

## **Critical (self-)reflections on the side-effects of academic research in post-conflict Aceh**

*by Antje Missbach, Australian National University*

After the end of almost thirty years of armed conflict and following a devastating tsunami, Aceh has become a ‘social laboratory’ for many foreign researchers in social sciences and humanities who study Aceh from every possible aspect. Over the last five years, a considerable amount of research has been produced and published. For some researchers, Aceh became a fast track accelerating their careers. Yet, how much did Acehnese scholars and researchers benefit from being a centre of scholarly attention? And how much were they able to participate in academic debates and exchanges?

This paper examines the role of Acehnese informants and the involvement of Acehnese intellectuals in the process of knowledge production in and of contemporary Aceh. Comparing the findings to previous academic cooperation in the 1970s, which also aimed at improving Acehnese research capabilities, I trace current academic ventures and discuss their main outcomes for general and personal academic capacity building. Engaging in contemporary debates about scientific communities and research obstacles in developing countries, this paper stresses critical evaluations of local researchers and informants based on a number of case studies that highlight both ongoing competition and successful cooperation.

**Abstract for EUROSEAS Conference in Gothenburg, 26-28 August 2010**  
**Panel: “Lessons from Aceh: post-conflict developments re-assessed”**

**“Aceh, East Timor & Indonesia: Post-conflict impacts on nationhood”**

*by Aboeprijadi Santoso, independent journalist, Jakarta and Amsterdam*

Few issues seem to have dominated public perception in Indonesia and affected the Indonesian concept of nation and nationhood as the conflicts on East Timor and Aceh. Throughout the mid-1990s to the first half of the 2000s fundamental changes affected both and their relationship to Indonesia. East Timor was brutally occupied, and Aceh became a rebel province. In terms of the genesis, the discourse of the conflicts and the way they were resolved, the two problems have been almost the opposite to each other. The paper will note some change and continuity. Changes come as the New Order centralized and sacralize the unitary state that continues after 1998 resulting in a besieged nationalism, sometimes termed ‘Black Nationalism’, that becomes part of a new conservatism and populism in Indonesia’s new democracy. The late-1990s are the most crucial years. Growing international support (for East Timor) and the post New Order crises have cemented Timor Leste and Acehnese nationalism. The New Order’s media suppression and ideological legacy mean that East Timor becomes largely a non-issue, but, thanks to the Aceh war, post-Suharto military is able to regain political ground. If Timor experience is seen as a conflict with alien forces (‘we’ versus ‘they’) allowing Indonesians to blame the outside world, the Aceh conflict was quite the opposite as it affects the national psyche strengthening public support for the war. As a result, if East Timor questions the concept and limit of Indonesia’s nation-state, the Aceh case put the idea of Indonesia’s nationhood itself in doubt. Aceh, now being a nation within a nation-state, has shown its own dynamic as the ‘cold war’ between the Army and the former rebels GAM goes on within a new democracy under ex-GAM rule that has to deal with new political issues of Islam (Shari’ah and the Jemaah Islamiyah entering Aceh).

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**Hidden in the Limelight of the Tsunami: Aceh's Silent Disasters**

*by Arno Waizenegger and Jennifer Hyndman, Simon Fraser University, Canada*

When it comes to disasters, international aid agencies and the international news media find themselves entangled in a complex relationship of mutual dependency. Due to what is sometimes called ‘the CNN effect’ and the rapid transmission of images and news across space, the media tremendously shape the global aid landscape. The thesis at hand explores how aid agencies adapt to particular media environments in disaster settings and, in turn, how this impacts their priorities and performance in delivering humanitarian assistance where it is needed. These issues are probed using the example of Aceh, the Indonesian province that was the highly publicized scene of the extraordinarily well-funded 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. In contrast, the underfunded silent disaster in Aceh resulting from protracted violent conflict between the Indonesian Government and the rebel, Free Aceh Movement, was largely invisible. Highlighting recent trends in the modern operandi of international news media and the aid industry, this case study indicates that transparency, independence and accountability are key principles that can avert the disparities between humanitarian disasters.

