikar Pandan reserves their harshest critique for BRR, whose outsized staff salaries made Todhak so bitter in Reza's "Tale From a Coffee Shop" that he was compelled to add more and more sugar to his coffee. In March 2009, the Tikar Pandan Culture League issued a sharply worded and sarcastic "Manifesto of Great Sadness" directed at Aceh's civil society organizations that joined together to give Kuntoro, the Minister of BRR, a gift as a symbol of gratitude for his patronage.<sup>88</sup>

In response to the giving of gifts from a number of Aceh's civil society organizations to Master [Tuan] Kuntoro and his [BRR] Empire, The Tikar Pandan Aceh Community Culture League hereby declares:

1. That the Tikar Pandan Community Culture League is not included in such an alliance!
2. That the Tikar Pandan Community Culture League will never regard the BRR Empire as valuable for Aceh's tsunami victims, much less give those gangsters an award!
3. That the Tikar Pandan Community Culture League is *the only formal institution* that has refused offers to receive assistance and has never been included in a list of *beneficiaries of assistance* from the Cultural Affairs Deputy or any of the other deputies within BRR since its beginning and until its end.

Ulee Kareng, 24 March 2009 (emphasis theirs)

In Chapter Four I argued that some people involved in Aceh's humanitarian encounter discovered a source of recognition in the external agents of humanitarianism. At the beginning of this chapter, I showed how certain key players in Aceh, the so-called champions, played the

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<sup>88</sup> Kuntoro, a close associate of President Yudhoyono, was appointed as the Minister of BRR for its entire duration from 2005 until 2009.

role of double agent, capable of recognizing victims of natural and man-made disasters in Aceh as both humanitarian victims and, over time, as national subjects once again. The Tikar Pandan Culture League refuses all of the above. The structure of their organization, “split up into cells,” and their recourse to Dôkarim as an ambiguous and cautionary authorizing figure who substitutes for the UN, the iconic institution of international humanitarian assistance, all appear to me as an attempt to reconstitute Aceh’s civil society while also refusing—to the extent that they are able—the concomitant impulse to reassert hierarchy in the wake of Aceh’s “democratic catastrophe.”

## **Conclusion**

In this last substantive chapter of my dissertation I have sketched an arc of outcomes from Aceh’s humanitarian encounter based upon my interviews and recollections with a group of informants who have been active participants in Aceh’s civil society. I started with the ideas developed in Chapter Four based on Siegel’s definition of recognition and its application to the humanitarian setting in Aceh. Recognition necessarily embraces an impulse toward hierarchy given its reliance upon an external authority as recognition’s agent. Out of Aceh’s democratic catastrophe a space was opened for the entry of new, if temporary, international humanitarian agents of recognition. The rush and urgency of the humanitarian imperative brings with it what Fassin calls a “humanitarian politics of life,” a system of values that sides with the destitute victims in a humanitarian crisis but nevertheless includes a complex ontology of inequality, or in other words an impulse toward another kind of hierarchy. I relate Siegel’s idea of recognition to Fassin’s distinction between those who are subjects that testify on behalf of the victims of Aceh’s humanitarian crises, and the victims who can only exist as objects. My informants in this

chapter are humanitarian subjects who told me about their encounters with humanitarianism, and with their stories I have tried to tease out how their encounters have had reconstitutive effects on Aceh's civil society.

At one end of the spectrum of outcomes we have humanitarian subjects that I have labeled champions. Donors seek people like Geumala and Azwar not just because they have passion to support civil society, but also because they have a learned, characteristically Indonesian, capacity to creatively leverage their social networks and personal identities in ways that secure desirable outcomes for all stakeholders. Not least among these stakeholders is the Indonesian government, which has clearly found its way, over time, to reassert its authority in Aceh. The government achieved this first through the establishment of BRR, a ministerial agency that served as the clearinghouse for all international assistance in Aceh; second with a negotiated settlement to the conflict with GAM; third with the formal co-optation of key GAM figures into the organs of state through high ranking appointments at BRR and then local elections; fourth with the informal co-optation of GAM leaders and their former combatants into a "patrimonial peace" based on the patron-client distribution of post-tsunami and post-conflict reconstruction funds, absorbed and reintegrated into the predatory and thoroughly Indonesian political economy; and fifth, as I will describe in this dissertation's Conclusion, with an increasingly stable alliance between former foes at the highest levels between TNI generals and GAM's most influential leaders. Left out of this list of achievements that signal Aceh's reintegration with Indonesia is Aceh's civil society, and this is where the charismatic champions and their constituents that work in Aceh's nonprofit sector play their comparatively smaller role, doing their part to bring Aceh back under the sign of Indonesia.

At the other end of the spectrum of outcomes we have humanitarian subjects that commit themselves to efforts that expose and disrupt hierarchy. For the Tikar Pandan Culture League, the ambiguous and playful figure of Dôkarim serves as an alternative and cautionary source of recognition, a commitment to Aceh's people and cultural traditions instead of Aceh's traitorous leaders. Whether we talk about the historic figure of Teuku Umar who executed Dôkarim, or Aceh's current ex-GAM leadership who have consistently rejected the participation of Aceh's civil society during the transition to peace, Aceh's poets and the rest of its civil society must be wary of their leaders who alternately collaborate with or rebel against external authorities, and who exercise their authority at whim to alternately co-opt or sell-out their constituents.

Tikar Pandan's critical wariness toward these figures of authority has resulted in an organizational structure—a "rhizomatic" league of cells—that partially evades recognition by Aceh's authoritative agents that would reintroduce hierarchy, whether it be the UN, BRR, or GAM ("You can't figure us out."). The rhizome model, as defined by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, resists hierarchical organizational structures (using arboreal root-tree systems as the contrasting model), features multiple points of entry and exit into the system that may connect with any other point, survives points of rupture, defies meaningful enumeration or chronology, and tactically adapts to the fixed arboreal systems that structure its environment (Deleuze and Guattari 2004:3-28; Muehlmann 2012). The surrounding presence of hierarchical structures is an important point that suggests Tikar Pandan could not possibly proliferate its cells indefinitely in all directions, which is another way of saying that there are severe limits on their capacity to ever realize an emancipatory culture for Aceh. The historical context of human rights abuses perpetrated by GAM and Indonesian security forces, and their subsequent refusal to address this past, for example, imposes a set of limits that in turn compels Tikar Pandan to establish a Peace

and Human Rights Museum. The massive influx of international donors as Aceh's humanitarian encounter commenced enabled the expansion of Tikar Pandan's league of culture cells, helping to amplify and strengthen the reach of their cultural critique. A partial dependence on donor support, and an organizational structure that still requires the champion-like, charismatic figures of Reza and Azhari to direct the rhizomatic growth of Tikar Pandan's cells, underscores for me the obvious point that their vision of cultural emancipation serves as an ideological reference point rather than an actual achievable goal.

In between these two models that imagine the reconstitution of Aceh's civil society, we are left with harder to place figures such as Bachtiar and Intan. At the very least, what unites them with the other humanitarian subjects I have described in this chapter is the power of narration, the ability to speak, sometimes reluctantly, in an alliance with and on behalf of Aceh's victims, but also apart from them. In many ways I think my informants in this and the previous chapter (with the important and deliberate exception of Junaid in Chapter Four) have more in common with me than the humanitarian victims on whose behalf we all worked for so many years. Each interview features an educated and collaborative social analysis of its own; their ideas have informed mine. Some of my informants have read the sections of these chapters I wrote about them and offered feedback.

Intan's self-taught secular individualism coincides with her "very exciting" and career-defining entry into the NGO world when she started working for IOM's post-conflict reintegration program. The trajectory of her professional development begins on the project implementation side of the program, wide open with possibilities but fraught with her troubling confrontations with "the saddest of the sad" conflict victims in East Aceh, on the outside of IOM. As Intan pulled away from the program beneficiaries by reducing her use of Acehnese language

and staying away from their homes, to what extent did the values of an international organization like IOM such as those I described in Chapter One—the acquisition of generic civility and the cultivation of public and private reflexivity, in service of IOM’s ideal state of smooth efficiency and maximal communication—continue to facilitate Intan’s awakening? To what extent did those values lead her to a sense of entrapment in a figurative “Inbox” when she found herself on the inside of IOM? What never failed to surprise me during my interview with Intan was her non-ideological commitment to her work within the nonprofit sector and civil society. The pleasure of learning that the civil society sector has proven to be a setting where Intan can do what she wants to do, and wear what she wants to wear, is the recurrent theme that propels her story forward, even when she is “under pressure.”

I end here with a reflection on Bachtiar’s dilemma. In 2012, he remains committed to the work of supporting Aceh’s public and mental health issues through the civil society sector, but in the wake of his humanitarian encounter, after working for so many years with UNDP, UNV, IOM and Handicap International, he expresses reluctance to return to the local NGO that inspired him to join the nonprofit sector in the first place. Bachtiar’s situation is hardly unique. In their study of a frequently overlooked group within Aceh’s civil society sector, the labor movement, Michele Ford and Thushara Dibley summarize a general condition that characterizes Bachtiar’s particular dilemma:

Civil society is seen by donors as being driven and shaped by a particular value system that prioritises issues of social justice and equality above self-interest, and international development organisations explicitly seek to support or create local groups that share these qualities. Research has shown, however, that the ways in which international development organisations implement their programs tend to encourage a different set of values in their partner organisations. International support often comes in the form of funding that is dispensed for short-term projects through complex application processes, with strict criteria about how it can be spent. The timeframe for project completion can range from a few weeks to a few years, which allows insufficient time to achieve the kind of change that these projects aim to promote... Attempts to create a sense of shared identity and common purpose can be undermined when donors distribute large sums of money in the form of salaries, honoraria or in-kind resources, creating competition

or diverting valuable human resources from other parts of civil society (Ford and Dibley 2011:474, 481).

In Ford and Dibley's summary of the problem, I read traces of Intan and Bachtiar's experiences working at IOM. In their diagnosis, I read traces of the values that guide Reza's and Tikar Pandan's strident critique against BRR and indiscriminate international donors. It takes a rare champion to negotiate the complex contradictions that the humanitarian encounter has left behind in Aceh.

# Conclusion

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## 9 April 2009: Election Day in Aceh

Two years and five months after the momentous evening at the Swisbel Hotel in Banda Aceh when Irwandi Yusuf defied all conventional political wisdom to win the first democratically held governor’s election, I found myself far more actively engaged in Aceh’s next electoral event. Together with Eunsook Jung, a fellow PhD student who also writes about Indonesian politics and civil society, I spent the morning of 9 April 2009 touring the voting stations around the rural sub-district of Jangka in Bireuen as one of The Carter Center’s (TCC) Long Term Observers for their Indonesia election monitoring mission. These were the first



legislative elections featuring local political parties in Aceh, one of GAM's signature achievements in the Helsinki MoU, the first of its kind in Indonesia. Six local parties successfully passed the verification process by Aceh's Independent Elections Commission, the most notable among them being *Partai Aceh*, the Aceh Party (PA), the new vehicle for GAM's political aspirations within the framework of the unitary state of Indonesia. The discussion this year was not whether PA would win, but by how much and how fairly.

We arrived mid-morning in Lueng village, where the crowded voting station in the front yard of the village mosque was surrounded everywhere with the red, white, and black colors of PA's flag. Next to a flag pole freshly painted with red, white, and black stripes we saw graffiti on the walls of a guard shelter just outside of the mosque that read, "Don't make the wrong choice!" with the number 39 beneath it (PA's number on the ballot) and a check mark painted next to it. The elderly head of the village's election committee greeted us warmly, thrilled and overjoyed that an international audience could join him as a witness to history in the making. "This is the very first democratic election in Lueng..." he told us with the authority of someone who has lived through decades of manipulated election results delivered by the Indonesian military (TNI) to suit elite political interests in Banda Aceh and Jakarta. Without a hint of irony, he completed his beaming announcement: "...and we are going to deliver 100% of our votes to *Partai Aceh!*" Eunsook and I kept outside of the open-air voting station, as stipulated by the guidelines for all election observers. We met the hired observers from other political parties who sat silently in a row on the mosque terrace, and all of us could see the "assistants" without election committee badges inside the voting area who escorted each voter to the row of booths, opened up the ballots for them, and showed them how and where to place their check marks.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> There were four ballots. One for Bireuen's district-level assembly (DPRD), a second for Aceh's provincial assembly (DPRA), a third for Indonesia's national assembly (DPR-RI), and a fourth for Indonesia's regional

**Images 6.1 & 6.2: Unofficial Election “Assistants”**



**Caption: “Assistants” without election committee badges, who escorted voters to the row of booths and show them how and where to vote were seen at voting booths all over former GAM stronghold areas across Aceh. Image 6.1 (left) was widely circulated by SIRA Party activists. Image 6.2 (right) is my own from Lueng in Jangka sub-district, Bireuen.**

In our follow-up interviews during the days and weeks after 9 April, all major stakeholders echoed the prevailing media message that described the elections, vote count, and recapitulation of results as “secure and smooth” (*aman dan lancar*). Conspicuously absent from the reportage and our informants’ debriefings were the other two criteria that Indonesian election officials ideally use to determine their success: “honest and fair” (*jujur dan adil*). Nevertheless with only a few exceptions, “secure and smooth” were apparently enough to keep the peace throughout Aceh on election day and afterward. Observers during the campaign season in advance of the elections could hardly have guaranteed the peaceful outcome considering the extraordinary levels of intimidation, political violence, and tension between PA, the other political parties both national and local, and especially the Indonesian military (TNI) (International Crisis Group 2009, see also Figure 2 in the dissertation Introduction; 2008).

We collected information on these problems as we traveled across Aceh’s northeast coast in advance of the elections, meeting with election officials, party leaders, civil society activists,

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assembly (DPD, akin to a senate). Aceh’s six local parties and all 38 national parties appeared on the DPRD and DPRA ballots, while only national parties appeared on the DPR-RI ballot. The DPD ballot featured individual candidates with their party affiliations.

police and TNI officers, and even foreign diplomats who were traveling around to observe as well but wanted to solicit our “long term observer” perspectives. In keeping with the humanitarian remote fieldwork practices that I have described in this dissertation, we hardly ever met with ordinary voters apart from a few on election day, and even those interactions were heavily mediated and surveilled. But as we moved from one town to the next, our contact information traveled through election stakeholder networks, and we soon found it difficult to accommodate, much less sort out and make sense of the barrage of data that people sent us by text message, frequently from unknown phone numbers without sender introductions. A few examples set up the epistemic murk that prevailed until election day:

On Tuesday night at around 1:30AM, six officers from the TNI base (*koramil*) arrived on three motorbikes, carrying three firearms. Then they told us “Do not vote for Aceh. If you vote for Aceh it means you’re inviting war with me.”

[Message sent to a local party candidate, not PA, forwarded to us:] *Teungku*, do not return so frequently to your home. When you return home, you’ll be shot dead immediately. This is valid information. We have the weapons near Simpang Mamplam.

At around 1:30AM, on 25 March 2009, the home of Rizal Fahlevi, a PA legislative candidate in the Lampahan Market area in Timang Gajah sub-district, Bener Meriah district, was hit with a grenade by an unknown perpetrator, a peace spoiler.

Good evening, we from the ATJEH community, are very fearful of the TNI and the POLICE who have been roaming about ATJEH.<sup>90</sup> At night, they are everywhere like the owls, but in the daytime they do not appear. We ask that you will publicize this information in the international news, that the people of ATJEH are afraid of the TNI and the POLICE. If possible, please do not share my phone number with anyone. Thank you.

[In English:] Good morning Miss Jesse. I am Sabela, a former political prisoner in Aceh and also the youngest senator candidate from Aceh to the Jakarta parliament. I live in Aceh Tamiang. I got your mobile phone number from the Head of the Independent Election Commission in Langsa. I invite you to observe the election process in my village, Suka Jadi in Karang Baru sub-district.

[Sent to the Head of the Bener Meriah Independent Election Commission, forwarded to us:] You can send our brother to jail, but I will send you, Commissioner, TO THE GATES OF HELL. Go ahead, enjoy your life with your wife and children, only a few more moments remain.

The Tamiang police chief and his men have surrounded the home of the district head of *Partai Aceh*, and we don’t know why. The intimidation here is severe. Please investigate and respond.

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<sup>90</sup> The sender uses *Atjeh*, an earlier (Dutch) spelling of Aceh, sometimes used by independence activists, though GAM officially used *Acheh* as their preferred spelling.

Just five days before the election in the early evening on 4 April, Eunsook and I were interviewing the members of a local NGO at a popular fried noodle restaurant in the city of Langsa, when our informant received an urgent text message:

Teungku Leube, the former regional [GAM] commander of Aramiah Langsa [the rural areas just west of Langsa city in East Aceh] and current head of the PA sub-district office there, age 41, has been shot dead by unknown assailants at around 7:20PM. His body has been brought to the Langsa public hospital.

Moments later the PA head for Langsa, who we had interviewed just the day before, called me and Eunsook and asked us to bear witness at the hospital. We arrived five minutes later at the hospital where a large crowd already stood outside the emergency room. Eunsook took testimony from local PA officials while I was whisked into the morgue to view the body. We heard that Teungku Leube had just arrived home from delivering administrative documents to the local elections office, and was sitting inside his house with his back facing the front window when two men dressed in black drove by on motorcycles and shot him twice. After viewing the body I stepped outside to rejoin Eunsook, where several local journalists had arrived, and a human rights activist who went on to become PA's spokesperson after the elections was loudly condemning these acts of intimidation against PA. The murder of Teungku Leube was reported widely in the local and international news, but none of the journalists who were at the hospital, and who all had interviewed me and Eunsook, included any mention of TCC's election observers on the scene, a curious erasure given how much news coverage the TCC mission in Aceh had received since we arrived one month earlier. Since February 2009, this was the sixth murder of a PA activist. Most PA candidates and officials had already taken the precaution of not sleeping in their own homes, but now they refrained from travel in the evening as well. By the time we arrived in Bireuen, local PA leaders refused to meet with us after dark.

Since PA's formation, the party had endured targeted murders, grenade attacks, the arbitrary arrest of PA candidates and officials, and the harassment and intimidation of likely PA voters, especially in districts such as Bener Meriah and Aceh Tamiang outside of GAM's ideological heartland, but quite the opposite prevailed in GAM's former strongholds. Aceh's five other local parties experienced particularly acute levels of daily intimidation and campaign obstruction. Trucks carrying villagers to other parties' campaign rallies in the towns were routinely stopped and sent home. Party cadres could not conduct their campaign activities in the villages, not even to put up their banners and posters. Dozens of candidates from other parties resigned from their campaigns and hundreds of party-sponsored poll watchers resigned en masse just days before the elections. Arson attacks and vicious slander, including a fatwa from a widely respected religious leader with ties to PA in Bireuen that declared women candidates unfit to run for office, were generally understood to be directed against SIRA, the second most popular local party after PA, led and supported by the former activists from Aceh's Referendum Era. During an interview in Sabang, a young former GAM combatant who ran as a candidate on the SIRA ticket broke down in tears as he described the irreparably broken relationship between GAM and SIRA, combatants and students, once cast in the familial language of older and younger brothers.

PA won the elections of course, but over the next few days we observed a careful recalibration of the results. At first, PA activists reported fantastic initial returns from their respective districts as high as 90% and 91% in East and North Aceh, with 17 districts and municipalities (out of 23 total in Aceh) reporting returns higher than 50%, but the numbers steadily decreased during the recapitulation process, settling on a provincial-wide total of 46.9% of the vote, earning 33 out of 69 seats in the provincial assembly (Palmer 2010). Despite some

obvious manipulations that we observed in districts outside of GAM's traditional base of support, PA could not afford to complain or else risk looking like a sore winner. During an interview that we conducted with TNI officials overseeing Aceh's peace process, they admitted that PA had won the election and assured us that they would be satisfied with the results as long as PA earned less than an outright majority. In short, PA won their mandate in a compromised manner that satisfied the two opposing sides in Aceh and Indonesia's bipolar conflict history. When we met with the leaders of other local parties, they told us they had made a strategic decision to avoid a national display of their legitimate grievances in order to maintain an appearance of Aceh's successful transition to peace and democracy. The fashioning of the results to suit TNI and PA at the expense (and resigned complicity) of the other local parties ensures that Aceh's and Indonesia's mutually beneficial conflict narrative continues.

Our most clarifying interview was with Zulfikar Muhammad, the Executive Director of the Aceh Human Rights NGO Coalition, who made two astute observations. First, he condemned civil society activists who focused strictly on the political violence leading up to the elections, because it was clearly the outcome of a weak and flawed electoral system that allowed so many violations to occur with impunity. Second, he said "voters prioritized peaceful elections over honest and fair elections. These were their two choices, and they decided it was better to sacrifice honesty and fairness in the name of peace." This was PA's winning campaign strategy from the start, claiming that only GAM was the signatory of the Helsinki MoU, and therefore only PA, as GAM's successor organization, could guarantee Aceh's peace. PA's campaign successfully framed the other local parties as political stooges of Jakarta interests rather than diverse elements of Aceh's reconstituted civil society. PA won with a not-so-veiled threat: "if *Partai Aceh* loses, Aceh will be destroyed."

**Image 6.3: “If Partai Aceh Loses, Aceh Will Be Destroyed!!”**



**Caption: A young supporter of a rival local party attends a rally at a soccer field in Pidie Jaya district encircled with *Partai Aceh* flags and graffiti that reads “If *Partai Aceh* loses, Aceh will be destroyed!!”**

TCC issued the final report of its limited observation mission four months after the elections (Carter Center 2009). The report emphasizes three thematic issues—electoral administration, campaign finance, and electoral dispute resolution mechanisms—and has a special geographic focus on Aceh because of its unique status as the first and only province of Indonesia to have local parties contesting the elections in a post-conflict environment. Each thematic chapter of the report includes bracketed gray box sections that focus on how the issues played out in Aceh. As this was TCC’s third election observation mission to Indonesia for each of the legislative elections held since President Suharto’s resignation, the report features qualified, technocratic statements focused on the administration of elections that allow for a progressive narrative of Indonesia’s continuing democratization rather than reproduce the tense and multivalent voices of so many diverse contestants and other stakeholders that the observers included in their weekly reports to the mission office in Jakarta. From the Executive Summary:

Although The Carter Center is not in a position to offer conclusions about the overall success of the elections, it notes that, as in 2004, the 2009 legislative elections took place in a generally peaceful atmosphere. This is a significant achievement. Aspects of the Indonesian electoral system observed by the Center indicate continued democratic consolidation in the country (ibid.6).