**Islam and civil society in Aceh: a challenge for post conflict reconstruction**

*by Christine Schenk*

Aceh faces a turning point in its political development five years after the 2004 tsunami: many international aid organisations have left, and the fate that the historically important political Islam in Aceh faces is uncertain, its influence contested: while the independent election of the governor and the subsequent regional elections have brought into effect democratic foundations for more self-government in line with the Law of Government of Aceh (LoGA), there is political disagreement on how to implement political authority and what implications this has for state-society relations, which are increasingly contested as evidenced in the recent bylaw on criminal law (also known as Qanun Jinayah). While this could be considered as a “bumpy start” of democracy after decades of bloody conflict and state of emergency, I argue in my paper that there is more at stake. I will make three propositions: First, that political Islam in Aceh is now at the crossroads of being more than a theological and/or ritual system with far reaching implications such as the hybridisation of civil society and the “state” (Effendy 2003, Hooker 2008). Along this line, representatives of the so called civil society are squeezed between different conceptions of the nation-state. Second, that the (more or less western) international community in the process of post-conflict reconstruction takes different stances ranging from what Li calls “rendering technical” (Li 2007), to attempting careful consultation. I will demonstrate that the often highly valued role of the civil society in post-tsunami and post-conflict reconstruction tends to be overrated. Third, that these observations have important repercussion for ongoing policy debates on post-conflict reconstruction and state building. In these debates, state-building and civil society often are considered as mutually exclusionary elements in a religious context, although they are not. Rather, state-building requires different concepts, including open exit planning, careful consultation and a flexible strategy.

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**Stabilising the state: The unintended benefits of corruption in post-conflict reconstruction programmes in Eastern Indonesia**

*by Dr Claire Smith, Crisis States Research Centre, London School of Economics*

My paper focuses on the political economy of post-conflict peace-building projects in Eastern Indonesia. Here, I consider peace-building and reconstruction in the broadest sense, in terms of aid interventions targeted at government, economic and social reforms. In the paper, I contrast the politics, policies and impacts of nationally organised and foreign-sponsored UN post-conflict aid interventions in regions of ethno-religious violence in Eastern Indonesia, focusing on the Maluku region. Maluku and North Maluku provide an interesting case study of foreign intervention because, unusually for international interventions in ethno-religious conflicts in developing countries, the national government provided the far greater share of post-conflict aid - in contrast to the Aceh case. The influence of international organisations within the local political economy was therefore limited in the Maluku region, and the pathways and outcomes of foreign aid were greatly influenced by the Indonesian government's own agenda. •• ••Post-conflict aid funds - from both national and international sources - played an important political and economic role in the poorest regions of Indonesia, in precisely the regions that have also been through the most severe ethno-religious violence. During the major period of ethno-religious conflicts in Eastern Indonesia (1999-2002), the central government faced secessionist and ethno-religious challenges to central government authority across the country. At this time, the central government had a clear agenda to 'buy back in' restive ethnic and religious elites to the authority of the central state. One way of doing this was through providing funds to local state elites to assist them in maintaining political control - whether through patronage projects to their constituencies or providing funds for election campaigns. Foreign aid funds were also hijacked to this agenda, but the political impacts of this kind of aid has been overlooked by the very agencies providing these funds. In contrast, the 'benefits' of state capture of aid funds (or 'corruption') has been deeply understood - indeed promoted - by the central government officials administering the

funds. •••One of the main themes the paper brings out is the complex relationship between ethno-religious conflict, underlying elite competition for control of the local state, and the political role of post-conflict aid. In contrasting national and UN aid projects, and tracing their policies and impacts, the paper highlights the practical political impacts that the state capture of aid has had in these Eastern regions of Indonesia that experienced such severe ethno-religious conflicts. Surprisingly, to foreign observers (though not the central government), one of the main outcomes of aid capture has been the stabilisation of the local state in these restive peripheral regions. The paper thus poses an uncomfortable question: if corruption of post-conflict aid has stabilised the local state in a region of severe ethno-religious unrest, what does this mean for the current 'transparency and accountability' agenda of foreign donors? Perhaps the democratic peace-building agenda of foreign donors is misguided, through failing to understand the political economy of both ethno-religious conflict and post-conflict aid in democratising regimes, such as Indonesia. Comparisons with the political economy of ethno-religious conflicts and aid interventions in Aceh and the Philippines will also be highlighted.

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**From rebels to rulers and legislators – The Free Aceh Movement’s (GAM) way into Indonesian local politics**

*by Gunnar Stange, Goethe-University Frankfurt/Main, Germany*

On 15 August 2005, the Republic of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*, GAM) signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that put an end to Indonesia’s thirty years of conflict in its westernmost province, Aceh. Five years later, the peace process is still on track. After direct executive elections in 2006/2007 and parliamentary elections in 2009, Aceh’s governor and ten out of 23 district and municipal heads are former rebels. The Aceh Party (*Partai Aceh*, PA) – the political vehicle of GAM that was established in early 2008 – now holds 33 out of 69 seats in Aceh’s regional parliament (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Aceh*, DPRA) and has the absolute majority of seats in seven district and municipal parliaments. The process of GAM’s integration into Aceh’s local politics appears – at least formally – to be final.