By the broad definition established in this dissertation's Introduction, TCC qualifies as a humanitarian organization. The report promotes TCC as an organization that "strives to relieve suffering by advancing peace and health worldwide; it seeks to prevent and resolve conflicts, enhance freedom and democracy, and protect and promote human rights worldwide." Their slogan is "Waging Peace. Fighting Disease. Building Hope" (ibid.i-ii). Even more than the World Bank Conflict and Development Program's focus on conflict monitoring and governance reform, TCC focuses on the technocratic and policy aspects of "waging peace," projecting a commitment to non-partisanship and impartiality, not least because a former United States president defines TCC's international reputation and personality. File this report on the shelf as the next volume in TCC's ongoing Indonesian election observation series, one of the more important nations in TCC's portfolio of democracy promotion success stories. Each report gestures toward the neutrality that the classicist model of humanitarianism champions above all else, as if the decision to focus separately on Aceh with a series of profiles in gray boxes, or USAID's funding for TCC's mission, or the US State Department officials who routinely contacted us while we were on the road, were not motivated by political interests. As if TCC's very presence does not put the organization "in a position to offer conclusions about the overall success of the elections." As if TCC was another international "mobile sovereign," untouched by the frictions we observed on the ground, and resolutely ineffectual to influence them. Blasé.

### **Notes on the Humanitarian Encounter**

The earthquake and tsunami generated an urgent humanitarian imperative that brought hundreds of international organizations and thousands of humanitarians to Aceh at the beginning of 2005. They came to address a crisis as it is traditionally understood—a destabilizing rupturing



event—but arrived in a low-level counterinsurgency situation where, even after the end of martial law and the resumption of reconstruction in post-MoU Aceh, humanitarians encountered many of the problems associated with a prolonged chronic crisis that had sedimented into Aceh's body politic and attenuated the aspirations of its people. In this dissertation I have taken seriously Henrik Vigh's suggestion to look at crisis as context instead of placing crisis in context. With the chronicity of crisis as my starting point, I have looked at the role of international humanitarian organizations and their local interlocutors on the ground. The tsunami bashed into Aceh as one more intolerable crisis after the others: the DOM era, the Referendum Era, martial law, the tsunami emergency, followed by a drawn out recovery period (the NGO era) punctuated with hopeful moments such as the Helsinki MoU and Irwandi's prideful victory, but also—as the 2009 elections demonstrate—with the renewal and perpetuation of chronic crisis that results from the restructuring of “elite pacts of governability and domination” by the originary perpetrators of crisis (Theidon 2007:89).

Vigh highlights the normative dimensions of chronic crisis, the routinization of disorder that settles in when states of exception have become the norm. “Normal” may refer to the prevailing everyday violence—the things we do the most often, or that which there is most of around us—but it may also refer to

how things should be or how we would like them to be. Crisis in this perspective is constantly judged... measured and defined in relation to ideas of other lives and societies: ideas that are constructed through spatial or historical analogy; in relation to how life is presumed better elsewhere and how life was better or could be better in other times (Vigh 2008:11).

In this dissertation I submit that for some people in Aceh the humanitarian encounter provided that example of another “normal” right in their midst, or at least a means with which to reach their own ideal normal. To live with and hold one's everyday normal defined by crisis against

that other normal—alternately wished-for by some and certainly disdained by others—yields productive frictions and leaves behind lasting effects.

An anthropology of the humanitarian encounter in Aceh obliges us, as Veena Das writes following Stanley Cavell, to remain “tireless, awake, when others have fallen asleep” (Das 2007:79). But for the humanitarian subjects that I write about who reach for an other, more ideal normal, while living amidst a routinized normality of crisis, Arthur Kleinman concedes that it is “painfully difficult to step outside our practical personal and societal responsibilities (our moral world), imagine some other, more availing ways to live, and put them into practice” (Kleinman 2006:122). Anthropologists must also negotiate this tension but on radically different terms given their option, in most cases, to flee from the crisis situations that they study. I have tried to show some of the challenges of keeping oneself tirelessly awake while embedded as a participant-observer within the humanitarian apparatus, to account for that unequal capacity (and frequent desire) for flight at a moment’s notice, and to acknowledge the filters that selectively reveal some aspects of the encounter while obscuring others. At the conclusion of this dissertation, I review some of these revelations.

### **Humanitarian Subjectivity**

In Chapter One I highlighted the disciplining effects of learning how to use IOM’s email networks, productive of public and private forms of reflexivity. The frame of the Outlook client, the display of metalingual functions, the archive of past communications, and the use of distribution lists all help new users acquire the facility to cite, revise, and rewrite within the acceptable, generic, and civil limits of discourse within IOM’s email archive, generating a shared or public reflexivity that strongly characterizes this genre of speech. The routinely circulated

email guidelines and SPAM warnings encourage the development of a private reflexivity in which email users at IOM learn to recognize and self-surveil their position within an archive of emails that delineate hierarchical, conflicting, and overlapping staff networks. An email user's private reflexivity discerns how and when he or she is authorized to speak or self-censor. In a recent interview conducted online with one of my former co-workers at IOM, Dr. Andi, I asked him what it was like when he first began using his IOM email account, and I was struck by how closely it accords with how I described the acquisition and internalization of the medium in an office context:

It was a totally new experience for us. Honestly, almost none of us had ever used an integrated office email system before, nothing beyond a simple yahoo or gmail account online. At first it was confusing, starting with learning how to upload and download email attachments, and figuring out how to find other users on the directory. With the integrated system, it was possible for all of the staff to communicate with one another anytime and anywhere, as long as we had an internet connection. We could give our opinions, share our ideas, critiques, and suggestions by email. If we share those thoughts face to face, it might offend someone in person, but by email it was indirect, so we could minimize the offense of others. Then we started using email as a medium to share anything we wanted, from jokes, to funny stories, to our writings and photographs, and anything else that had no relation to our work. Sometimes, that got really frustrating.

Dr. Andi describes a reflexive process of *finding his bearings* within a global, anytime and anywhere, media technology environment in which all new staff at IOM found themselves immersed.<sup>91</sup> My examination of the IOM email archive reveals a partial aspect of the fashioning of a humanitarian subjectivity.

Starting with Inbox, my dissertation chapters dance around and flirt gently with the idea of humanitarian subjectivity without ever fully naming it as such, much less approaching a definition. A general definition taken from Good et al.'s edited volume *Postcolonial Disorders* suggests both the utility and challenge of defining a more specifically humanitarian subjectivity:

“Subjectivity” immediately signals awareness of a set of historical problems and critical writings related to the genealogy of the subject and to the importance of colonialism and the figure of the

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<sup>91</sup> Vigh (2008) uses the language of “finding one’s bearings,” which he takes from Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1964:23). I work with this idea in the following paragraphs.

colonized “other” for writing about the emergence of the modern (rational) subject. Subjectivity denotes a new attention to hierarchy, violence, and subtle modes of internalized anxieties that link subjection and subjectivity, and an urgent sense of the importance of linking national and global economic and political processes to the most intimate forms of everyday experience. It places the political at the heart of the psychological and the psychological at the heart of the political (Good, Good, Hyde and Pinto 2008:2-3).

It was perhaps out of an abundance of caution that I have avoided a particular designation of a humanitarian subjectivity that comes out of the recent history of intervention in Aceh. Instead I have mobilized concepts from the anthropological toolkit such as mobile sovereignty, friction, supermodernity, recognition, networks, linguistic ideology, and epistemic murk while composing an assemblage of ethnographic stories that loosely connect the life and work histories of the primarily middle class Indonesians that I have called humanitarian subjects with the structural determinants of both international humanitarianism and Aceh’s history of war, disaster, and post-MoU peacetime. I have tried to keep the connections loose in order to avoid overdetermined interpretations.

The challenge anthropologists face when writing about subjectivity, Byron Good writes, is to find a way to engage in a “form of listening and engagement that involves a mode of mutual discovery,” which in turn allows the anthropologist to avoid problematic positions where he or she presumes to “know better” (Good 2012:32). The interviews I conducted in January 2012 were some of my best because by then I was largely removed from the hierarchical and supervisory conditions in which I worked with my informants at the height of the humanitarian encounter. It was easier to pursue conversations in a mode of mutual discovery without the structuring apparatus of a large humanitarian organization bearing down upon us. One of the better examples of this was my interview with Intan in which she discussed the anxieties of working with post-conflict actors on the outside and with IOM’s crushing administrative apparatus on the inside. In both instances, the young and independent-minded Intan described

powerful career-defining moments. Were they moments that produce a humanitarian subjectivity? To the extent that Chapter Five proposes a wide range of humanitarian subject positions, and that Intan herself was disarmingly honest about the changes her work experience at IOM brought into her life, then I would answer yes. When we were both still working at IOM, a conversation like the one we had would have been impossible. We approached some of the critical issues that studies of subjectivity address, as Good defines them in the article cited above: “psychological experiences of authority and authority relations, both individual and collective; the dynamics of ‘subjection’ and anxiety; and the real force of loss as it reverberates through one’s being,” to name just a few (ibid.27).

In the same article, Good writes that “reflections on colonialism are important in much of this work, either directly or indirectly, as a mode of exploring historical experience” (ibid.28). This is why I make frequent comparisons between the humanitarian encounter in Aceh and the emergence of modern middle class Indonesian subjects through education. Throughout this dissertation I have used the work of historians and anthropologists of Indonesia such as Mrázek, Siegel, and Kipp who have looked at the Indonesian nationalist narrative that shows how local villagers with their cultural traditions assume a modern, national, Indonesian subjectivity. Mrázek invokes the metaphor of “the road to school,” in which the road that colonial Indonesians walked upon draws a trajectory away from their origins, the *volk* in the villages who are left behind, and directs them into a world in motion. Along the way, Indonesian subjects acquire a sense of perspective, identifying and naming the material artifacts and immaterial ghosts in the yard, the village, the trees, then leaving them behind as they continue their journey forward (Mrázek 2010:129-30, 151). As I described in Chapter Five, the capacity to reflect upon then name, categorize, and subordinate one’s origins has a distinctly Indonesian genealogy with roots

in the colonial encounter. The so-called “champions” of Aceh’s civil society leverage this skill, subordinating ethnicity, religion, and other aspects of their social identities in ways that can be mixed and matched according to whatever their current setting demands. Humanitarian subjects in Aceh leverage a similar set of skills to a greater or lesser extent. They look back upon the *volk*-like victims of conflict and tsunami in the villages where they were born and speak on their behalf, producing narratives of self-actualization that simultaneously construct a cause for and solidarity with the objects of their humanitarian work, but apart from them as well (Fassin 2007:519).

The reconstitution of hierarchy after a democratic catastrophe partially depends upon the politics of value and moral sentiment that the humanitarian encounter brings with it, and the middle class Indonesian humanitarian subjects that I have written about are a part of this process when they tell the stories that set them apart from the victims they describe. The heavy-handed language of humanitarian subjects and objects in this context makes that point, but I should also emphasize that from another ethnographic perspective the victims that access humanitarian assistance during and after a crisis are also humanitarian subjects of a different kind. Erica James, for example, has written about the new political subjectivities that emerge from the humanitarian discourses of traumatic suffering in Haiti during and after the coup period of 1991-94, when Haitians found their bearings within the humanitarian apparatus and tactically leveraged its services by acquiring trauma portfolios that define them as victims (James 2004; 2010; 2010). Likewise in Aceh, the arrival of international humanitarians allowed new intersubjective encounters, such as Saiful Mahdi’s depiction (Chapter Five) of tsunami victims choosing to access assistance from American instead of Indonesian soldiers, or Nur’s interview

with the MSR researchers (Chapter Three) that reproduces the official narrative of recovery that DDR programs intend to generate.

When Kleinman and Vigh each assert that those who endure may compare their situations to an other, idealized normal, the capacity to first imagine, then grasp for, then find one's bearings in that other, more desirable normal, leads to differential outcomes. Compare, for example, the radical experiential gap between Sami and Junaid, whose stories I presented at the end of Chapter Four. Both lived through traumatic conflict-era experiences, and both had close encounters with humanitarianism, but only Sami, I think due to an acquired reflexive capacity, could leverage his encounter with humanitarianism toward his personal and social aspirations. Junaid's ability to endure takes a different form, relying on tentative and tactile survival skills attuned to the uncertainty of crisis and its most proximate "critical characteristics" (Nordstrom 1997:28; Vigh 2008:10-13). We may call both Sami and Junaid humanitarian subjects, but in this dissertation I have focused more upon those humanitarian subjects like Sami who have not only found their bearings on Aceh's humanitarian landscape, but have also come close to mastering it.

In his book *What Really Matters*, Kleinman writes a moving profile of an international humanitarian aid worker named Idi who struggled with the radical inequalities between the foreign and local staff that worked for her organization. One reason why the program she worked on might not have succeeded without foreign workers, Idi concedes, is "not because of some fault of local workers... but because they could not command the financial and symbolic resources required to fund a program with economic, social, and political capital" (Kleinman 2006:53-54). Of course this is not the static, preordained fate of all humanitarian programs, but Idi's assessment matches my own in Chapter Five. Whether they are expatriate or national

humanitarians, the capacity for self-reflection and finding one's bearings, to identify oneself within a humanitarian apparatus and then leverage its economic, social, and political capital for both personal and social gain may be a prerequisite condition for assuming this distinct type of humanitarian subjectivity.

Humanitarian subjects have removed themselves from the intimate proximity of their origins. Their capacity to reflexively collect and manipulate aspects of their identity has a distancing effect that on the one hand allows humanitarian subjects to assume command over economic, social, and political resources that results in effective programming. On the other hand this reflexive capacity produces what Mrázek calls a "modern lightness," likening one's collection of masterfully narrated stories of humanitarian victims to a series of articles in a newspaper that can be put down and left upon the coffee table, a dioramic perspective that Walter Benjamin called "heightened expressions of the dull perspective" (Mrázek 2010:195). The most visibly successful humanitarian practitioners, the champions described in Chapter Five, reap benefits from this modern lightness, allowing them to proudly bear their Acehnese identities without letting the frictions of their work drag them too close into Aceh's recurrent crises.

Abstracted from their origins and always in motion, where do we locate these humanitarian subjects? This is where I think the trajectory departs from and exceeds the colonial story of forging national subjects. In a similar manner but outside of the national frame, I locate these humanitarian subjects along a spectrum that trends toward Marc Augé's supermodern "non-places," working in makeshift office spaces or camps, speeding across provincial highways in rental vehicles, and waiting in hotel or airport lounges. Humanitarian subjects move through these non-places on their way to and from "the field," where fleeting and mediated encounters occur with the victims who propel the humanitarian imperative forward with urgency and keep



practitioners on the move. In this dissertation, humanitarians collectively imagined the field as “Aceh,” compelling the large international agencies such as IOM and the World Bank to maintain a province-sized “Aceh perspective” and locating most of us in the provincial capital, Banda Aceh. No one ever thought of Banda Aceh as “the field” even though we spent most of our time there, perhaps because “the field,” as an imagined place where humanitarian victims and their friction-producing, place-defining “cultures” reside, must always be kept at an objective distance to maintain that detached and blasé sense of just “passing through” (ibid.122).

### **The Use of Montage to Acknowledge and Negotiate Ethnographic Aporias**

The lightness of the humanitarian subject’s encounter with its object lends itself to the montage style of ethnographic writing that I have used throughout this dissertation. In each chapter, starting with a heterogeneous selection of emails from my IOM archives in Chapter One, and ending with a collection of interviews that solicit retrospective memories supplemented with published accounts in Chapters Four and Five, I compose arguments based upon loosely collated ethnographic fragments juxtaposed against each other, not unlike a collection of articles that appear in the special thematic issues of our favorite academic journals, or the edited volumes published by the academic press. Each fragment tells the unique story of an individual informant or event. One by one, we learn something more about the humanitarian encounter in Aceh, each one useful in and of itself. But with only a few signposts I also hope that the montage of fragments assumes a coherent mosaic that gestures toward larger arguments of interest to both anthropologists of humanitarianism and area studies scholars of Southeast Asia.

I chose to use a montage writing method because it textually approximates the sense I felt of humanitarians just “passing through,” each fragment another dispatch in the third person,

another digital image in the camera, one more email attachment that does the rhetorical work of supporting a larger argument, but not exactly required reading to get the point. The reflexive supermodernity that characterizes the humanitarian subject enables mastery over every fragment, composed within a frame. Like the thousands of emails in your inbox, each one may be forwarded, quoted, cited, copied and pasted, revised, replied to, or maybe just deleted because most have little relevance and generate too much noise. An ethnographic fragment requires a strong signal to break through the noise and grab my attention before I can find a place for it within the pages of this dissertation. The humanitarian subject learns how “to measure one’s life and to handle one’s experience—cinematically, painterly, and touristically reduced” (Mrázek 2010:210). But once in awhile, and for me the paradigmatic case is the figure of Dona in Chapter Two, the ethnographic fragment has a signal so strong that it makes a wavering and fleeting connection that reaches through the mediating filters of the humanitarian encounter and touches me before I recoil and turn my attention to the next fragment.

As I assembled a montage of ethnographic fragments for each chapter in this dissertation, I began to wonder what was special about the selected stories such that they were able to break through the noise of so many piles of handwritten notebooks, printed texts, and digital data that I brought home with me from Aceh. As I wrote in Chapter Four, ethnography allows us to tease out clarifying stories from singular situations, but why do some of these singular situations assume the status of a social text for my analysis while others do not? I get a partial answer from Stephen Greenblatt’s appreciation for Geertz titled “The Touch of the Real” that I find particularly relevant to this dissertation about Aceh’s post-conflict setting:

the thickness in [Geertz’s] sheep stealing anecdote [in his “Thick Description” essay] seems to depend upon a high degree of social conflict, and social conflict, he writes, “is not something that happens when, out of weakness, indefiniteness, obsolescence, or neglect, cultural forms cease to operate, but rather something which happens when, like burlesqued winks, such forms are pressed

by unusual situations or unusual intentions to operate in unusual ways (Geertz 1973:28).”  
(Greenblatt 1997:29)

In his reading of “Thick Description,” Greenblatt suggests that the singular ethnographic situations that ethnographers write about “depend upon a high degree of social conflict.” Cultural forms are mobilized to such an unusual extent that we are able to notice them, a first order filter that privileges conflict over the quotidian. The choice to include them in a montage collection is a second order filter that privileges the singularly subjective situations of the ethnographer that can be leveraged in service of a chapter’s narrative arc.

Renato Rosaldo has written about how “processes of drastic change often are the enabling conditions of ethnographic field research, and herein resides the complicity of missionary, constabulary officer, and ethnographer” (Rosaldo 1989:120). The tsunami and peace agreement certainly precipitated just this sort of drastic change, and the ensuing humanitarian encounter enabled hundreds of researchers, including dozens of ethnographers, to come to Aceh and “ransack the field,” as some critics have observed (Missbach 2011). George Marcus picks up on Rosaldo’s use of the word “complicity” and writes that it “becomes the defining element of the relationship between the anthropologist and the broader colonial context” (Marcus 1997:94). We may replace the word “colonial” with “humanitarian” and reach similar conclusions. Researchers in Aceh during its humanitarian encounter are complicit in leveraging the unfolding moments of rupture and high degrees of social conflict. It was the irresistible opportunity to continue working for *five years* on post-conflict issues during Aceh’s humanitarian encounter that prevented me from seriously redirecting my attention to writing this dissertation. But it is precisely this sort of work that trains our ethnographic attention toward ruptures and conflict and away from everyday life, hence Vigh’s attempt to redirect our gaze toward the chronicity of crisis; Das’ injunction to remain tireless and awake; Drexler’s, Hedman’s, and Brass’ warnings

about the reproduction of a pervasive discourse of conflict and violence; and Mohammad Zulfikar's critique of the NGO preoccupation with electoral violence in Aceh rather than the underlying system that enabled it. Herein lies the paradox of conducting an ethnography from within the humanitarian agencies that contributed so much to Aceh's drastic changes despite their lingering pretensions toward apolitical neutrality, changes that I am simultaneously complicit in and tasked with observing. I leave it to the reader to decide whether I have succeeded in acknowledging and negotiating this ethnographic aporia, rather than merely reproducing it, with the mosaic of fragments I have assembled for this dissertation.

### **Qualifying Mobile Sovereignty**

With each successive chapter, I have tried to slowly debunk or at least qualify the trope of the "mobile sovereign" humanitarian. The "Inbox" chapter begins the dissertation with a description of how one large international humanitarian organization self-regards and acts as if it is a self-contained bureaucracy; neatly "boxed-in" to an email network, conducting business by rapid and efficient, always available, telecommunication technologies; with a vertical orientation (toward headquarters in Geneva, or project donors, for example) that emphasizes policy and project proposals over realities on the ground. But Inbox also begins an analytical process that describes how externalities on the ground always and eventually impinge upon the organization. The field is porous with local actors, some present in the email archive but mostly absent, and the humanitarian organization comes into friction with them in their attempts at a more aloof sovereignty. Externalities shape implementation on the ground in ways that the organization's self-image utterly fails to acknowledge (Good, personal communication, 2012).

Each chapter after “Inbox” increasingly acknowledges the productive frictions that result when the supposed mobile sovereign engages with singular situations and local histories. In Chapter Two I describe a set of “remote fieldwork” methods that keeps the expatriate humanitarian researcher and his sponsoring agencies away from the dirty details on the ground but nevertheless brings them a step closer to those externalities, the post-MoU realities in Aceh. Chapter Three presents a synthesis of the findings generated by the remote fieldwork methods described in Chapter Two, and represents this dissertation’s closest engagement with the beneficiaries of humanitarian assistance provided by the Indonesian government, international agencies, and local NGOs. While some beneficiaries comfortably locate themselves within Aceh’s official narrative of conflict recovery, many locate themselves within oppositional discourses of strident critique taking the humanitarian efforts at post-conflict recovery to task by falling back upon familiar historical tropes of resistance such as GAM’s separatist ideology and the language of holy war. Others still escape humanitarianism’s dioramic gaze, especially when their stories can not be labeled and subordinated into the aforementioned familiar discourses of recovery or resistance.

Finally, in Chapters Four and Five, I take a retrospective look at the humanitarian encounter. Chapter Four looks at the intimate interpersonal encounters between expatriate humanitarians and their local staff, and I use Siegel’s concept of recognition, grounded in unequal encounters and reliant upon a politics of connection and proximity, to make sense of the legacy of those encounters. In Chapter Five, I use a series of retrospective interviews to look at a diverse range of humanitarian subjects in Aceh, from the champions who perform their own masterful everyday acts of reintegration to the activists who remain suspicious of all authoritative figures with the power of recognition, humanitarians included. Their suspicions are

legitimately grounded in Aceh's history of repeated betrayals of civil society by those who govern them.

On the one hand, the "mobile sovereign" concept has analytic power, because we can see how international humanitarian organizations arrive and then leave behind drastic changes with relative impunity. But my ethnography and many other recent anthropological studies of humanitarianism show repeatedly that we must qualify it in every singular situation and local history (Fassin and Vasquez 2005:390; Good, Good and Grayman 2010). Aceh suffered an unprecedented democratic catastrophe when the tsunami hit, and the humanitarians who came to assist met a second, decidedly *undemocratic* and martial catastrophe, generating an unlikely humanitarian encounter that combined responses to both natural and manmade disasters in a strong state setting. The mobile sovereign concept unfairly assumes that humanitarians work in weak or even absent state settings (Good 2012). The tsunami temporarily stunned Indonesia, a rupture that allowed the unlikely entry of multiple sovereign military forces from other countries and set in motion a historic humanitarian response, but the state quickly reasserted its authority in the management of humanitarian efforts in Aceh.