Yet, GAM’s transformation from an ethno-nationalist independence movement to a local political party came at a high price. Today, the movement - formerly considered to be very homogeneous – is highly fractioned both horizontally and vertically. However, during the campaign period in the run-up to Aceh’s legislative elections held on April 2009, GAM managed to once more close its ranks tightly and led Partai Aceh to a landslide victory.

In its first part, this paper looks into the more than shaky process of Partai Aceh’s foundation that revealed deep rifts between GAM’s former exile leadership and the so called young Turks on the ground in Aceh. In its second part, the paper attempts to identify patterns to explore the dynamics that – despite highly factionist tendencies within GAM – finally made Partai Aceh the dominating power in Aceh’s parliaments.

**Women as Change Agents? Power and Powerlessness of Women Activists in the Transformation Process in Aceh, Indonesia**

*by Kristina Grossmann, Goethe University Frankfurt, Germany*

The transformation process in Aceh causes huge challenges for women, but at the same time provides a wide range of opportunities for participation and modelling the new Aceh. In this vibrant atmosphere, where tensions between Islamic religiosity, Western value systems and traditional cultural structures are immense, women activists articulate gender and women’s issues, design strategies, implement programs and use their chance during the process of transition to translate their aims into positive gender outcomes.

Many theories and empirical data of a gendered examination of transformation processes show, that women contribute greatly to the reform movement, play a significant role in consolidating peace and democracy, but women’s and gender issues are mostly excluded in the further process of political reconfiguration. Women activists in Aceh face similar conditions. By scrutinizing the categories: political opportunities, mobilizing structures and framing processes, whereby the internal and the external contexts in which women activists (are able to) organize, come under careful examination, I show, that Acehnese women activists do exert power in the political realm and consolidate their influence within socio-cultural discourses.

However, their multiple efforts are at the same time impeded by the power of political elites, religious and traditional leaders, Western development policy and women themselves.

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**Looking through Humanitarian Relief in Aceh**

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On 26 December 2004, the Indonesian province of Aceh was hit by a magnitude 9.0 earthquake which triggered tsunami. According to the Indonesian government’s disaster coordinating agency, BAKORNAS, by the end of March 2005, 128,645 people in Aceh had lost their lives, 37,063 were missing and 532,898 had been displaced (USAID, 2005).

Research and practice have long documented disaster relief challenges and how to overcome those challenges (e.g., Anderson, 1999; ALNAP, 2006). One area which continually displays difficulties is rebuilding communities. It is a process which in a post disaster context means transition from emergency based to permanent communities and structures.

To articulate the message of process, different levels of community participation has been promoted. The massive tsunami recovery effort has created a unique institutional community group with high levels of capacity-building inputs, numerous procedures and norms, and distinct constellations of incentives and rewards.

Nevertheless, sustainability of recovery inputs and institutional forms remains open to debate. This paper discusses changes taking place in community. On the basis of experiences, this paper also suggests some general lessons as to the conditions that may enable community to actively involve in the recovery process.

Keywords: community involvement, ownership, sustainability.

**ALA and ABAS: Applying Lessons from Aceh’s Peace Process in Responding to Aceh’s Provincial Partition Movements**

Stefan Ehrentraut, November 2009

One under-researched dimension of conflict in Aceh is the relationship between the ethnic Acehnese majority and the province’s various ethnic minority groups, such as Gayo, Alas, Kluet and Singkil. However, this relationship has recently come to the forefront of politics in Aceh, due to the emergence of two forceful movements advocating for the partition of Aceh and the creation of two new provinces, Aceh Leuser Antara in the central Aceh highlands (ALA) and Aceh Barat Selatan along the southwest coast (ABAS). This development is seen by many as one of the greatest challenges to peace and stability in Aceh. While Indonesian law provides for the creation of new provinces, the establishment of ALA and ABAS would contradict the definition of Aceh’s borders in both the MoU and LoGA.

Arguments put forward by advocates of provincial partition include claims of underdevelopment and political and cultural marginalization of ethnic minorities by Acehnese-dominated provincial politics. This cultural dimension of partition movements is significant not least because it re-assembles Aceh’s case for self-government during the conflict. Much of the argument in favor of Aceh’s demands for autonomy is based on cultural distinctiveness, historical self-government and resistance to colonization and this language is prominent in the MoU and LoGA. If one accepts these arguments, it is hard to deny similar demands of ethnic minorities that are made on the same grounds, within the framework of Indonesian law.