To conclude this discussion of mobile sovereignty, I offer another ethnographic fragment from IOM's Geneva headquarters in 2006. Just as IOM's self-image as a hierarchical organization with a global reach to its field missions around the world fails to acknowledge how frictions on the ground shape program implementation, it also fails to acknowledge the local frictions at headquarters. We saw a hint of this in Chapter One when the Director General Office's internal communications guidelines contradicted the information technology officer's advice on the makings of a good email user. After attending a training in Geneva in May 2006 about mental health issues in settings of complex emergencies, I paid a visit to IOM's

headquarters, just across the street from the World Health Organization's (WHO) headquarters. Upon arrival in the Migration Health department's hallway of offices, my main contact in Geneva, the mental health programs officer, greeted me warmly then loudly announced to everyone that "our man in Aceh is here in Geneva!"

She introduced me around and it was clear that most of the staff had other preoccupations to attend to, but I at least had a memorable encounter with IOM's Migration Health Director who was pleased to "finally attach a face with a name." Her interest in IOM and Harvard's joint mental health work in Aceh turned upon a global MoU that IOM shared with WHO to work on projects collaboratively, and she encouraged me to work with WHO in Aceh on our upcoming intervention. She had no idea that IOM's emerging model of mental health care for conflict survivors in Aceh posed significant programmatic and philosophical differences with WHO's programs in Aceh, nor did I expect her to, but it was clear that she was looking for IOM-WHO success stories for her portfolio to illustrate the utility of the joint MoU that might result in additional funding for future project development.

Apart from her genuine support and interest in our work, this brief meeting illustrated two points for me. First, the Director's knowledge of our work in "the field" was too thin to be of any practical use for us even though she was ostensibly our boss at the highest level. Second, the Director was embedded in her own localized set of relationships and frictions that formed the main context of her work. She was much more concerned with holding up her end of IOM's arrangement with WHO, and demonstrating its utility to her colleagues in Geneva. IOM's other departments, she explained, typically think that her Migration Health programs ought to be handled by more health-oriented organizations, pointing to WHO's office across the street. But they forget, she explained, that WHO is not an implementing organization, but rather more like a

policy and program development institute. Their programs take five years, whereas IOM's need to happen instantly when an emergency strikes.

My visit to IOM's office in Geneva reminded me of one of the dictums in Bruno Latour's actor-network theory which states that "even a longer network remains local at all points" (Latour 1993:117). Latour uses the example of a railroad to reconceptualize local-global discourses that have come to dominate the literature on humanitarianism:

Is a railroad local or global? Neither. It is local at all points, since you always find sleepers and railroad workers, and you have stations and automatic ticket machines scattered along the way. Yet it is global, since it takes you from Madrid to Berlin or from Brest to Vladivostok. However, it is not universal enough to be able to take you just anywhere. It is impossible to reach the little Auvergnat village of Malpy by train, or the little Staffordshire village of Market Drayton. There are continuous paths that lead from the local to the global, from the circumstantial to the universal, from the contingent to the necessary, only so long as the branch lines are paid for (ibid.117).

The structure and practice of IOM's email network is a good example of how the local-global discourse powerfully shapes our perception of the humanitarian encounter, lending the idea of the "mobile sovereign" a measure of credibility. But in the technical details of how IOM expands and contracts its email connections, adapting its network to every emergency setting, we see that the sizable resources that IOM allocates to maintain and surveil it at every point offers another metaphor for rethinking how humanitarian organizations work. Likewise in Geneva I met a collection of people in IOM's Migration Health division with work agendas and concerns that were just as intensely local as my work in Aceh. Their work was linked to mine, but only through an always local network of tenuous connections.



## Recognition vs. Witnessing

The leitmotif of recognition has a narrative arc of its own throughout this dissertation even though I did not introduce it explicitly until Chapter Four. The Inbox chapter appears to foreclose forms of recognition that move beyond the archive's generic civility, especially given the network's directory of distribution aliases that divide international from national staff in every work domain. The existence of distribution groups does not completely preclude possibilities for interpersonal encounters by email, say from one individual to another, but the reflexive awareness and frequent deployment of these divides in the network sets up a discursive mode that I believe makes recognition, as a politics of not just connection but also proximity, more difficult. The *as if* qualities of proximity that email generates fail to produce recognition on a number of occasions. Whenever emails with sincere affective expressions crossed geographic and national-international divides—the beseeching emails from IOM's national shelter staff when their expatriate boss was fired; Aji's rage sent from Bireuen to the rest of Aceh and Jakarta; Luc's rousing "why we fight" message to his staff across Aceh; Fauzan's bewildered contract concerns sent from Tapaktuan to Bobby in Banda Aceh; and Pak Zul's detailed justifications for requesting extra field days sent from remote offices in Takengon, Kutacane, and Tapaktuan to the "big shots" in Banda Aceh who never approve them—all of these were met with either rejection or (more often) silence.

In Chapters Two and Three, I lay out hints of how recognition works generally, in particular with the "unrecognized" characters of Dona, Hasbi Lacak, and Rian. Authoritative agents of conflict recovery in Aceh have little to gain from the recognition of anomalous figures whose stories reflect poorly on recovery processes that have left so many conflict survivors unacknowledged. Finally in Chapters Four and Five, I explicitly introduce Siegel's definition of

recognition that turns upon the humanitarian encounters that occur on unequal footing all through this dissertation. The tsunami created a rupture that allowed new and temporary figures of authority—the humanitarians—to rush in, recognizing humanitarian subjects and objects. For those who avail themselves of either humanitarian aid or employment, I suggest that the act of recognition enables a transfer of recognizing authority from the humanitarian agencies back to Indonesia, producing reintegrative effects. The champions described in Chapter Five are the extreme example of this process, a positive inverse image of the less transparent and predatory forms of recognition with reintegrative effects described by Aspinall in his “From Combatants to Contractors” essay.

The crucial element of Siegel’s definition of recognition is the necessary presence of an authoritative figure who in the very act of recognizing the other introduces hierarchy into the relationship. The stories I recounted in Chapter Four feature my informants’ unprompted memories of expatriate humanitarian superiors. The champions and other kinds of humanitarian subjects I introduced in Chapter Five have the power of recognition, and are themselves recognized by authorities above them. My definition of humanitarian subjects rests upon this unequal encounter. Drawing upon Fassin’s definition of humanitarianism as a politics of life, humanitarian subjects necessarily introduce hierarchy into their encounters with the beneficiaries of aid, whose stories they are in turn empowered to narrate.

Recognition may be contrasted with witnessing. I think of witnessing as an encounter that takes place on more equal footing between two subjects, reminding me of Emmanuel Levinas’ definition of the “interhuman perspective” in his essay titled “Useless Suffering.”

There is a radical difference between *the suffering in the other*, where it is unforgivable to *me*, my own experience of suffering, whose constitutional or congenital uselessness can take on a meaning, the only one of which suffering is capable, in becoming a suffering for the suffering (inexorable though it may be) of someone else. It is this attention to the suffering of the other that, through the cruelties of our century (despite these cruelties, because of these cruelties) can be

affirmed as the very nexus of human subjectivity, to the point of being raised to the level of supreme ethical principle—the only one it is impossible to question—shaping the hopes and commanding the practical discipline of vast human groups (Levinas 1998:94, italics in original).

A commitment to the interhuman perspective, “the very nexus of human subjectivity,” summons a moral imperative somewhat different than what the humanitarian imperative has come to mean. For Levinas, the imperative to attend to the suffering of others transcends the “simple exchange of courtesies that has become established as an ‘interpersonal commerce’ of customs” (ibid.101).

In my work with Mary-Jo and Byron Good on the PNA, we discovered that an act of witnessing can be far more difficult and dangerous than acts of recognition, and we wrote about this in our “Complex Emergencies” chapter. First, as I recounted in a footnote in the Introduction, the more sensitive and attuned members of our research staff had trouble receiving the stories of suffering that their interviewees shared with them. In their words, every act of witnessing had a cost, a transfer of suffering with a kind of physicality in the exchange, as one respondent after another “*melampiaskan penderitaan*,” vented, expunged, released, inflicted his or her stories upon the interviewer, who then had to carry the burden (Good, Good and Grayman 2010:253). Their burdens of witnessing, once acquired, were a kind of poisonous knowledge for them too, particularly during the early days of the peace process when its success was far from assured:

Bearing witness to atrocities and violence for Acehese interviewers and mental health workers had, and continues to have, far more serious implications than it does for those of us who wrote these reports. During the conflict, being witnesses to violence was extraordinarily dangerous... Simply knowing what happened, particularly having information about specific acts of violence, placed the witness at risk of interrogation and possible torture. But this is precisely the work in which our interview teams and our mental health workers, nearly all of whom are Acehese, have been engaged. They do this work with the full awareness that violence might return someday, that the intelligence services remain active in Aceh, and that should the conflict begin again, this information might be used against them (ibid.259).

Levinas’ interhuman perspective implies an agency that allows one to exercise his or her moral imperative to engage in an act of witnessing, placing two subjects, despite the “astonishing

alterity of the other,” on equal footing and defying the safer, more conservative, impulse toward hierarchy. Recognition features that impulse and is not simply an act of domination because the subordinate figure yearns for it from a proximate authority figure, leading to intimate effects ranging from a reconstituted sense of national belonging, to unlikely encounters among humanitarian subjects that yield lasting but always unequal and complicit relationships, to the predatory post-MoU economies described by Aspinall.

## **Notes on Post-MoU Aceh, Indonesia**

### **Arresting Metaphors: Aceh *Digeunton***

Back in 2006 and 2007 when I was collecting data about how people in Aceh describe what in English are called nightmares, by far the most common experience described was a less elaborate version of the kind of sleep paralysis described in many other parts of Southeast Asia (Adler 2011; Hinton et al. 2009; Madrigal 2011). Acehnese informants variously describe this phenomenon as *digeunton* (pressed upon) or *dicekek* (choked or strangled), and everyone has experienced this at least once in their lifetime. Asphyxiating descriptions of *digeunton* can be infectious; I experienced sleep paralysis for the first time in my life only after I learned about it in Aceh! I summarized this kind of nightmare as follows:

A large, tall, black, obscure figure sits on the chest of a sleeping person and pushes down so hard and/or takes the person into such a tight and choking embrace that the person can not move, can not breathe, and can not shout for help. Usually the dreamer of this terrifying figure is half awake and aware of their paralysis (Grayman, Good and Good 2009:305).

When I visited Aceh in January 2012, I noticed in my interviews with old friends or in their writings that metaphors of paralysis were repeatedly mentioned such as Reza Idria’s portrait of his friend Todhak stuck in the coffee shop that I introduced at the beginning of Chapter Five. At

this dissertation's conclusion, I would like to run through some of these arresting metaphors that I have come across in my research; they describe Aceh as a place perpetually *digeunton*, under pressure. I will start at the level of Aceh's government, continue with individual examples from my field research, and end with implications for Aceh's civil society.

Since they won the legislative elections in 2009, PA have resorted to delay tactics as their principal mode of governance, with a terrible track record in passing or revising pressing legislation, including many items in the MoU and LOGA that required action from Aceh's provincial assembly, seen by many as the source of Aceh's paralysis.<sup>92</sup> The most vexing example of this during my visit in January 2012 was the upcoming governor's and *bupati* elections, which I described in the introductory sections of Chapter Four. The elections and their repeated postponement cast a dark shadow during my visit; everyone wanted to (or explicitly refused to) discuss it with me. PA had a strategic interest in postponing the elections until after Irwandi's term expired, which would no longer afford him an incumbent's advantage and give PA's candidate a better chance to win. In August 2011, a friend of mine wrote two opinion pieces in *Aceh Kita*, one day after another, under two different pseudonyms and both used the phrase *kebuntuan politik* (political impasse, deadlock) to describe Aceh's ongoing electoral crisis.<sup>93</sup>

Beside the rise of KPA and PA during Aceh's post-MoU era, Aceh's provincial and district/municipal governments have rapidly but unevenly increased its formalization and bureaucratization of Islamic law, which has had an equally paralyzing effect on religious

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<sup>92</sup> I have written about PA's "delay tactics as a mode of governance" in my blog post titled "Notes on ICG's Latest Indonesia Report: 'GAM vs GAM in the Aceh Elections'" dated 19 June 2011: <http://jgrayman.wordpress.com/2011/06/19/icg-gam-vs-gam/>

<sup>93</sup> See *Berebut Kuasa di Aceh* by Faturrahman DH (<http://www.acehkita.com/berita/berebut-kuasa-di-aceh/>) and *Pilkada Pasti Damai* by Rahmat Djailani (<http://www.acehkita.com/berita/opini-pilkada-pasti-damai/>).

discourse in Aceh. Reza Idria from the Tikar Pandan Community (Chapter Five) has written prolifically on this subject and he mobilizes a rich vocabulary of arresting metaphors to describe what few have been able to put into words. In the very first meandering sentence of a 2008 journal article titled “Shariah Machine” (*Mesin Syariat*), Reza immediately commands the reader’s attention with an arresting metaphor that appeals to the abject and reflects upon his very hesitation to write on the subject:

May God who holds my soul in His grip forgive me if I assert that to speak of Islamic law in Aceh today is like the pus inside of a boil without a pore, unable to burst, like a troublesome sequence of words in our heads that seeks urgent expression, to explain how our anxieties work their way, ever so silently and carefully, even into an article’s Introduction (Idria 2008:1).

After nearly a decade of formal implementation, the Islamic laws in Aceh have somehow come to authorize mass vigilante violence without sanction (Afriko 2010; Newman 2009). Poor people who commit small violations like petty gambling or forbidden sexual relations are subjected to public caning, while the wealthy caught for similar crimes always escape this humiliating brand of justice through endless appeals or the payment of steep fines. Meanwhile, corrupt officials who plunder public coffers on a massive scale do not fall under any of Aceh’s formal Islamic laws. The contradictions pose urgent questions that no one is capable of asking: “like a boil that will not burst. To ask them aloud, our voices get stuck in the throat, because these are essential questions, concerning religion, concerning faith. No sane person in Aceh could bear the burden of being labeled an apostate or anti-Islam” (Idria 2008:7).

Like the obscure figure of *digeunton* that paralyzes its victim by the application of pressure upon the body, the formalization of Islamic law bears down upon even the Governor of Aceh and renders him inexplicably powerless to speak out against what everyone knows he opposes. From a 2010 presentation, Reza describes the governor’s unenviable position:

Irwandi Yusuf has liberal views and he has refused to sign several pieces of legislation related to Islamic law in Aceh. But even *he has trouble dealing with the pressure* because it comes in the

name of religion. *This is a kind of inexplicable force. A shapeless power.* Culturally speaking, for an Acehnese person to oppose a religious issue is taboo and would come up against public opinion. In the governor's political calculus, he probably sees no benefit, so he chooses to ignore it (2010:12, emphasis mine).

Compare Reza's imagery of Irwandi and the rest of Aceh's population under the pressure of an inexplicable force with Siegel's lasting image from Daud Beureuèh's sermon that opens my discussion of Aceh in the dissertation's Introduction, of Ibrahim with his knife raised and suspended in mid-air, and Ismail about to accept the blow that never falls. The formalization of government involvement in religious practice posits a fundamental mixture of *hawa nafsu* (worldly ties) and *akal* (inner awareness) whereas the tension of Beureuèh's arresting image illustrates an unending (and impossible) internal struggle to keep them separate, to forsake the former and master the latter. In light of Siegel's interpretation of Beureuèh's sermon, Reza's courageous questions about the application of Islamic law today take on a new dimension and signal radical changes in Aceh's religious practice that have externalized with corporal sanction what once had been the domain of man's inner religious life.

### **Humanitarian Subjects Under Pressure**

The interviews I conducted in January 2012 show in various ways how Aceh's chronic political crisis leads to arrested development for my informants. Fauzan's and Pak Zak's jobs at the mine in Southwest Aceh were suspended pending the outcome of the election that was postponed four times. They repeatedly used phrases like "*macet di tempat*" (jammed in place) to describe the effect these electoral games have had on their livelihood. Fauzan prefers to find a job outside of Aceh because "people here still prefer to operationalize violence over thought," so he stays home with his son and helps his mother manage the family cafe. Pak Zak works in his garden by the river. My interview with Bachtiar also saw him caught in a state of suspension,

foreseeing the imminent end of his contract with Handicap International, and feeling ambivalent about returning to work for RATA, the local NGO that originally inspired him to work in the nonprofit sector during the heady days of the Referendum Era. Employment options in Aceh's civil society sector are neither lucrative nor available. He still looks hopefully to the expatriate researchers from Harvard Medical School (Byron & Mary-Jo Good) who find it increasingly difficult to secure funding for our work in Aceh now that the international donor community has moved on to other humanitarian crises.

When I interviewed Intan, she still had a job as the head of finance and administration for a small international NGO with a dedicated presence in Aceh. However she seemed more excited at the time about the new juice bar she had just opened with her friends at the start of 2012 in Banda Aceh's central square where city residents of all ages spend their late afternoons on weekdays and their early mornings on weekends. But with the shootings of migrant Javanese laborers dominating Aceh's headlines and coffee shop talk in December and January, the timing of the juice bar's opening turned out to be rather inauspicious. The asphyxiating political atmosphere during the first four months of 2012 depressed travel and recreational patronage of small businesses, and Intan's juice bar closed just a few months after it opened. I think of my decision not to visit Bireuen in January 2012 and imagine other versions of that decision repeated in hundreds of situations. My Acehnese friend Faturrahman DH (not his real name, he wrote under a pseudonym) who wrote one of the editorials cited in the previous footnote has a Javanese wife, and together they decided that she should go to her hometown in Java for her safety until after the elections. With hundreds of travel plans postponed or diverted and recreational activities deemed too risky, it becomes easy to imagine how small startup businesses like Intan's could not survive the political climate, or how the once booming smalltown



peacetime economies in Aceh's more volatile regions such as Bireuen could become depressed. Just a few months after Intan told me during our interview that she had no plans to leave Aceh, the project that supported her salary ended without a contract extension. With the skills and professionalism that she acquired during Aceh's NGO Era, Intan quickly found another job in the nonprofit sector... in Bali. For the first time in her life Intan lives outside of Aceh (apart from the three months in high school when Intan's family evacuated to Medan during the martial law period, which she does not count). Intan is not the only one who left Aceh. The defining champion of Chapter Five, Azwar Hasan, finally moved back to Jakarta just a few weeks after I interviewed him. Many left Aceh before my reunion tour in 2012, such as my former housemate Hafid who accompanied me to the Swisbel Hotel to witness Irwandi's victory in late 2006. He married a woman from Jakarta and has lived there full time since 2009. Dr. Andi, who I only introduced briefly in this concluding chapter, also married a woman from Java, and lives full time in Surabaya. When faced with life under pressure in Aceh, some of the humanitarian subjects with enough resources or talent leverage their mobile capacities and leave.<sup>94</sup>

### **Civil Society Under Pressure**

The local NGOs and other groups that were drawn deeply into the humanitarian encounter represent only a partial range of the diverse spectrum of Aceh's civil society organizations. These are the organizations that share a cosmopolitan and humanist outlook that align with the values espoused by most international humanitarian organizations such as human rights, gender equality, ethnic and religious diversity, environmental sustainability, good governance, and justice for the poor. Outside of this spectrum are sectarian and partisan groups,

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<sup>94</sup> "From the wings as it were, silent technologies determine or short-circuit institutional stage directions. If it is true that the grid of 'discipline' is everywhere becoming clearer and more extensive, it is all the more urgent to discover how an entire society resists being reduced to it" (de Certeau 1984:xiv).

and in Aceh these included former conflict actors that have retained their conflict-era identities, now as civilians, in the post-MoU era such as FORKAB, the group representing GAM ex-combatants who surrendered and submitted to reeducation before the MoU (see Chapter Two under the header “Text Messaging”). Radical religious groups from Java such as the Islamic Defenders Front (*Front Pembela Islam*, or FPI), which had no presence in Aceh prior to the tsunami, made successful inroads onto Aceh’s civil society landscape during the humanitarian era (Afriko 2010). Other groups including former pro-Indonesia militia groups supported the division of Aceh into three separate provinces. Groups such as these were often seen as potential spoilers of Aceh’s peace, partly exacerbated by the fact that they rarely benefited directly from the humanitarian encounter.

Complicating the spectrum further, during my work with TCC I also came across local NGOs that do not easily fit categorically into either the progressive humanitarian or a sectarian/partisan spoiler models. In the central highlands we met the leaders of a Takengon-based NGO known popularly as Jang-ko (*Jaringan Gayo Anti-Korupsi*, The Gayo Anti-Corruption Network) who kept themselves busy waging a valiant effort to keep the Central Aceh district government more transparent, but during our interviews we also discovered that they supported the partition movement to split Aceh into three separate provinces, a position that clearly contravenes the Helsinki MoU. On the one hand, Jang-ko’s well publicized efforts to hold local government accountable perform a classic role that civil society organizations are expected to undertake. When they were still in Aceh, international humanitarian and donor organizations invested heavily in local NGOs with a good governance agenda. On the other hand, international donors are unlikely to support an organization like Jang-ko because of the premium that the global community has placed upon the success of the peace process in Aceh.

An expanded and more complicated view of Aceh's civil society organizations in the wake of the humanitarian encounter illustrates two important points. First, the diversity of interests represented by these organizations, including not only the civilian groups that once resorted to violence to achieve their goals but also the many activist groups that were restricted or banned during the conflict, illustrates just how much Aceh's civil society has flourished since the end of the conflict. Even the groups that did not directly benefit from investments by international donors enjoy the indirect benefits of the peace that international aid helped achieve. After all, during the conflict GAM prevented groups such as FPI from setting foot in Aceh, and TNI prevented good governance activists from peering too closely into their control of provincial and district government affairs.

A second point, however, must acknowledge that the full spectrum of civil society organizations in Aceh do not play on a level field, especially after the major international donors have moved on to other crisis settings. For all the investments made in women's NGOs that fight for gender equality, the total number of women who won seats in the 2009 elections *decreased* at the provincial and district/municipal levels all across Aceh, whereas women across Indonesia won more seats overall. For all the investments made in the human rights NGOs that argue for a shariah law grounded in a social justice framework, the corporal punishments administered by the courts and the mass vigilantism perpetrated by zealots in the name of Islamic law have only increased along with restrictions on public dress and behavior, particularly for women and so-called anti-Islamic social deviants such as punk rock fans. Human rights NGOs have also been stymied at every turn in their pursuit of post-conflict transitional justice issues despite provisions for a truth and reconciliation commission and other forms of restitution for conflict victims in both the MoU and LOGA. Meanwhile, anyone's trusted membership or even

association with GAM's post-MoU civilian organization KPA may easily access patronage networks and the many spoils that were associated with humanitarian reconstruction efforts, and later, development projects. In the wake of the governor's election in April 2012, after PA's nominee Zaini Abdullah defeated Irwandi Yusuf and consolidated PA's control over both the executive and legislative branches of government, we (Byron, Mary-Jo, and I) heard ominous news that a school affiliated with the Aceh Women's League, a local NGO that represents the interests of female GAM ex-combatants, had been shut down. The Aceh Women's League has historic ties with SIRA, the student referendum movement and later the local political party that PA defeated in the 2009 election, as well as with Irwandi's faction of GAM ex-combatants. The future of a progressive humanitarian civil society under increasingly old-style autocratic rule remains uncertain at best.