Building on field research undertaken in October and November 2009, this paper explores the history of Aceh’s partition movements, their relationship to the conflict, the grievances underlying the movements and the political dynamics at the district, provincial and central level driving them, the movements’ status and prospects as well as their implications for future peace and stability in Aceh.

The paper argues that the peace process in Aceh itself provides important lessons for addressing the emerging ALA/ABAS challenge, namely that accommodation rather than repression is the most promising course of action, including provisions for minorities that are similar in nature, but not in scale, to what Acehnese have accomplished as a result of their struggle, some degree of devolution, representation and greater autonomy in areas such as natural resource management, economic development, language and education.

**“LEARNING FROM THE OMISSIONS: The Absence of Gender  
Responsiveness  
In the Aceh Peace Process”**

**An abstract submitted for the EUROSEAS Conference 2010 in  
Gothenburg:**

**Lessons from Aceh: post-conflict developments re-assessed**

**\* By Sri Wahyuni**

**What indicators make a peace process succeed? What are the components needed in the making of peace? How can peace sustainability be achieved if gender is not taken into account?**

**Peace process is no longer the preserve of a small group of elite negotiators, but is increasingly seen as the responsibility of all. Indeed, it cannot be fully achieved unless actors at all levels participate, including women. Previous papers have described that the Aceh conflict, like many conflicts in the world, has spilled beyond its national boundaries, threatening the pace and security of not only men, but also women, in the whole region. Such threats clearly show the need for a systematic review of conflict mitigation mechanism and peace processes, which, in many cases, are far from satisfactory.**

**Guinard (2002) points out three 'distinct' phrases which lead to the reestablishment of peace. These are: 1. Pre-negotiations, 2. Substantial-negotiations (agreement), and 3. Implementation. This paper will examine how gender responsiveness has been absent in each of the three distinct phases of the peace process in Aceh and will evaluate the crucial role of negotiators.**

**One crucial element in the peace process is the role of main negotiators. These main actors should be cognizant of gender equality needs. Substantial negotiation must not only be framed in terms of political authority, but must also address community well-being. By not taking community well-being and gender into account during the substantial negotiation phase of the Aceh peace process, the main negotiators have created significant challenges for the implementation phase. These challenges must be anticipated and understood in order to be overcome.**

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## **Down From the Jungle – Back to the Jungle?**

The Reintegration of Former Combatants in Aceh 5 years Post-MoU

*by Roman Patoek, Goethe University Frankfurt, Germany*

Five years have passed since the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Government of Indonesia (GoI) and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) was signed in the aftermath of the devastating Tsunami, breaking ground for a so-far stable peace. Five years which saw amidst Tsunami reconstruction and international presence the relatively swift and smooth disarmament and demobilisation of GAM's military wing (TNA) and its transition from a military guerilla to an influential civilian organization (KPA) and backbone to the political party *Partai Aceh (PA)*. Former rebels not only hold office as governor, mayors and district heads since 2006, but since 2009 also constitute the relative majority of the provincial parliament DPRD.

While these initial peace processes were mostly successful, the reintegration of former combatants into Acehnese society within the framework of the Indonesian national state was running at a significantly slower pace.

The MoU stipulates that all personnel involved in GAM activity are amnestied, their civil rights reinstated and their reintegration into civilian life supported. Each former fighter was eligible to instant instalments, long-term funds, farmland and the reconstruction of destroyed property. To distribute these reintegration funds a reintegration board (BRA) was established in Aceh. However, the devil is in the details. First of all, both sides thought reintegration primarily financial. Health care, psychological trauma handling and vocational training were widely neglected. Second, due to initial security concerns, the number of 3,000 former GAM combatants in the MoU was estimated way too low. Third definition of combatants, non-combatant supporters, conflict victims was difficult, disregarded gender issues and lead to the eligibility of different competing groups including former anti-GAM militia and former GAM-defectors. Fourth using the channels of organizations like KPA for

distribution of funds strengthened them and reinforced sources of internal power. Fifth the primary reliance on individual payments instead of community based approaches hampered real integration.

Against the backdrop of provincial elections in 2009 and two field research studies in 2009 and 2010 among ex-combatants in Aceh the presentation attempts to assess the current state of reintegration efforts and their expectations towards the progress of peace in Aceh.