### **Transitional Justice from Below**

In the voice of Dôkarim, Reza wrote "These are bad times for the mind and the imagination, / So we build our own stories;" and so in the absence of any action on transitional justice from either Jakarta or the PA-ruled government in Aceh, the Tikar Pandan Community opened up their own Human Rights Museum as a rebuke. Kimberly Theidon has written about a need for understanding "transitional justice from below... exploring how neighborhoods and communities also mobilize the ritual and symbolic elements of transitional justice to deal with the deep cleavages left—or accentuated—by civil conflicts" (Theidon 2007:67). The Tikar Pandan Community's human rights museum, with low budget donor support from the International Center for Transitional Justice, serves as a unique and limited example of this kind of mobilization. On the occasion of its one year anniversary, the tiny house in which the

museum is housed was packed with a who's who of Banda Aceh's intellectual and civil society elite. Photos of the museum's commemorative events and educational activities, such as a human rights school for high school students, circulate across facebook and other social media with threads of praising comments beneath them. My sense, however, is that this museum serves its ritual and symbolic purpose only for Aceh's more narrowly defined civil society, the community of middle class humanitarian subjects that I have written about in this dissertation, as the rural communities who suffered the worst forms of violence and humiliation during the conflict can not easily access the museum's commemorative resources in Banda Aceh or online.

In Aceh's rural communities, other models of transitional justice from below exist, and they primarily take place either in the ritual/symbolic domain that Theidon writes about or in the grassroots economic domain. Shortly after the peace agreement, when amnestied prisoners, exiles, and ex-combatants returned to their home communities, we heard reports of village and family ceremonies that were held to welcome them called *peusijeuk*, an Acehnese ritual usually held after turbulent events. The term (from *sijeuk*, the same as the Indonesian *sejuk*, meaning "cool") literally suggests a "cooling off," a metaphor denoting the calming of emotions. *Peusijeuk* can be either collective village events or private events held in individual homes. In our first round of psychosocial research in February 2006, we tried to quantify these anecdotal stories we had heard about post-MoU *peusijeuk*, and in our survey we asked 596 men and women in former conflict areas of Pidie, Bireuen, and North Aceh districts about whether such events had been held in their communities since the MoU. Twenty-eight percent of our respondents answered affirmatively (Good, Good, Grayman and Lakoma 2006:53-54). Apart from these spontaneous *peusijeuk* events, local and international NGOs supported a variety of culturally oriented peace-building activities throughout former conflict areas such as traditional

arts and musical performances. Although these events might not exactly come “from below,” organizers typically sought community participation in their design plans, and they were tailored to regional performance traditions.

Theidon emphasizes that if DDR programs are to be situated within a transitional justice framework, then reintegration needs must be addressed and analyzed at multiple levels, from individual combatants, to their families and communities, to sub-national/regional variations, up to the level of national and global policy frameworks (Theidon 2007:74). When my MSR research staff stumbled upon the volleyball game for peace featuring former conflict adversaries playing together on a specially renovated volleyball court in Bener Meriah district (Chapters Two and Three), it was such a novelty because no one could imagine a similar event in GAM’s heartland in the northeast coast districts. IOM’s reintegration program under Mark Knight reasonably tried to accommodate regional variations like this by opening ten ICRS offices across Aceh in order to respond to local dynamics, and by offsetting individual reintegration assistance with community-based peace dividends and health services. Much smaller NGOs such as the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) and the Asian Medical Doctor Association (AMDA) developed reintegration programs highly tailored to the specific communities where they worked, no more than a few villages for each organization. It was JRS, for example, that alerted me to the problem of Javanese transmigrants still living in exile in North Sumatra that were fearful about returning home to their remote settlements in the interior sub-districts of East Aceh. Here was a particular demographic from a particular location that had escaped every larger organization’s radar firstly because they were absent from Aceh altogether, and secondly because GAM assiduously ignored this problematic aspect of reintegration, not least because it was GAM that forcibly displaced Javanese transmigrants during the conflict.

Several post-conflict assessments conducted in Aceh found that what most communities asked for more than anything else was livelihood support to jumpstart the local economies that the conflict destroyed. Teungku Nasruddin Ahmad, a widely respected and adamantly apolitical GAM intellectual leader, leveraged his business background and champion influence to start a local NGO in Bireuen called Aceh Society Development (ASD) that might approximately be characterized as a post-conflict version of Azwar Hasan's post-tsunami Aceh Revival Forum described in Chapter Five. ASD provides micro-credit for small business development and village cooperatives that at its inception gave a preferential option to female ex-combatants and a wide range of conflict actors and survivors as its beneficiaries. Apart from their economic focus, ASD has also conducted detailed research about the dynamics and tensions within KPA, and between KPA and the local communities where they live. Their findings emphasize the myriad ways in which KPA, and the GAM conglomerate more broadly, cannot be painted as a monolithic organization, even in a single district such as Bireuen (Aceh Society Development 2009). ASD's work has been a runaway success, and over the years they have expanded their reach to several other conflict-affected districts.

These are some of the examples I have come across over the years in which local communities and civil society organizations, local and international, come up with creative and regionally tailored solutions to Aceh's post-conflict reintegration and transitional justice needs. But these examples contrast sharply with what has come to be understood as the prevailing reintegration model that the provincial government's Aceh Reintegration Agency (BRA) implemented. Though BRA dynamics varied across districts and over time under a revolving door of leadership, the agency has been criticized for implementing a one-size-fits-all reintegration program delivered through patronage networks that reinforce rather than reintegrate

conflict-era identities. The extent of BRA's transitional justice work consisted largely of housing construction and cash handouts to amnestied prisoners, ex-combatants, militia members, and a wide range of inconsistently defined conflict victims. As the Multi-Stakeholder Review (MSR) findings show in Chapter Three the beneficiaries of reintegration assistance criticize this prevailing model over the diverse but smaller forms of civil society and humanitarian engagement that go relatively unnoticed.

To be sure, with the exception of Tikar Pandan's human rights museum, none of these programs were framed in terms of transitional justice, but rather only as reintegration programs. In the absence of formal acknowledgement of the transitional justice issues that were included in the MoU and LOGA, the civil society and humanitarian organizations that designed and implemented the variety of programs described above hope that a sense of justice or at least peace with the past at the local level might be achieved. But as Chapter Three, ASD's research, and several other reports have shown, many conflict survivors are still waiting for accountability that exceeds a cash payment (Andriani et al. 2011; Aspinall 2008; Grayman 2009; *ibid.*; Knezevic 2006). As the final section of my dissertation's Conclusion should make clear, as much as I join in solidarity with the activists and humanitarians who implemented with sincerity the kinds of reintegration programs described above, I also join the chorus of pessimistic critiques that do not see a realistic pathway toward public acknowledgement and accountability of past abuses coupled with reconciliation for the future. I might even argue, along with several other observers, that under Aceh's (and more broadly Indonesia's) current political situation, a sustained push for public acknowledgement and accountability within the prevailing transitional justice models advanced by international human rights groups could prove to be a failure with



deleterious consequences.<sup>95</sup> Through our work at IOM, we discovered the practical, engaged value of carefully calibrating how we share the results of our research. We had to figure out what to say, in what terms to say it, and what to leave implicit in various settings, particularly where the perpetrators of past human rights abuses are still in power, or even in the room with you when you tactically remind them of what they did (Good, Good and Grayman 2010).

## **25 June 2012: Inauguration Day**

As I wrote my last few chapters in the United States, I was still conducting remote fieldwork. Since I wrote the Remote Fieldwork chapter in December 2010, and even more so since we conducted the MSR fieldwork in July and August 2008, the social media tools available for conducting remote fieldwork have increased and proliferated not just in Aceh, but in the United States as well. I kept in touch with former colleagues and current events in Aceh throughout 2012 using Facebook, Twitter, blogs, Instagram, email, and chats. A new generation of online anthropologists are debating not just their demands for more open access publishing in academia, but also more provocatively the merits of conducting open access fieldwork.<sup>96</sup>

I close this dissertation with one last electoral ritual that not only points toward Aceh's future, but also underscores just how "profoundly powerless and largely irrelevant" the legacy of Aceh's humanitarian encounter has become "to the dynamics of local struggles, unable to effect the forms of governance to which they are committed" (Good, Good and Grayman 2010:266).

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<sup>95</sup> For a genealogy of how models for "truth and reconciliation" became a global paradigm, see (Shaw 2007).

<sup>96</sup> The most widely read group anthropology blog, Savage Minds, routinely covers open access publishing issues within the American Anthropological Association, as well as in academia at large. Their collected posts on the subject are available at: <http://savageminds.org/category/open-access-open-source/>. In another group anthropology blog titled Ethnography Matters, one of the writers published her advocacy for "Writing Live Fieldnotes: Towards a More Open Ethnography," in which she describes how she uses Instagram as a fieldnotetaking technology and methodology, which can be fraught with research ethics concerns as the discussion beneath her post makes clear: <http://ethnographymatters.net/2012/08/02/writing-live-fieldnotes-towards-a-more-open-ethnography/>

Two months after he lost his bid for reelection, Irwandi Yusuf attended the inauguration of his successor at the Aceh Legislative Assembly Building on 25 June 2012, an event that unfolded in real time across a variety of social media platforms. Irwandi's term ended in February, so the Minister of Home Affairs presided over the transfer of executive authority from a temporary caretaker governor to PA's winning candidate, Dr. Zaini Abdullah, a former Prime Minister of GAM's government in exile in Sweden during the conflict and part of the "old GAM" faction's inner circle. But just as the concession speech from losing presidential candidates in the United States ensures that his or her supporters accept the outcome, so too did Irwandi's presence at the inauguration signal a statesmanlike concession for his many supporters.

Many observers, myself included, never expected Irwandi's governorship would end this way. For the first half of 2011 Irwandi still had the momentum to win reelection and he was a clear frontrunner. Not only did he have the advantage of incumbency, but it also appeared that he was set to reproduce his winning strategy in 2006 when he mobilized KPA's entrenched command structure, the third generation "new GAM" forces led by the surviving remnants of the second generation commanders, to defeat his "old GAM" opponent Hasbi Abdullah (Zaini's younger brother), whose later victory in the 2009 legislative elections under the PA banner made him the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly. As a "new GAM" field operative himself during the conflict, Irwandi secured the loyalty of the rank and file in 2006 and easily defeated his old GAM opponent. The split between old and new GAM has a storied and layered history, with several sub-factions within each group, but PA tipped the scales against Irwandi and consolidated their support across all GAM factions when they recruited Muzakir Manaf to be Zaini's running mate. Manaf was the last senior commander of GAM's armed forces at the time of the MoU, and the head of KPA ever since GAM's demobilization. The rank and file

maintained a fierce loyalty to Manaf, and PA could finally peel away more than enough Irwandi supporters to defeat him.

Irwandi and PA supporters each saw the other as a traitor. As GAM's clear political successor organization in post-MoU Aceh, PA painted Irwandi alternately as a vainglory rogue or a Jakarta stooge intent upon divide and conquer. For his part, Irwandi had several reasons to expect PA's nomination for reelection, not least among them his navigation of a relatively successful first term in office during Aceh's humanitarian recovery from two disasters. Irwandi also earned mass support for his populist reforms such as free health care for the poor and direct village-level development grants. In February 2011, still quite confident of his reelection prospects, Irwandi sent a text message to his pool of journalists:

Regarding Aceh's development, even the blind can feel the difference. Orphans can rejoice, their misery has been reduced. The sick can laugh, Aceh's prestige has gone up in the eyes of Jakarta and the world. Moreover the terrorists in Aceh are grieving,<sup>97</sup> and there's so much more that can be asked to the ex-combatants: Who is easier to meet? Me or 'them'?<sup>98</sup>

Irwandi need not explain who "them" refers to, and he is correct when he states that he has been more accessible than the detached and presumptuous Sweden leaders, who by most accounts make imperious decisions and do not feel the need to answer for them, whereas Irwandi frequently sat at coffee shops and famously drove his own jeep for surprise site visits across Aceh. Finally, Irwandi also expected PA's nomination for reelection because of the tireless support he gave to the party during the campaign for the 2009 legislative elections.

But post-MoU GAM's brief unity in early 2009 crumbled for at least two reasons. The first, more prosaic reason: Irwandi, in his effort to govern all of Aceh and not just GAM, did not

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<sup>97</sup> "Orphans can rejoice" refers to Irwandi's generous policy of providing student scholarships for tsunami and conflict orphans. "The sick can laugh" refers to his free health care policy for Aceh's poor. "The terrorists are grieving" refers to the successful collaboration between Indonesian police forces and KPA members in identifying and routing out a poorly organized terrorist cell in Aceh Besar district in 2010. See International Crisis Group's report "Indonesia: Jihadi Surprise in Aceh" (International Crisis Group 2010).

<sup>98</sup> "Irwandi: Muzakir Manaf Itu Cuma Bercanda" Serambi Indonesia. 8 February 2011.

patronize PA enough (and by extension the entire GAM conglomerate) to earn their nomination. As well-noted by Aspinall in his “From Combatants to Contractors” article summarized in Chapter Five, the GAM conglomerate has most successfully reintegrated with Indonesia by slipping into a thoroughly Indonesian style of governance through patronage. In order to consolidate their control over the spoils of one-party rule, PA decided to cut Irwandi out of the electoral process because he did not show enough loyalty to the party during his first term.

The second and more historical reason, I believe, relates to PA’s capacity to consolidate and capitalize on its power of recognition, and to do it in such a way that no longer threatens Indonesia as the ultimate authority. PA established itself as the sole inheritor of GAM’s legacy, whose ideology under its leader Hasan di Tiro always deployed a nostalgic vision of Aceh’s precolonial sultanate as its idealized mode of sovereignty. Tiro creatively traced native Acehnese authority from the lineage of sultans to a lineage of religious leaders who led rebellions against both Dutch colonialism and the Indonesian state. The Tiro family was the most prominent of this lineage of religious leaders, so GAM’s founder naturally declared himself the rightful heir to the throne. By the time it was safe enough for the old GAM leadership to return to Aceh from Sweden, Hasan Tiro was greatly aged and infirm, but PA made an enormous spectacle of his homecoming in October 2009.

GAM’s royal genealogy revives old notions of hierarchy, asserting its authority not through a questionable genealogy of “sultans” but through acceptance of that genealogy by a large contingent of Acehnese independence activists who yearn for the sultan’s recognition. The elderly head of the election committee in Lueng, Bireuen convinced me of this when he proudly told me that his village’s “first democratic election” meant delivering 100% of their votes to PA. As an independent candidate opposed to the inheritors of Aceh’s authoritative royal legacy,

Irwandi could not possibly win against this collective desire for recognition in places like Lueng and its concomitant impulse toward a reconstitution of hierarchy.

One day before Tiro died on 3 June 2010, the Indonesian government restored his Indonesian citizenship. The language used by Antara, Indonesia's official news agency, to report on this last symbolic frontier of GAM's reintegration with Indonesia reflects how recognition works as an act of wish fulfillment that it would seem has effectively domesticated GAM once and for all:

The hopes of Hasan Tiro, the former leader of Aceh's separatist movement, to return to Indonesian citizenship were realized with the signing of a letter of citizenship by Patrialis Akbar, the Minister of Justice and Human Rights. "I have signed a letter of citizenship for Hasan Tiro, the former leader of Aceh's disintegration. The letter will soon be submitted to the Coordinating Minister of Political, Legal, and Security Affairs," said Patrialis... In recent years Hasan Tiro has indeed asked for a certificate of citizenship, citing his desire to become an Indonesian citizen once again. Previously, Hasan Tiro held a Swedish passport and lived in Stockholm since 1979 due to the confrontation with the Government of Indonesia. "We are granting [Tiro's] citizenship because they have stated their desire [for it]. We received a positive response from the President who has approved granting his citizenship," Patrialis explained.<sup>99</sup>

Patrialis repeatedly illustrates the hierarchy into which Tiro wishes to return without ever mentioning GAM, only "Aceh's separatist movement," "Aceh's disintegration," and Aceh's "confrontation" with Indonesia. The authority to recognize begins with Patrialis' signature but only with the approval of the authorities above him, first the Coordinating Minister and ending with President Yudhoyono himself, the final arbiter of recognition. If PA submits to this framing of their subordinate position as wish fulfillment, then it appears that the party is free to reproduce it within their domain of one-party rule, where in 2012 Zaini and Hasbi Abdullah, the two brothers from GAM's Sweden faction, rule the executive and legislative branches of Aceh's government respectively.

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<sup>99</sup> "Hasan Tiro Kembali Jadi WNI" Antaranews.com 1 June 2010.  
(<http://www.antaranews.com/berita/1275398521/hasan-tiro-kembali-jadi-wni>)

If in this dissertation's Introduction I called Irwandi's victory GAM's coming out party in Aceh's post-MoU era, then here in the Conclusion I would call Zaini Abdullah's and Muzakir Manaf's inauguration ceremony a symbolic unveiling of PA's model of governance for Aceh. I followed the inauguration through social media outlets such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram where journalists and activists live-blogged regular updates as the event unfolded. The Minister of Home Affairs remarked to several journalists that in the 15 governor's inaugurations he had presided over across Indonesia, he had never met as many foreign dignitaries as Aceh's inauguration hosted. Two tent pavilions adorned in the red and white striped colors of the Indonesian flag—one for men and another for women—were set up outside the building to seat an overflow of invitation-only guests, who were able to watch a broadcast of the ceremony inside the hall on large screen televisions. The gates of the legislative assembly complex, the pathway to the building, and all entrances were guarded officially and nominally by the police, but they were far outnumbered by dozens of PA's own private security "task force" (*satuan tugas* or *satgas*) wearing military fatigues in the red, white, and black colors of PA's (and GAM's) flag with bright red berets. Thousands of Zaini-Muzakir supporters in red stood outside the gates.

Two of the most unlikely guests of honor arrived together, retired TNI generals Soenarko and Prabowo Subianto, both former officers of *Kopassus*, TNI's Special Forces Command. Their arrival was captured on a cellphone camera and posted to Instagram and Twitter by Nurdin Hasan, a talented stringer who routinely reports on Aceh affairs for *The Jakarta Globe* newspaper. Aceh's *Serambi Indonesia* newspaper, also live-blogging the inauguration, posted a prescient headline: "Prabowo Arrives With Soenarko, Irwandi Alone."<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> "Prabowo Datang Bersama Soenarko, Irwandi Sendirian" *Serambi Indonesia*. 25 June 2012. <http://aceh.tribunnews.com/2012/06/25/prabowo-datang-bersama-soenarko-irwandi-sendirian>

**Image 6.4: The Generals**



**Caption: Retired generals Prabowo Subianto (L) and Soenarko (R) attend the inauguration of *Partai Aceh* victors Governor Zaini Abdullah and Vice Governor Muzakir Manaf on 25 June 2012 at Aceh’s Legislative Assembly Building. Photo by Nurdin Hasan, posted to Instagram ([instagram.com/p/MTasOCmm9e/](https://www.instagram.com/p/MTasOCmm9e/)) and used with permission.**

Soenarko had been in charge of TNI’s Aceh regional command from 2008 until 2009, and proved to be an unpopular and belligerent figure during the 2009 legislative elections campaign season. Soenarko’s combative voice routinely appeared in the newspapers to vilify Aceh’s local political parties, to repeatedly oppose the presence of international observers (such as myself) for the elections, to prevent PA from using GAM symbols in their campaign, and to wage spiteful back and forth arguments in the press with Irwandi. One of Aceh’s independent election commissioners recounted a story over Twitter about Soenarko and Irwandi’s notoriously antagonistic relationship. At a group meeting, Irwandi introduced his team of KPA colleagues to Soenarko using language such as “Mr. A is the commander from here, and Mr. B is the commander from there,” only to be cut off by Soenarko who banged his fist upon the table and yelled “You don’t have any so-called ‘commanders!’ In Aceh only *I* am the Commander!” After a year and a half of scathing reports of Soenarko’s behavior, President Yudhoyono relieved

him from active duty and he was transferred to a teaching position at a military academy in Java. Then suddenly a few months before the 2012 governor's election, PA announced Soenarko's endorsement of the Zaini-Muzakir ticket. Some speculated that Soenarko's awful relationship with Irwandi drove him into an alliance with PA, while others suggested that "Soenarko is collaborating on economic projects with former GAM commanders," but most observers can hardly understand what benefit accrues to either PA or Soenarko in such a bizarre and unlikely alliance (International Crisis Group 2012:6).

Even more notorious than Soenarko, but at a national level and more recently subject to a savvy image makeover, Prabowo Subianto is a former Head of *Kopassus* and also President Suharto's ex-son-in-law. Among his many misdeeds, Prabowo is perhaps most famous for his brutal suppression of democracy activists at the twilight of Suharto's New Order dictatorship during the mid-late 1990s; for fomenting mass violence against Indonesian Chinese urban populations in 1998, especially in Jakarta; and for nearly launching a coup d'état against Suharto's successor, President Habibie. The collected history of his crimes earned him the ignoble distinction of being the first person denied entry into the United States under the provisions of the United Nations Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. After a discharge from the TNI and a lengthy exile in Jordan, Prabowo launched a comeback and rehabilitated his image enough to start the Great Indonesia Movement Party and serve as Megawati Soekarnoputri's running mate in the 2009 presidential elections. He financed the election of Jakarta's wildly popular new governor in 2012, and announced his intention to run for president in 2014, with some polls even placing him as the frontrunner. Even less apparent than Soenarko, few people could guess at PA's motivation to invite Prabowo to the inauguration (or why he would accept) other than to surmise



the burgeoning of an improbable alliance between PA and the most reactionary elements of the TNI; or in other words, a public display of the restructured pacts of governance and domination for Aceh's post-conflict era, featuring "the same interlocutors, the same silences and the same exclusionary logics that existed" during the conflict, leaving the rest of Aceh *digeunton*, under pressure (Theidon 2007:89).

During the swearing-in ceremony, when the Minister of Home Affairs mentioned Irwandi's name and thanked him for his service, the audience inside the building could hear a chorus of derogatory catcalls from outside the chamber. When the inauguration ritual was complete, foreign dignitaries and honored guests made their way out of the assembly building along paths lined on either side with PA's security detail. The live blog on one of Aceh's online newspaper sites reported that as Irwandi exited the building, someone yelled "traitor!" and tossed an empty bottle of mineral water at his head. On the Youtube video that was uploaded from someone's cellphone just hours later, Irwandi is hidden from view by the shouting angry mob of PA security that descend upon him within seconds of the first insult hurled his way, then beat him aggressively upon the head and neck until police officers could secure him, rush him to his car, and drive him immediately to the hospital.

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